

# Hand in Hand

Family literacy in a minority context



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Faculty of Education  
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Coalition francophone pour l'alphabétisation  
et la formation de base en Ontario

Ottawa Ontario  
March 2008

The Coalition francophone is a non-profit organization promoting literacy and basic skills and offering support to Francophone service providers across Ontario. The Coalition also heightens public awareness with promotional campaigns aimed at Francophones in Ontario

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# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>1. Terminology</b> .....	<b>9</b>
1.1 What does the word “literacy” mean? .....	9
1.2 Multiple literacies .....	10
1.3 Literacy, family literacy and multiple literacies .....	10
1.4 History of family literacy programs .....	11
1.5 Various definitions of family literacy .....	12
1.5.1 The Fédération canadienne pour l’alphabétisation en français .....	12
1.5.2 The Coalition francophone pour l’alphabétisation et la formation de base en Ontario .....	12
1.5.3 The Centre for Family Literacy .....	12
1.6 Characteristics of a family literacy intervention based on multiple literacies .....	13
1.7 Conclusion .....	14
<b>2. Francophones in Ontario: Literacy and demographic facts</b> .....	<b>15</b>
2.1 Demographic facts about Francophones in Ontario .....	15
2.2 Rate of transmission of the French language .....	16
2.3 Results of the 2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey .....	16
2.4 Conclusion .....	17
<b>3. For My Child: Analysis, interpretation and findings</b> .....	<b>19</b>
3.1 The research .....	19
3.2 Methodology .....	21
3.3 Analysis and interpretation of research results .....	22
3.3.1 Models used in the context of the research .....	22
3.3.1.1 <i>Grandir avec mon enfant</i> .....	23
3.3.1.2 <i>Lire et écrire à la maison</i> .....	25
3.3.1.3 <i>Des livres dans mon baluchon</i> .....	27
3.3.2 Recruitment of participants for the programs .....	29
3.3.2.1 Participation of fathers .....	29
3.3.3 Socio-demographic characteristics of program participants .....	29
3.3.4 Impacts of the programs on families .....	30
3.3.5 Evaluation of the programs .....	31
3.4 Recommendations of the research .....	32
3.5 Conclusion .....	34

<b>4. Comparative analysis of results of the Coalition francophone's research with results of other research on family literacy .....</b>	<b>35</b>
4.1 Recruitment problems identified in the research .....	36
4.1.1 Recruitment of families .....	36
4.1.2 Recruitment of fathers .....	36
4.2 Linguistic elements identified in the research.....	37
4.2.1 Languages in exogamous homes .....	37
4.2.2 Bilingualism .....	38
4.2.3 Language used in child care centres .....	39
4.2.4 Socialization in French.....	39
4.3 Impacts of programs on families .....	40
4.3.1 Overall impacts.....	40
4.3.2 Impacts on parenting skills.....	42
4.3.3 Evaluation of the impact of the <i>Learning Together</i> model.....	42
4.4 Training for practitioners .....	44
4.5 Conclusion .....	44
<b>5. Family literacy in a minority setting.....</b>	<b>47</b>
5.1 Family literacy models oriented toward minorities.....	48
5.1.1 The Kenan model – United States .....	48
5.1.2 <i>Parent Empowerment for Family Literacy (PEFaL)</i> – Europe .....	49
5.1.3 <i>Manukau Family Literacy Program (MFLP)</i> – New Zealand .....	51
5.1.4 Other American models.....	52
5.2 Conclusion .....	54
<b>6. Best practices in family literacy: Research outcomes.....</b>	<b>55</b>
6.1 Definition of the concept of best practice .....	55
6.2 Best practices drawn from the Coalition francophone's research.....	56
6.3 Information sources .....	56
6.4 Factors to consider .....	58
6.4.1 Cultural differences.....	58
6.4.2 Differences in perceptions and beliefs .....	58
6.4.3 Gender-based differences .....	59
6.4.4 A participative and critical approach based on the participants' pre-existing literacies .....	61
6.4.5 Partnerships.....	62
6.4.5.1 The Epstein partnership model .....	63
6.4.5.2 Partnership between the home, school and community in francophone Canada.....	63
6.5 Conclusion .....	65
<b>7. Implementation of multiple literacies.....</b>	<b>67</b>
7.1 Description of multiple literacies .....	67
7.2 Guidelines for the implementation of family literacy programs based on multiple literacies .....	69
7.3 Conclusion .....	70

<b>8. Guidelines for the planning, management and evaluation of family literacy programs .....</b>	<b>71</b>
8.1 Characteristics of the Francophone minority setting in Canada .....	71
8.2 Guidelines for program directors .....	73
8.3 Guidelines for practitioners .....	74
8.4 Guidelines for the evaluation of programs .....	75
8.5 Conclusion .....	75
<b>9. Recommendations.....</b>	<b>77</b>
9.1 Members of the Réseau d'experts en alphabétisation familiale .....	77
9.2 Researchers .....	77
9.3 Program directors .....	78
9.4 Practitioners .....	78
<b>10. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>11. References .....</b>	<b>83</b>

### **Note on the use of language denoting gender**

In this document, for the sake of brevity, masculine pronouns are used to refer to people in general. Readers are asked to understand these references in the generic and not gender-specific meaning.



# Introduction

A child's first educator is the parent or adult who plays a significant role in his life. Family literacy programs are designed to meet the needs of parents who want to take on this educative role in the best possible manner. Participation in a family literacy program opens the door to learning and exchanges of knowledge and experience with practitioners and other parents and helps parents feel prepared and confident in making literacy practices a priority in their lives and in the lives of their child right from their birth. With good habits solidly established, parents can continue to support their child all through his school years. Their child will thus be better prepared to take his place in an ever more complex and demanding world.

Thanks to information that has become available through communication technologies and international exchanges, an increasing number of countries are becoming interested in family literacy. More programs are springing up, and they are designed or adapted to take into account the realities of the local environment. Canada is no exception, with programs in each of its provinces and territories. In francophone Ontario, member organizations of the Coalition francophone pour l'alphabétisation et la formation de base en Ontario have been offering family literacy programs for the last 15 years or so.

The Coalition francophone, a non-profit organization incorporated in 1999, offers support services to providers of adult training services in French who work in the community sector and in the school and post-secondary education systems in Ontario. The Coalition francophone designs and carries out research, analysis and training projects to support its 40 member organizations. It also supports member organizations in the implementation of family literacy programs. Eleven members offer family literacy programs, whose implementation is supported by the Coalition francophone.

The Coalition francophone has always been interested in family literacy. It considers family literacy to be

a means of preventing illiteracy among children and a dynamic way of involving parents with low reading skills in an educational process. Moreover, the Coalition francophone recognizes that family literacy programs are an excellent way of preserving and promoting the French language and francophone culture in a minority setting. Family literacy can therefore be understood as a social project that generates momentum and draws the community together (Brunet, 2003)<sup>1</sup>. [Free translation]

In 2003, the Coalition francophone commissioned a research to evaluate the impact of family literacy programs. The research was conducted by Sophie LeTouzé, coordinator of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Citizenship and Minorities (CIRCEM) of the University of Ottawa. Three reports have been published:

- *For My Child, Phase 1 (2004-2005)*,
- *For My Child, Phase 2 (2005-2006)*,
- *For My Child, Phase 3 (2006-2007)*.<sup>2</sup>

The current report is an analysis of this research in the broader context of research on family literacy. It also sets out recommendations about best practices and future research that can improve family literacy programs so that they can better meet the specific needs of families living in a francophone minority setting.

<sup>1</sup> In 2003, the French term commonly used to denote literacy was *alphabétisation*. The connotations and use of this term are discussed in greater detail below.

<sup>2</sup> The reports are available online: <http://www.coalition.on.ca/publications/>

This 10-chapter report includes an analysis of what exists in Ontario as well as elsewhere in Canada and around the world in the field of family literacy and in other related areas, such as early childhood and parental education. It also contains

- an analytical presentation of the research data and conclusions of the Coalition francophone's research,
- a comparative analysis of conclusions drawn from various research projects so that interventions in Ontario can be compared with programs elsewhere,
- an overview of various models of family literacy programs in anglophone and francophone settings,
- the specific characteristics of interventions within the francophone population in Ontario and family literacy programs oriented toward minority groups elsewhere in the world,
- an analytical list of best practices and lessons that can be drawn from the research to improve family literacy interventions, and
- a list of recommendations for quality family literacy programs.



# 1. Terminology

## SUMMARY

- 1.1 What does the word “literacy” mean?
- 1.2 Multiple literacies
- 1.3 Literacy, family literacy and multiple literacies
- 1.4 History of family literacy programs
- 1.5 Various definitions of family literacy
  - 1.5.1 The Fédération canadienne pour l’alphabétisation en français
  - 1.5.2 The Coalition francophone pour l’alphabétisation et la formation de base en Ontario
  - 1.5.3 The Centre for Family Literacy
- 1.6 Characteristics of a family literacy intervention based on multiple literacies
- 1.7 Conclusion

The following chapter will situate this report in the larger context of research on family literacy. It is important at the outset to define the terms that will be used, including “literacy”, “multiple literacies” and “family literacy”, and because these terms are relatively new, it may be helpful to explain why they have been chosen.

## 1.1 What does the word “literacy” mean?

The traditional French word for literacy is *alphabétisation*, which can connote a process of acquiring literacy but which has traditionally been restricted to mean learning to read and write. While *alphabétisation* is still the standard French term for “literacy” in lay speech, a new word, *littératie*, is being used more often. *Littératie*, coined from the English, was introduced into professional discourse on literacy research in French for the first time in 1985 (Giasson et al. in Pierre, 2003), and appeared later in scientific writings in 1991 (Pierre, 2003). Today, although the term *littératie* is the subject of debate in the family literacy community and in research circles, it is increasingly accepted and used in various fields - for example, in the school system, in adult education and in health care.

*Littératie* has a less restrictive meaning than the traditional term *alphabétisation*. Derived from alpha and beta, the first two letters of the Greek alphabet, *alphabétisation* refers to the processes by which knowledge of letters is taught and learned. According to Pierre (2003), the term also carries the implied – and inaccurate – meaning that learning to read and write involves the initial teaching of the alphabet. Pierre argues that learning to read and write really begins long before the start of formal teaching in school and the decoding of the alphabet. In any case, the term *alphabétisation* connotes a process of acquiring literacy in the narrow sense of “reading and writing.” For this reason, we will translate *alphabétisation* into English as “alphabetical literacy.”

For Freire (1982), literacy is a tool the individual uses for expanding his understanding of the world (or “reading the world”). In the context of this definition, which encompasses a larger and more inclusive perspective, family literacy’s purpose is to help parents and their children develop a critical way of thinking that will enable them to take charge of their lives. The emphasis is not only on what they are in the present, but on their “becoming” in the future (Masny and Dufresne, 2007).

*...literacy is a tool the individual uses for expanding his understanding of the world (Freire, 1982)*

## 1.2 Multiple literacies

The concept of multiple literacies adds a deeper dimension to the concept of literacy. Here is a brief overview of the concept.<sup>3</sup>

Multiple literacies is a social construct that includes words, gestures, attitudes and social identities, or, more precisely, ways of speaking, reading, writing and appreciating and valuing; in short, a way of “becoming” in the world.

The perspective of multiple literacies seems to take into account the diverse realities of francophones living in a minority setting. Francophones in this situation must take up the challenge of developing not only their academic literacy (reading, writing, arithmetic, etc.) but also their personal and critical literacy (their ability to apply critical thinking to the world) and their community literacy (learning to “read” communities to be able to integrate into them and develop a sense of belonging) with the objective of “becoming.”

This concept of “becoming” is important for families on an individual and a collective basis; it opens the possibility of their transforming as individual units and as communities, an essential element for the survival of francophone minorities.

## 1.3 Literacy, family literacy and multiple literacies

In the field of family literacy in French in Canada, there is much debate around the use of the terms “alphabetical literacy,” “literacy” and “multiple literacies.” Should we speak of programs for the alphabetical literacy of families (*alphabétisation familiale*) or of family literacy (*littératie familiale*) programs? Is the goal to help people acquire alphabetical literacy, or is it to support them in the development of their multiple literacies? Francophones working in the field of family literacy are increasingly aware of the limitations of the term *alphabétisation familiale*.<sup>4</sup>

The training program called *Fondements de l’alphabétisation familiale dans un contexte minoritaire francophone*, an adaptation of *Foundational Training in Family Literacy* (Centre for Family Literacy, 2001) is based on the perspective of multiple literacies. When Francophone organizations in Canada decided to structure their family literacy services, they used elements of this training to inform their thinking and their intervention. The Coalition francophone has recently chosen to adopt the term *littératie familiale* (family literacy).<sup>5</sup>

As a result, we use the term *littératie familiale*, family literacy, throughout the present document.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed description of multiple literacies, see chapter 7.

<sup>4</sup> It is the experience of the Coalition francophone that its members use the term *alphabétisation* in a much broader fashion than its more traditional meaning (which is simply learning reading, writing and arithmetic).

<sup>5</sup> In 2007, the Coalition francophone chose to abandon the term *alphabétisation familiale* and to adopt the term *littératie familiale* (Coalition francophone, 2006-2007, p. 20). The FCAF, however, continues to use the term *alphabétisation familiale* (*ibid.*).

## 1.4 History of family literacy programs

Let us look briefly at the history of family literacy programs. The earliest programs started in Israel, the United States, and the United Kingdom in the 1970s and 1980s (Thomas, 1998). They appear to have been launched because many children of low-income families were not performing well at school. In light of this observation, the US government, for example, subsidized the *Even Start* program, which was designed to support local family literacy projects for low-income families.

The American researcher Denny Taylor was the first to speak of family literacy in 1983. Using ethnographic research conducted over six years, she focused on the role of the family in children's learning processes as they acquired reading and writing skills. She observed that children's activities related to the process of learning to write are extremely complex and interrelated, and that they are influenced by families' intergenerational models and by the daily the personal experiences of family members, both within and outside the home (Taylor, 1983).

Taylor was particularly interested in changes within families that allow family members to break with long-standing models of learning and create new possibilities. She also focused on the concept of conservation, or the continuity of family models that are passed on from one generation to the next. Along with these concepts of change and continuity, she explored the importance of parental attitudes in relation to social flexibility and resilience, attitudes that influence multigenerational family models (*ibid.*).

Since then, a variety of family literacy programs have been created all over the world. Generally speaking, these programs target the parents of preschool or primary school children and take place in schools or in community centres. Today, a number of researchers and practitioners promote family literacy programs because this approach recognizes the intergenerational transfers of language and literacies from parents to children and conversely, from children to parents that make it possible to break the vicious cycle of failure in school (Sticht, 2006).

In French Canada, the FCAF has taken on a leadership role among its members to guide and support them in their interventions with families. It founded the Réseau d'experts en alphabétisation familiale (network of experts in family literacy) in 2003 using funds from The Action Plan for Official Languages. The network's goal is to facilitate access to French-language family literacy programs and it has identified six areas of intervention:

1. improving the organizational abilities of literacy groups,
2. networking and sharing knowledge and competencies between family literacy groups and their potential partners,
3. researching and analyzing the impact of family literacy interventions,
4. training practitioners in the fundamentals of family literacy and family literacy programs,
5. developing approaches and models used to improve family literacy, and
6. promoting the outcomes of family literacy programs (FCAF, 2004b).

## 1.5 Various definitions of family literacy

Certain organizations working in the literacy field, including the FCAF, the Coalition francophone and the Centre for Family Literacy, have proposed their own definitions of family literacy. It is important to take these definitions into account because the programs and research of these organizations have influenced the development of family literacy programs in French Canada. These definitions are all rooted in the perspective of multiple literacies.

### 1.5.1 The Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français

In 2003, the FCAF and its Réseau d'experts en alphabétisation familiale worked together to determine a common definition of family literacy:

The term family literacy refers to an approach that is directed toward an adult who plays an important role in the life of a child. The approach sets out to develop three forms of literacy: cultural literacy, academic literacy and community literacy. The development of these forms of literacy will help the adult gain a better understanding of his life as a francophone in a minority setting. The adult will also be made more conscious of the importance of small actions that will improve his life and that of his children. Thanks to family literacy, the adult will be better prepared to take on his role as the first teacher of his child. The child is the direct beneficiary of the family literacy approach, since the adult will be in a position both to think critically about his environment and to act on his environment. The adult will improve not only his ability to express himself in French but also his reading, writing and arithmetic skills. In addition, he will be in a position to actively contribute to the development of his community (FCAF, 2004a, p. 34). [Free translation]

### 1.5.2 The Coalition francophone pour l'alphabétisation et la formation de base en Ontario

The Coalition francophone fully adheres to the definition used by the FCAF. It has however decided to pare it down to a few essential elements for the sake of concision:

...family literacy is an approach that supports the parent or the adult who plays a significant role in the life of the child in his role as primary teacher of the child by contributing to the development of his cultural, academic and community literacies (Letouzé, 2005, p. 2). [Free translation]

### 1.5.3 The Centre for Family Literacy

According to the Alberta-based Centre for Family Literacy, family literacy is not limited to learning to read and write. Rather, it facilitates the reinforcement of the bonds between parents and children and the involvement of parents in the education of their child. It results both in families that are strong and fulfilled on all levels and in healthy communities.

The centre believes that the various forms of literacies are interwoven into all aspects of family and community life: health, employment, education, social well being and justice, to name only a few. All other learning is based on these different forms of literacy.

In 2001, the centre developed the *Foundational Training in Family Literacy*, a one-week training program that was delivered all across Canada to practitioners involved in family literacy. The FCAF adapted this training program for Francophones living in a minority setting. The adaptation, named *Fondements de l'alphabétisation familiale dans un contexte minoritaire francophone* (FCAF, 2004a), introduces the perspective of multiple literacies into family literacy, as mentioned earlier.

## 1.6 Characteristics of a family literacy intervention based on multiple literacies

Here are the main characteristics of a family literacy intervention based on the concept of multiple literacies:

- The notion that there is no “right” way to talk, read, write or appreciate and value the world, but rather a multiplicity of ways that change and shift according to the contexts in which these skills are used.
- An emphasis on the control we can have over our own lives: that is, our capacity to change how we live and what we do. This aspect is especially important for a parent living in a setting where his language and his culture are in the minority (e.g., Francophone minorities, immigrants, indigenous peoples).
- The involvement of a parent so that he may improve his abilities with regard to oral language and the written word in all its forms, and so that he may become more competent and gain more confidence in his ability to “read” unwritten messages and to read himself: for example, decoding people’s behaviour and understanding how people act in particular groups.
- The development of an individual’s capacity to look on things and events in his life with a critical mind (FCAF, 2006).

## 1.7 Conclusion

By defining the terminology and describing the concepts associated with alphabetical literacy (*alphabétisation*), literacy (*littératie*) and multiple literacies, this chapter described the transition from the older concept of alphabetical literacy toward a more inclusive definition of literacy and the concept of multiple literacies. This transition stems from a conceptual shift based largely on perspectives derived from psychology and linguistics, domains where literacy and multiple literacies are regarded as social practices. The chapter also provided a brief history of the development of family literacy programs and presented the various definitions of family literacy in use in Canada, namely those of the FCAF, the Coalition francophone and the Centre for Family Literacy.

The next chapter continues to place the Coalition francophone’s research in context with a presentation of demographic facts about francophones in Ontario and the results of the 2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey that pertain to French Canada.



## 2. *Francophones in Ontario: Literacy and demographic facts*

### SUMMARY

- 2.1 Demographic facts about Francophones in Ontario
- 2.2 Rate of transmission of the French language
- 2.3 Results of the 2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey
- 2.4 Conclusion

### 2.1 Demographic facts about Francophones in Ontario

According to the Ontario Office of Francophone Affaires (2005), whose primary source is Statistics Canada, the population of Canada in 2001 was 32,649,482. Just under one-third (29%, or 9,590,700 people) spoke French. In Ontario, 1,362,020 people spoke French; this number includes people for whom French is their first, second or third language and people who know French. Of this number, 548,940 people, or 4.8% of the total population of the province, were Francophones. The Office of Francophone Affaires defines a francophone as a person whose first official spoken language is French.

**According to the Ontario Office of Francophone Affaires, there were 548,940 francophones in Ontario in 2005.**

The eastern region (Ottawa, Russell County, Clarence-Rockland and Kingston) represents 41.3% of the Francophone population of Ontario. Francophones constitute 14.7% of the total population in the eastern region.

The central region (Peel-Mississauga, Simcoe-Penetanguishene County, and Welland) represents 25.6% of the Francophone population of Ontario. Francophones constitute 1.8% of the total population in the central region.

The north-east region (District of Nipissing-Sturgeon Falls) represents 25.2% of the Francophone population of Ontario. Francophones constitute 25.1% of the total population in the north-eastern region.

The north-west region (Manitouwadge, Thunder Bay) represents 1.6% of the Francophone population of Ontario. Francophones constitute less than 0.1% of the total population in the north-west region.

The south-west region (London, Windsor) represents 6.3% of the Francophone population of Ontario. Francophones constitute 0.3% of the total population in the south-west region (OFA, 2005).

## 2.2 Rate of transmission of the French language

The rate of transmission of French to children under the age of 18 years in Ontario is of particular interest to us.

**Language(s) spoken at home** – In endogamous households (in which both parents speak French), 91.6% of the children continue to speak French. In exogamous households in which the mother is Francophone, the retention rate is 34.2%. This rate drops to 14.6% when it is the father who is Francophone (OFA, 2005).

**Loss of students** – Ontario has 12 French-language school boards. Of every 10 students who begin their studies in French-language schools, four leave French-language schools before the end of secondary school to go to English-language schools (Barkany, 2007).

## 2.3 Results of the 2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey

In 2006, Statistics Canada produced a document called *The Canadian Component of the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey 2003 (IALSS): The Situation of Official Language Minorities* (Corbeil, 2006). It presents and explains the results relating to Francophones between the ages of 16 and 65 of the second international survey. Because the data was amassed from a large number of Francophones in Manitoba, New Brunswick and Ontario, it is safe to say that it fairly represents the reality of Francophones in these provinces.

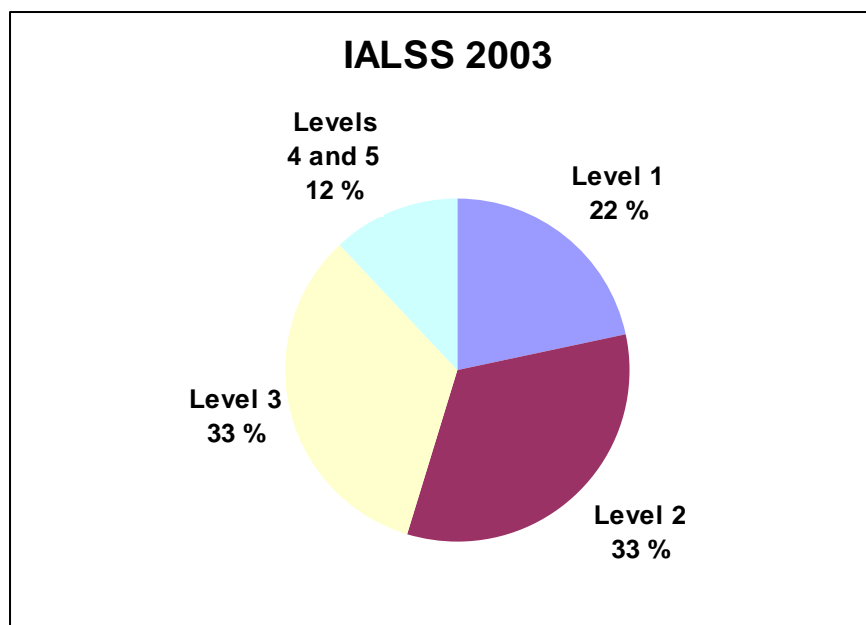
### Key facts of the survey

- In Ontario, 55% of Francophones ranked at level 1 or level 2 in literacy. Level 1 is the lowest and level 5, the highest: Level 3 is considered to be the minimum required to function in our society. On a national scale, 42% of Canadians ranked below level 3.
- One-quarter of the Francophone population in Ontario has considerable difficulty in decoding a text and as a result, cannot understand its core meaning.
- One-third of the Francophone population in Ontario can read well enough to get by in daily life, especially if the texts are written in plain language.
- Only one-tenth of the Francophone population in Ontario can read complex documents. (See figure 1, showing the range of literacy levels among francophones in Ontario, below.)

Overall, Francophones in Ontario have more difficulty reading and understanding written texts than do Anglophones, whether or not their geographic location places them in a majority or minority setting, and whether or not they chose English or French to respond to the survey questionnaire (Wagner et al., cited in FCAF, 2007).

One factor that in part explains these results is that Francophones have historically had less education than Anglophones. Although this is changing, the weight of history still affects many Francophones. It must be added that access to French-language schools, for many Franco-Ontarians, has only occurred very recently (Corbeil, 2006).

**Figure 1: Prose literacy<sup>6</sup> levels among Francophones in Ontario**



Source: Chart 3, Corbeil (2006) p. 37

## 2.4 Conclusion

This chapter presents key statistics about Francophones in Ontario, the largest group of Francophones living outside Quebec. Regional distributions show that the proportion of Francophones varies considerably from one region to another in Ontario. The results of the 2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey reveal that a high proportion of Francophone adults are at literacy levels 1 and 2, level 3 being considered the minimum required to function in our society.

The next chapter constitutes the heart of the current report. Using the research results recorded in the *For My Child* reports, it discusses the impact of family literacy programs in Francophone Ontario.

<sup>6</sup> Prose literacy is one of the categories by which literacy is measured in the survey, along with document literacy, numeracy and problem solving. Prose literacy is defined as the knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information from texts including editorials, news stories, brochures and instruction manuals (HRSDC, 2005, p. 13).



# 3. *For My Child* Analysis, interpretation and findings

## SUMMARY

- 3.1 The research
- 3.2 Methodology
- 3.3 Analysis and interpretation of research results
  - 3.3.1 Models used in the context of the research
    - 3.3.1.1 *Grandir avec mon enfant*
    - 3.3.1.2 *Lire et écrire à la maison*
    - 3.3.1.3 *Des livres dans mon baluchon*
  - 3.3.2 Recruitment of participants for the programs
    - 3.3.2.1 Participation of fathers
  - 3.3.3 Socio-demographic characteristics of programs participants
  - 3.3.4 Impacts of the programs on families
  - 3.3.5 Evaluation of the programs
- 3.4 Recommendations of the research
- 3.5 Conclusion

The final results of the Coalition francophone's research are now available, after four years of planning, providing support for the organizations offering family literacy programs, gathering data and analyzing it. This chapter contains a synopsis of the information that has been collected in the *For My Child* reports.

## 3.1 The research

The research began in 2003, when the Coalition francophone decided to measure the impact of family literacy on families living in minority settings in Ontario. The results, presented in the three reports entitled *For My Child*, are of national interest because the families that participated in the family literacy programs studied represent a wide range of family and community situations, and other communities across Canada may recognize situations here that are similar to their own. However, further research carried out in other provinces will add credence to the results presented here.

This is the first attempt in French Canada to undertake a formal evaluation of the impact of family literacy programs on Francophone families by documenting the changes observed from the beginning to the end of the programs.

The research was directed by the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Citizenship and Minorities (CIRCEM) at the University of Ottawa for the Coalition francophone. It is a direct outcome of the Action Plan for Official Languages that the federal government unveiled in 2003 to ensure the nurturing of Francophone and Anglophone linguistic minorities. The National Literacy Secretariat, now called the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, funded the research.

A work committee helped direct the research. The following people sat on the committee: Suzanne Benoit, executive director of the Coalition francophone pour l'alphabétisation et la formation de base en Ontario; Marc Bissonnette, executive director of the literacy organization La Route du Savoir; Lucie Brunet, consultant with the firm Brunet Sherwood Consultants, who acted as project coordinator; Gabrielle Lopez, director of development of the FCAF; Yvon Laberge, consultant with Excel Learning Concepts; and Sophie LeTouzé, coordinator of the CIRCEM.

Six French-language literacy organizations in Ontario, members of the Coalition francophone and selected for their experience in the area of family literacy, acted as partners in this research:

- Moi, j'apprends, Ottawa and Russell County;
- La Route du Savoir, Kingston;
- ABC Communautaire, Welland;
- Le Collège du Savoir, Kingston;
- Alpha Huronie, Penetanguishene; and
- Nipissing ALEC Centre, North Bay and Sturgeon Falls.

The research resulted in three reports:

- the report on the first cohort, *For My Child, Phase 1 (2004-2005)*, published in December 2005;
- the report on cohorts 2 and 3, *For My Child, Phase 2 (2005-2006)*, published in December 2006;
- the report on cohorts 4 and 5, *For My Child, Phase 3 (2006-2007)*, published in March 2008.

All three reports present the program models, analyze their impact on families and put forward conclusions and recommendations. In addition, they present comparisons of

- the frequency of family literacy activities carried out by the parent at the beginning and at the end of the program,
- the frequency of family literacy activities carried out by the parents and their child at the beginning and at the end of the program,
- the parents' use of French to carry out activities at the beginning and at the end of the program,
- the parents' and their child's use of French to carry out activities at the beginning and at the end of the program.

The third report also includes an overview of the entire research and provides information on the participation of families in the programs, the recruitment of families, parents' reasons for participating and the impact the programs have had on family literacy. The recommendations stemming from the research are presented at the end of this chapter.

## 3.2 Methodology

Over a period of three years, the CIRCEM evaluated five cohorts of families that participated in family literacy programs offered by the six partnering literacy organizations offering literacy services in seven regions. A total of 285 families participated in the research.

Four of these organizations are located in regions in which the Francophone population is very much a minority. Only one is located in a region in which Francophones represent a majority (62.5%, in Russell County). The other two fall somewhere between these two extremes. We can therefore say that the great majority of the Francophone population from which participants for the programs were drawn present special needs related to linguistic, cultural and identity issues that can affect the whole family.

Four questionnaires were used to gather data to enable the research team to define the conditions for success of the program, determine the challenges to be overcome, identify the specific characteristics of each program model and draw information on the impact of the programs.

Three categories of participants filled out the questionnaires: the parents enrolled in the programs the practitioners<sup>7</sup> and the directors of the partnering literacy organizations.

The questionnaire for parents was filled out at the beginning and at the end of the programs. The interviews were semi-directed and allowed basic data on personal characteristics, attitudes, habits and behaviour to be compiled. Eighteen questions enabled the research team to determine how often the parents carried out literacy activities on their own and with their children, as well as the language or languages they used for these activities. Another series of open-ended questions gave parents the opportunity to give their impressions of the program and to describe the changes that had occurred in their families as a result of taking part.<sup>8</sup>

The practitioners answered a questionnaire during a semi-directed interview at the end of each program. The research team was thus able to compile data on their profile and their reactions to both the positive and negative aspects of the program. The practitioners filled out a form with general information on each participating family at the outset of the program, as well as a road map at the end of each workshop to document the changes they observed from one week to the next, and follow-up on the attendance of each family.

The directors of the partnering organizations responded to a questionnaire at the end of the program in a semi-directed interview to describe the reasons for choosing the particular model offered by their organization, the way the program was implemented, the recruitment strategies, the support from the community, the conditions they identified as leading to success and the challenges to be overcome in offering these programs.

<sup>7</sup> In the present report the term “practitioner” refers to the people who do the intervention with the adult and the child.

<sup>8</sup> If a family was absent from the program more than three times, their data was not included in the evaluation of the impact of the program.

## 3.3 Analysis and interpretation of research results

### 3.3.1 Models used in the context of the research

A total of eight family literacy models were selected in accordance with the needs of the communities. The organizations did not necessarily deliver the same model throughout the project. All of the models except for one were chosen because they targeted adults. Some models targeted parents of preschoolers and others targeted parents of school-age children.

It is appropriate to emphasize that the target population for family literacy programs in French does not only concern parents with low reading skills, but also a whole range of population groups such as immigrant families, exogamous or multicultural families, families with special needs relating to the learning of the French language or the increased use of French in the home (FCAF, 2004a).

Program models also vary according to the type and the target of the intervention. The American researcher Nickse (1990) put forward a typology to classify family literacy interventions according to the following elements:

- direct intervention with the adult and the child,
- indirect intervention with the adult and the child,
- direct intervention with the adult and indirect intervention with the child, and
- indirect intervention with the adult and direct intervention with the child.

Here is the list of the selected models:

- *Des livres dans mon baluchon* (for parents of preschoolers) – direct intervention with the adult and the child,
- *Grandir avec mon enfant* (for parents of preschoolers and school-age children) – direct intervention with the adult and indirect intervention with the child,
- *J'ai du plaisir à grandir avec mon enfant* (for parents of preschoolers) – direct intervention with the adult and the child,
- *Je m'éveille avec mon enfant* (for parents of preschoolers) – direct intervention with the adult and indirect intervention with the child,
- *Lire et écrire à la maison* (for parents of school-age children) – direct intervention with the adult and the child,
- *Mon tapis raconte* (for school-age children) – indirect intervention with the adult and direct intervention with the child,
- *Parler pour que les enfants écoutent, écouter pour que les enfants parlent* (for parents of preschoolers) – direct intervention with the adult and indirect intervention with the child, and
- *Pour les rendre heureux* (for parents of preschoolers) – direct intervention with the adult and the child.

All of the models used were analysed according to various parameters. Three particular models are featured because they fulfil most or all of the following criteria:

- They have clear objectives.
- They are accompanied by a user guide.
- They include a “child” component.
- They take into account the particular context of Francophones living in a minority setting (with program elements relating to language, culture and identity).
- They demonstrate coherence between the identified goals and the target population.

These models are

1. *Grandir avec mon enfant* (Joly and Fauchon, 2002), an adaptation of the Canadian Anglophone Literacy and Parenting Skills model to the minority Francophone setting,
2. *Lire et écrire à la maison* (Drolet, Giasson and Saint-Laurent, 2001), from Québec, for parents of first graders, and
3. *Des livres dans mon baluchon* (Bissonnette and La Rue, 2004), specifically designed for the minority Francophone setting from the perspective of multiple literacies.

### 3.3.1.1 *Grandir avec mon enfant*

**Background:** The *Grandir avec mon enfant* model was developed in collaboration with many Anglophone and Francophone experts from five different provinces. The model has been adopted as a pilot project by various Francophone organizations in Canada.

**Duration:** The model is divided into ten modules of two and one-half hours each, for a total of 25 hours.

**Target group:** Parents of preschool and school-age children, with the direct participation of adults and the indirect participation of children.

**Definition of family literacy:** An intervention designed to strengthen parenting skills and to help parents support their children in their learning.

#### Goals

- to enhance participants' self-esteem,
- to foster pride in one's language and culture,
- to increase awareness of the parental role,
- to improve parenting skills, and
- to develop a positive attitude toward the emergence of literacy skills.

#### General objectives

To encourage participating parents

- to exchange ideas in an atmosphere of openness and respect,
- to take stock of strengths (acquired literacies) and challenges on an individual level,
- to enhance their self-esteem,
- to acquire new parenting skills,
- to become conscious of the link between self-esteem and cultural and linguistic identity,
- to take advantage of the reading and writing activities that present themselves in everyday life, and
- to know what Francophone services are offered in the community and to make better use of the various Francophone resources available.

## Topics

- i) exploring our parenting role,
- ii) self esteem,
- iii) communicating to be understood,
- iv) active listening,
- v) positive discipline,
- vi) I feel angry with my child! Why?
- vii) conflict resolution,
- viii) the family,
- ix) values, traditions and culture, and
- x) well-being.

**Structure of modules:** Uniform in structure, the first four parts of each module are as follows:

- i) greeting and welcoming activity,
- ii) using a personal journal to express one's ideas,
- iii) key words and expressions associated with the theme so that the participating parents can use them in the discussion in small groups or all together, and
- iv) relaxation and visualisation to relax the body and the mind and stimulate the imagination.

From there, the modules vary according to the concepts they are presenting.

**Reading and writing activities:** These kinds of activity within each module help develop parenting skills as much as reading and writing skills. They aim to help participating parents feel comfortable with reading and writing and with integrating them into their daily lives.

**Other characteristics:** Additional information is provided in the guide's appendices, in particular advice on strategies and tools for leading the group, materials that can be used as fables and stories that the facilitator can use to present each theme, an enrolment form, an attendance form, evaluation forms for the practitioner and the participant, references for the workshop titles of books for children related to the theme in each module and a certificate of participation.

**Comments:** Although the model *Grandir avec mon enfant* does not include a "child" component, one of the two organizations that used this model has integrated a child component by offering a child care service in partnership with a local daycare centre.

The fifth and sixth modules include two activities that reinforce the parental role and skills for daily living with one's child. One of these activities aims to improve the parent's relationship with his child, and the other is a parent-child activity presented in the form of a game to help the parent foster and support their child's acquisition of reading and writing skills.

The facilitation of modules in this model requires considerable knowledge and leadership skills, particularly where the participating parents come from diverse backgrounds and have various skills and competencies. Module 9, which deals with values, traditions and cultures, may present a considerable challenge, especially in contexts where there is a wide range of diverse cultures.

### 3.3.1.2 *Lire et écrire à la maison*

**Background:** The program model *Lire et écrire à la maison* emerged from an action-research project that was funded by the FCAR-CQRS-CSIM-MEQ<sup>9</sup> under the auspices of a program to support research in the prevention of academic failure in underprivileged environments. The authors of this model teach at the Université Laval and are interested in reading and writing skills, as well as prevention of learning difficulties.

**Definition of family literacy:** A program that helps parents become aware of the daily activities they can do with their children around letters and words to encourage the emergence of reading and writing skills.

**Duration:** Eight one hour and a half workshops and one visit to a local library for the same length of time, which represents approximately 13.5 hours in total. Workshops are held once a week from September to the end of October or the beginning of November. The last workshop is held in January, once the children have learned to read (synthesis, evaluation and celebration). The visit to the local library can take place anytime during the course of the program.

**Target group:** Parents of school-age children (grade 1), with the direct participation of adults and the direct participation of children.

#### Goals

- to give parents tools so that they can better support their child in acquiring reading and writing skills at the beginning of grade 1, and
- to help parents find concrete and effective means of getting their child interested in reading and writing and in aiming for academic success.

#### Topics

- i) books and academic success,
- ii) keeping on reading to your child even in grade 1,
- iii) playing with letters,
- iv) reading and writing in daily life,
- v) listening to your child read,
- vi) writing games,
- vii) listening to your child read as he develops his skills, and
- viii) synthesis, evaluation and celebration.

<sup>9</sup> FCAR: Fonds pour la formation de chercheurs et l'aide à la recherche; CQRS: Conseil québécois de la recherche sociale; CSIM: Conseil scolaire de l'Île de Montréal; MEQ: Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec.

**Structure of workshops:** Each of the first seven workshops begins with an overview that describes the sequence of events, the materials required and their distribution to participants. Each workshop also includes the following eight components:

- i) a word of welcome and review of the activities carried out at home;
- ii) the what, how and why (presentation of the workshop in the format of a scenario that could be used by the practitioner);
- iii) a discussion of the concept presented in item ii);
- iv) a demonstration (if needed);
- v) the presentation of strategies used before, during and after reading, as well as games to play with letters, with the feature activity being "Write a story dictated by your child"; other activities include books for beginners, interactive writing such as journal writing with a partner, an activity of shared reading, etc.;
- vi) a practical session that the parents do with their child during the workshop;
- vii) a "recap" of the workshop; and
- viii) the planning of activities to do with the child at home that week and the distribution of activity sheets.

The eighth workshop, which takes place in January, is devoted to the synthesis and evaluation of the program and ends with a small celebration.

**Reading and writing activities:** This model focuses on reading and writing. The practitioner's guide contains a list of children's books appropriate for beginner readers.

**Other characteristics:** The material loaned to parents includes 30-minute videocassettes that are also used in the workshops. Because the workshops take place in the school environment, the resource teachers and teachers encourage parents to fully support their children with simple interventions based on current trends and the results of research.

**Comments:** The model *Lire et écrire à la maison* has been successfully piloted in various socio-economic settings in schools in Montréal and Québec. This model is different from the others in that it takes place at school, which facilitates the integration of the children. It also includes a visit to the local library.

Because it was designed to be implemented in Québec, a Francophone majority setting, this model does not take into account the linguistic, cultural and identity issues that affect Franco-Ontarians, nor does it take into account the situation of French in a minority setting and the contact between the two languages in everyday life in Ontario. The centres that have chosen this model have tried nevertheless to integrate some of these aspects into their program.

Parents who have low literacy skills or little formal education or who do not speak, read and write with ease in French would have difficulty functioning with this model. However, *Lire et écrire à la maison* offers a very helpful tool for use in a minority setting, which is to record or buy books on cassette for parents who are allophone, have low literacy skills or are Anglophone.

### 3.3.1.3 *Des livres dans mon baluchon*

**Background:** The program model *Des livres dans mon baluchon* was designed by Marc Bissonnette and Louise La Rue from the adult training centre Centre de formation pour adultes La Route du Savoir in Kingston, Ontario. After carrying out a feasibility study, the authors concluded that none of the existing models seemed to answer the needs of their community, the Thousand Islands region, in which Francophones constitute 2% of the population. They therefore decided to create one, which resulted in *Des livres dans mon baluchon*.

**Duration:** Ten workshops spread out over 10 weeks, three hours per week. Two facilitators ensure the implementation of the program, because the parents and the children participate in separate programs during the first part of the workshop. (See the paragraph below on the structure of the workshops.)

**Target group:** Francophone parents and children between the ages of three and five from all economic backgrounds in the Thousand Islands region.

**Definition of family literacy:** The definition of family literacy used in the model is drawn from that of the FCAF: “an approach that is directed toward an adult who plays an important role in the life of a child. The approach sets out to develop three forms of literacy: cultural literacy, academic literacy and community literacy.” The goals of the program’s activities are to increase the “participant’s background of personal knowledge,” to reinforce his sense of belonging to his community and to encourage his appreciation of and value for his culture of origin and his own cultural history.

#### Goals

- to develop the linguistic, cognitive and affective abilities of participants, namely Francophone parents and their children between the ages of three and five from all economic backgrounds in the Thousand Islands region;
- to provide parents with information about cultural events, raise the level of general knowledge, strengthen the feeling of belonging to the community and emphasize the value of the culture of origin;
- to provide children with a structured environment that facilitates socialization in French; prepares them to start school; opens them up to the world around them through language, play and social interaction; and accelerates the emergence of literary practices; and
- to take action in the linguistic and social areas characteristic of parents (cultural life, community life, parenting skills) and in areas characteristic of children (gross motor activity, fine motor activity, cognitive and affective development, socialization).

#### Topics

- i) participation,
- ii) learning,
- iii) self-esteem,
- iv) nutrition,
- v) communication,
- vi) parenting skills,
- vii) safety,
- viii) health,
- ix) community, and
- x) creativity

The theme of each workshop sets out the central idea around which the content for each week is organized. The andragogical<sup>10</sup> worksheet for the parents and the pedagogical worksheet for the children each describe in detail activities to be carried out with each group, as well as strategies and tools to lead the workshop.

**Structure of workshops:** The first part of each workshop consists of separate activities for the parents and for the children; the parents prepare for the activities that they will be doing with their child in the second part of the workshop. In the second part, they carry out the activity with their child while putting into practice what they have just learned. During the third and final part of the workshop, the parents share and discuss their experience during the workshop.

- **Activities for the parents:** greetings, discussions about the French-speaking world and community resources, oral presentations from each parent, andragogic activity of the week related to the theme of the week, story reading by parents (each taking their turn), breaks, games, access to educational resources to develop literacies and distribution of family kits (kits contain resources for the whole family such as an educational board game, a book of children's stories, a reference book, a magazine, a local journal, a video cassette and a CD in French, etc.).
- **Activities for the children:** greetings, initiation to socialization, physical exercise, chatting, exercises in fine motor activity, art, listening to a story, initiation to music, breaks or group games, and distribution of children's kits (these kits contain resources for children, including a book, words of children's songs, a notebook, etc.).

**Reading and writing activities:** During the workshops, the parents take turns reading a story. The family kit contains several resources with activities for parents and children that can be done at home, and reading materials related to the themes of the workshop.

**Other characteristics:** The model is accompanied by a description of the andragogical and pedagogical approach: the themes are presented in the form of questions, quizzes, riddles and discussions. The group is important. The practitioners fill out a weekly evaluation sheet as a kind of formative evaluation so that the program can be adapted week by week. The model integrates the profile developed by the Canadian Teachers' Federation for entry into grade 1 for children living in a Francophone minority setting.<sup>11</sup>

**Comments:** The model *Des livres dans mon baluchon* takes into account the linguistic, cultural and identity issues that families in minority settings are confronted with, as well as the situation of French in the context of the community and contact between the two languages in everyday life. The variety of activities from which the practitioner can choose makes it possible to adapt the workshops to the needs of the participants according to their language and literacy level. For example, the model includes listening to songs in French, which allows individuals who are not at ease with the language to participate and to "train their ear" to the words and the rhythm of the language.

Texts in the appendix of the practitioner's guide provide additional information.

<sup>10</sup> Andragogic refers to the methods or techniques of teaching adults.

<sup>11</sup> The CTF has developed a profile for entry into grade 1 that sets out the language and cultural knowledge that the child should possess in French before starting school in French.

### 3.3.2 Recruitment of participants for the programs

All of the organizations that participated in the project recruited mostly in Francophone schools and child care centres (63.8%) and, to a small degree, through newspaper advertisements.

Centres situated in regions where Francophones make up less than 10% of the population generally had difficulty recruiting. The director of one centre advertised the programs at private companies in the region, which enabled them to reach families that otherwise may not have heard about the program. All of the reports reveal some concern about the issue of recruitment.

#### 3.3.2.1 Participation of fathers

The programs generally attract nearly five times as many women as men. In the first cohort, 10 out of 62 adults were fathers. In the second and third cohorts, 31 fathers out of 192 adults took part in the programs. Of these fathers, 24 participated in the model *Lire et écrire à la maison*, which targets parents of school-age children. This suggests that fathers are more interested in their child's learning once the child starts school, an observation also made by Ortiz et al. (1999).<sup>12</sup> The fourth and fifth cohorts included 23 fathers out of 128 adults.

### 3.3.3 Socio-demographic characteristics of program participants

#### Language characteristics

The research showed that 35%-45% of the families that participated in the programs lived in exogamous households, and that 55%-65% of participating families reported that they speak French at home.

#### Age

Parents between 31 and 40 years of age with children four years of age and under (33%) or five to six years of age (over 50%) made up the largest group reached by the research. Note that parents of children five to six years of age took part in the model *Lire et écrire à la maison*.

#### Parents' reasons for participating

The research shows that parents participate in family literacy programs in French mainly for their child's sake. They cite the following reasons:

- They are looking for a Francophone environment.
- They want to provide greater stimulation to their child's development in order to contribute to his future success.

These reasons are a constant factor of all of the family literacy programs covered in the research.

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<sup>12</sup> See section 6.4.3.

On a more personal level, parents are happy to have the opportunity to improve as parents and to be able to share their experiences with their peers.

### **Educational level of parents**

In the case of cohorts 2 to 5, the programs reached mainly parents with a high level of education, namely postsecondary studies, whereas the first cohort included parents with less education (who may or may not have finished secondary school). The less educated parents in the first cohort were recruited from among people who already participated in the centres' educational programs. The Coalition francophone, the practitioners and the directors of the centres would have liked to see the programs reach less educated parents recruited from outside their centre as well. In spite of sustained and varied efforts in this direction, the results were not very encouraging.

The high rate of participation of more educated people is explained in a research by Myers and de Broucker (2006, p. iv): "Those who have a higher level of education to start with are more likely to take advantage of future opportunities for training and instruction."

### **3.3.4 Impacts of the programs on families**

In all five cohorts, parents reported that the programs increased their learning, changed how they used the French language and how often they took part in literacy activities in the family, and improved their parenting skills.

Parents mentioned an increase in the frequency of

- activities that encourage the development of literacies,
- use of French,
- interactive activities between parents and children, and
- parents' involvement in their child's learning.

During interviews with the parents, they reported that

- They had learned strategies to put into practice in their daily lives, and in particular had become more aware of the importance of living in French in the home.
- They included more literacy activities in their daily lives.
- They were better informed about the resources in the French language in their community.
- They had expanded their Francophone network.

Parents also reported changes in the attitudes and behaviour of their child:

- He is more confident.
- He has enriched his vocabulary.
- He is better at respecting routines.
- His has acquired a sense of belonging in relation to the French language.

### 3.3.5 Evaluation of the programs

This section summarizes what was reported by the parents, the practitioners and the directors of the centres as described in the three reports *For My Child*.

The parents appreciated the discussions, the learning and the resources. What was of most interest to them, however, was the opportunity to exchange ideas with other parents, which helped break the isolation that some of them felt. They also appreciated the participation of the children. The children's participation, moreover, had a positive effect on the families' attendance in the program. In fact, the first report of this research indicates that in the centres that offered programs that lacked a portion involving children's participation, the absentee rate was higher.

***The children's participation has a positive effect on the families' attendance.***

Because many families do not have access to resources in French, a number of program models, including *Lire et écrire à la maison* and *Des livres dans mon baluchon*, provide kits and pedagogical resources that families can take home. The kits include books, games and ideas for activities to do with the children at home. These kits are a very positive feature. Some centres also sent resources by e-mail, to the parents' great satisfaction.

In some cases, changes of location or date at the start of the programs and a lack of structure of certain workshops had a negative effect on participation.

Several parents expressed the wish that the programs last longer.

The practitioners and directors of the centres felt that the programs fostered improvement in spoken French, the development of cultural identity and, for the children, integration into French-language schools. They were satisfied with the partnerships with the schools, the child care centres and the other community organizations. They would have liked to have been able to recruit more fathers and were concerned about the lack of regular attendance of families, while observing that the presence of the children has a marked effect in reducing parents' absenteeism. Finally, they observed changes in the families' parenting skills, in what they had learned and in the frequency of their use of French.

It is important to note that the proportion of Francophones in the region in which a centre delivers its family literacy services may have an influence on the impact of the programs, especially with regard to the use of French at home. In fact, the frequency of the activities that parents did with their child increased significantly in all categories in families living in communities where English is the majority language (where, in their immediate surroundings, Francophones are a minority). Where francophones are a majority in their immediate surroundings, the frequency of the activities that parents did with their child also seemed to increase in nearly all of the categories, but the variances were much less significant than for Francophones in an immediate minority setting. There are two possible explanations. First, since the families already spoke French at home all the time, the margin for improvement is necessarily smaller. Second, it may be that a certain negligence sets in when one is not afraid of losing one's language. In communities where the Francophone population is in the majority, one can live in French all the time. Therefore, losing one's language is not a concern.

In all cases, parents reported that they had learned strategies that they apply in their daily lives.

### 3.4 Recommendations of the research

**Recommendation 1:** Choose a structured family literacy program model that has clear goals and is accompanied by a manual that has been tested.

**Recommendation 2:** Develop proactive recruitment strategies that are aimed directly at the target clientele.

**Recommendation 3:** Encourage all practitioners to follow the training *Fondements de l'alphabétisation familiale dans un contexte minoritaire francophone*.

**Recommendation 4:** Provide training to practitioners where the family literacy program model used includes such training and give them supervision and support throughout the program.

**Recommendation 5:** For family literacy program models that do not include training for the practitioners (e.g., *Lire et écrire à la maison*), develop such a training.

**Recommendation 6:** Ensure that the structure of the program is in place; that is, as much as possible, establish the location where the workshops will take place, respect the start and end dates, begin and finish the workshops on time and stick to the planned themes.

**Recommendation 7:** Provide an opportunity for parents to borrow educational resources (e.g., kits), since many families have limited financial resources and educational resources in French in minority settings are scarce.

**Recommendation 8:** Develop partnerships with other French-language community organizations in the region in order to increase the visibility of educational centres for adults, to facilitate a sharing of resources (venues, expertise, etc.), to attract a clientele that could be at risk and to create a support network for Francophone families.

**Recommendation 9:** When a new partnership is established that involves the loan or rental of space, make sure the venue can welcome both adults and children.

**Recommendation 10:** Think about ways of making family literacy programs more appealing to men. It might be a good idea to conduct a study on this issue.

**Recommendation 11:** Target the age range of the children more specifically, in order to better serve the needs of parents and ensure that they are satisfied.

**Recommendation 12:** Establish a clear and precise protocol that sets out how to deal with children during the workshops. The protocol could be presented to parents at the first workshop to enlist their full cooperation and to improve the welcome and the service provided to the children.

**Recommendation 13:** Follow up on the program evaluation by handing out a questionnaire to parents at the last workshop.

**Recommendation 14:** Adopt a model that contains activities specifically designed for children. Research shows that the impact of a family literacy program is much lower when the children are not included in the program or when a daycare service is used.

**Recommendation 15:** Seek out new ways to recruit families, young parents, individuals at risk, fathers and recent immigrants.

**Recommendation 16:** Provide a family literacy program for parents who need “refrancisation” (i.e., people who used to speak French and who for various reasons do not speak it fluently anymore and wish to recover it).

**Recommendation 17:** Aim to integrate elements that increase awareness of the French reality and that deal with questions of identity in program models that do not yet address these issues.

**Recommendation 18:** Maintain pressure on government bodies to obtain adequate and recurrent funding.



### 3.5 Conclusion

This chapter is at the core of the Coalition francophone's research. It described and compared three of the eight program models used in the research. We chose these three models because they were used most often and because they respect most of the criteria for the selection of a family literacy program. The chapter then gave a synopsis of the results of the research and ended by underlining the impact of the programs on the participant' use of French and parenting skills, as well as on literacy activities in general and family literacy activities in particular.

The *Grandir avec mon enfant* model targets the parents of preschool and school-age children and *Des livres dans mon baluchon* targets the parents of preschoolers. *Lire et écrire à la maison* is addressed to parents of children in grade 1. Whereas *Lire et écrire à la maison* and *Des livres dans mon baluchon* offer a direct intervention with the parent and the child, *Grandir avec mon enfant* is focused on the parent. *Lire et écrire à la maison* is devoted to reading and writing activities, and *Grandir avec mon enfant* is mainly focused on promoting improvement in parenting skills. Although *Des livres dans mon baluchon* includes activities to promote reading, writing and parenting skills, it also aims to heighten the process of awareness of socialization in French (e.g., speaking French at home) and awareness of cultural activities in French in which families can take part at home and in the community. Finally, *Des livres dans mon baluchon* and *Lire et écrire à la maison* include kits and pedagogical resources that parents can take home.

The results and their interpretation found in the *For My Child* reports can be summarized as follows. The majority of the participants in the programs lived mainly in French at home, and most of them were women. Most of the men who participated in the programs enrolled in the *Lire et écrire à la maison* program model for parents of school-age children. In their responses to the questionnaire, almost all of the parents reported a very high level of motivation toward their program. Parents mentioned that they had observed changes relating to their use of French and that they had increased the frequency of their literacy activities. They indicated that they had learned various strategies for helping their child during literacy activities. They were better informed about the resources available in French in their community and had made new Francophone acquaintances. They also reported changes in their child: he is more confident, he has enriched his vocabulary, is better at respecting routines and has developed a greater sense of belonging to the French language.

According to the evaluations, it appears that the inclusion of children in the programs is a success factor and contributes, among other things, to reducing absenteeism. The practitioners and directors of the centres felt that the programs fostered improvement in spoken French, the development of cultural identity, and, for the children, integration into French-language schools. They were satisfied with the partnerships with the schools, child care centres and other community organizations. The chapter ended with 18 recommendations that came out of the *For My Child* reports.

The next chapter is devoted to establishing the connections between the results presented in the *For My Child* reports with results of other research on family literacy.

# 4. Comparative analysis of results of the Coalition francophone's research with results of other research on family literacy

## SUMMARY

- 4.1 Recruitment problems identified in the research
  - 4.1.1 Recruitment of families
  - 4.1.2 Recruitment of fathers
- 4.2 Linguistic elements identified in the research
  - 4.2.1 Languages in exogamous homes
  - 4.2.2 Bilingualism
  - 4.2.3 Language used in child care centres
  - 4.2.4 Socialization in French
- 4.3 Impacts of programs on families
  - 4.3.1 Overall impacts
  - 4.3.2 Impacts on parenting skills
  - 4.3.3 Evaluation of the impact of the *Learning Together* model
- 4.4 Training for practitioners
- 4.5 Conclusion

In French Canada, the field of family literacy is in its infancy. To better position the research of the Coalition francophone, numerous studies that evaluate the impact of family literacy programs are referenced (Brooks et al., 2007; Couture et al., 1998; Fagan, 2001; Green, 2003; Hayden and Sanders, 1998; Hoff, 2001; Karther, 2002; Lavoie et al., 2000; Padak and Rasinski, 2000; Ponzetti and Dulin, 1997; Powell, 2004; Powell and D' Angelo, 2000).

Research has also been done on the projects QualiFLY (*Quality in Family Literacy*), PEFaL (*Parent Empowerment for Family Literacy*), *Learning Together*, the *Manukau Family Literacy Program* (MFLP) and a project by the Mother Child Education Foundation, or AÇEV. A meta-study of family literacy programs undertaken in 2007 by a group of researchers in the UK found 16 projects throughout the world that collected credible data (Brooks et al., 2007).

QualiFLY is a UNESCO project that brings together six countries; its purpose is to promote recognized best practice in family literacy in these countries (UNESCO, 2008). PEFaL operates in six European countries for the purpose of encouraging parents to participate in sessions on family literacy so that they can assist in their children's academic development. PEFaL also aims to empower the adult as a parent in the home and at school and as a lifelong learner (Camilleri et al., 2005). The Mother Child Education Foundation (AÇEV) based in Turkey has implemented a functional literacy support program for adults that includes segments for fathers (Elfert, 2007). *Learning Together* was studied by Phillips et al. (2006) over a long period; we will discuss the results of this research later in this chapter. The *Manukau Family Literacy Program* (MFLP) (Benseman, 2002) is a New Zealand model and is described in chapter 5.

## 4.1 Recruitment problems identified in the research

### 4.1.1 Recruitment of families

Various studies and program models (e.g., *Learning Together*) demonstrate that it is difficult to get parents with lower levels of education to participate in family literacy programs. Some exceptions to this rule were found, notably in the projects QualiFLY and PEFaL.

This matter merits consideration. In French Canada, three qualitative studies have been done on the skills and a description of parents with low literacy levels (Bittar et al., 2005; Drolet et al. 2001; Garnier, 2004). The authors of these studies observe that all the parents have a positive attitude to education and want to exert a positive influence on their child's academic development. Nevertheless, few parents with weak reading skills do reading and writing activities at home. Homework sessions can be challenging for some parents because of the child's lack of interest and the parents' lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes or of being corrected by their child. According to Drolet et al. (2001), some parents have difficulty communicating with school staff; they point out that parents who follow a family literacy program feel more capable of helping their child in his studies than those who don't, and they are also more likely to go back to school for further education.

The Coalition francophone' research indicates that recruitment constitutes a major challenge in a number of communities. Because each program is carried out in a specific place, it is important to determine the most effective means of recruiting families in that place. The *Lire et écrire à la maison* model is successful in this regard. The fact that the activities take place in a school and that the school board and the school administration participate actively in promoting the program makes recruitment easier.

### 4.1.2 Recruitment of fathers

Research consistently confirms that fathers do not often participate in family literacy programs. This was also the case for the participants' involved in the Coalition francophone's research.

***Fathers do not often participate in family literacy programs.***



Ortiz et al. (1999) make the following recommendations

- Invite fathers who already participate in programs to talk to other fathers about their experience.
- Reassure fathers by telling them that they can make a significant contribution to the development of their child's literacies.
- Help fathers recognize the benefits they derive from a family literacy program, including an improvement in the emotional bond with their child.

## Example of an intervention with fathers

Elfert (2007) reports that, in Turkey, AÇEV implemented a program to support fathers (*The Father Support Program*). This program is designed to support fathers by

- making them more aware of the development and education of their child,
- increasing their knowledge about child development,
- helping them acquire more communication skills that are less authoritarian, and
- guiding them toward doing more literacy activities and spending more time with their child.

The program targets fathers of children between the ages of two and ten. Elfert reports that they succeeded in reaching 13,000 fathers and children in 25 provinces in Turkey.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to evaluate AÇEV's father support program. The quantitative evaluation was done using an inventory of attitudes and the qualitative evaluation was done using interviews with fathers and mothers. A correlation can be seen between what these parents reported and the results of the inventory of attitudes. The inventory results show changes in the attitudes of fathers participating in the program. Fathers became less traditional and less authoritarian and more permissive as parents. In addition, communication improved between the fathers and their child (Koçak, 2004).

The Coalition francophone's research reveals that more fathers were drawn to the program that targets parents of school-age children (in this case, children in grade 1). One conclusion may be that fathers are in general more interested in helping their child with homework and encouraging him in his academic development. We are of the opinion that in Ontario, where the school system includes a full-time preparatory cycle (preschool at the age of four and kindergarten at the age of five); it should be possible to recruit fathers well in advance of the first grade.

## 4.2 Linguistic elements identified in the research

### 4.2.1 Languages in exogamous homes

In the United States, Padak and Rasinski (2000) observed an improvement in spoken language and in reading skills when families participate in a family literacy program. Children who speak English as a second language improved their skills in English, the language of instruction.

The Coalition francophone' research showed that a notable proportion of exogamous families participated in the programs. In fact, 35%-45% of the participating parents were living in an exogamous situation. The mother tongue of the majority of the parents was French.

## 4.2.2 Bilingualism

Bilingualism is a very common phenomenon throughout the world and a reality for a number of Francophone children living in a minority setting. (Landry, 2003) The *For My Child* reports mention that a considerable number of participants spoke a second language, often English. Caspe (2006) notes that many adult Franco-Ontarians received all or a part of their education in English, which means that the acquisition of a language (in this case, English) has occurred to the detriment of the first language (French). This kind of bilingualism often leads to assimilation and the loss of identity. On the other hand, what is known as “additive bilingualism” is characterised by a high level of competence in both languages (Landry and Allard, 1990). Family literacy programs in a minority setting allow participants greater exposure to French and thus encourage additive bilingualism.

As we will see in chapter 5, many family literacy programs in the United States target participants from exogamous households. The number of exogamous households is continually increasing in Canada among Francophones (Landry and Allard, 1990). It is therefore important that practitioners be informed about bilingualism in order to have a better understanding of the linguistic and cultural context of their program participants and to adapt their intervention accordingly.<sup>13</sup>

In a book devoted to child development, Hoff (2001) describes factors that influence bilingualism

- **The length of time of exposure to each language:** The time devoted to a language influences the rate of learning of the language and the level of skill in using it.
- **The age of the child:** The younger the child is when exposed to a second language, the more his mastery of its grammar and punctuation will resemble that of his first language.
- **Changes in the language-learning environments (a move or beginning school, for example):** A change in the child's life that affects the proportion of time he uses one language can lead to a corresponding change in his level of skill in the other language.

### Some important aspects of bilingualism (Hoff, 2001)

- The time spent speaking a language influences the level of ability in that language. The presence of French in the contexts to which a child is exposed influences his ability to use this language.
- Bilingual children have to deal with more information than unilingual children. Therefore they need more support from their families, schools, and community.
- The attitude of people in their surroundings toward bilingualism influences the attitudes of children learning a second language.
- The attitude of the non-francophone parent toward the French language influences the child's perception of French.
- Immersion in a language facilitates learning that language.
- A child who learns two languages at the same time can transfer vocabulary and grammar from one language to the other. This gives the impression that he is mixing the languages up but in fact this phenomenon is normal and reflects the learning process. The “mixing” of languages gradually disappears over time.

<sup>13</sup> Further information on this point can be found in *Éducation, langue(s) et culture(s) de l'enfant du couple francophone-anglophone*, by Allard, Essiembre and Arseneau (2003).

- Linguistic mistakes are a learning opportunity for the child. When a child experiments with verbal expression and makes mistakes, these mistakes reflect normal language development and an evolving understanding of how the language works.
- The most complex and the most important part of learning a language is producing messages (speaking).

In a minority setting, many families are bilingual. Hoff's comments apply fully here. Also, an adult who functions in two languages doesn't necessarily have the same facility and ability in both languages. If he is more fluent in English, he may engage less often in literacy activities in French. It is very important that the practitioners and parents know these facts. Family literacy programs must therefore anticipate various kinds of intervention, depending on whether the family is endogamous or exogamous. A program cannot address the needs of both groups in the same way and must be adapted accordingly if it is to be successful.

### 4.2.3 Language used in child care centres

In an article published in the *Actes du Colloque pancanadien sur la recherche en éducation en milieu francophone minoritaire: Bilan et perspectives du Centre de recherche et de développement en éducation*, Masny (2002) makes recommendations on children's language in child care centres and preschool programs:

It is important, for example, that the children share books that are brought from home. If these books are written in a language other than French, one could set aside a time to tell the story in French. The exchange of cultural referents used in the book provide an opportunity for children to expand their vision of the world and to develop a sense of security about building an identity that is often hybrid in the Francophone minority setting. However, it is important to ensure that the language of communication at the daycare is French and that a privileged position is reserved for texts in French. [Free translation]

According to Masny, it is important to establish a close link between the centre's programming and that of the preschool and the primary school.

The "child" component of a family literacy program can also draw ideas from these sources. The *For My Child* reports refer to programs where the child is in a child care centre (e.g., *Pour les rendre heureux*). It could be useful to establish connections between the activities carried out at the child care centre and those offered in the family literacy program.

### 4.2.4 Socialization in French

In Francophone minority communities, it is imperative to offer the child the opportunity to talk and play in French from the earliest age. It is also important that the family take part in activities in French outside the home, to demonstrate that it is possible to learn and have fun together in French.

The idea is to create infrastructures that directly provide the children with essential elements of socialization and human development... The more the children can benefit from places where they can socialize in French prior to entering preschool, the more the eligible parents<sup>14</sup> will feel supported in the implementation of a strong Francophone culture in the family-school environment for their children and the more French-language schooling will become accessible to them (Landry et al., 2007, p. 20). [Free translation]

Thus, families need to have access to places where they can socialize in French if they are to acquire and maintain this ability. In addition to providing information, learning and networking, family literacy programs in French provide families with this kind of place.

The *For My Child* reports highlight an important point: parents reported that they enjoyed being able to exchange ideas with other parents, which breaks the feeling of isolation that they may have in a minority setting. Parents also said that they were better informed about the resources in French available in their communities and that they had expanded their Francophone network.

These results are supported by those of several studies of other models, be it the Kenan model or the MFLP, which are both described in chapter 5.

## 4.3 Impacts of programs on families

### 4.3.1 Overall impacts

In a report on the impact of family literacy programs, Elfert (2007), coordinator of the UNESCO project QualiFLY (*Quality in Family Literacy*), documents some of the immediate and more general benefits of the programs, in particular an improvement in children's literacy skills and increased ability on the part of parents to help their children learn. He also emphasizes an increase in self-confidence and motivation to learn among the adults.

In the United States, Padak and Rasinski (2000) produced a list of the benefits, observed and supported by research, of family literacy for children, parents and society. These benefits are listed below.

- ▶ **Children** – Improved academic achievement • Improved spoken and written language and reading skills • Improved social skills, self esteem, and attitude toward school • Better health • Improved skills in English, the language of instruction, for children for whom English is their second language
- ▶ **Parents** – More positive attitudes toward school • Improved academic skills • Better knowledge of parenting skills and child development • Greater job satisfaction • Greater appreciation for education • Greater involvement in the school • Closer relationship with their children on an emotional level • Increased participation in academic literary activities in the home
- ▶ **Society** – Positive effects on nutrition and health, as well as on academic success, teen parents, job opportunities and social inclusion

<sup>14</sup> Eligible parents in the context of French Ontario are those who are eligible to send their children to French-language schools.

The model *Learning Together: Read and Write with Your Child*, an adaptation of the *Family Literacy Demonstration* program implemented in the United Kingdom, has been the object of a longitudinal research over five years completed in 2006. Its authors, Phillips, Hayden and Norris (2006), observed that the program brought important benefits to the child but that it had little impact on the academic literacy skills of the parents.

Fagan (2001) observed that after participating in a program, parents had a better understanding of the acquisition of writing and of their role as a parent in this process, greater ease in accessing resources and information they needed, and an enhanced awareness of the needs and characteristics of their children.

Hannon and Bird (2004) have insisted that enough studies have been done to conclude that family literacy programs designed for the parents of preschool children have a positive impact on families.

Couture et al. (1998) and Lavoie et al. (2000) observed that French-language programs increased parents' understanding of factors that help the acquisition of writing skills, which include

- discovery of the functions of the written word,
- ability to talk like a book,
- ability to make connections between the spoken and the written word,
- awareness of the sound aspect of language, and
- discovery of the writing process.

Both sets of authors also observed that parents adopted new behaviours as educators of their child and that the programs had a positive impact on the children's academic progress. According to Lavoie et al. (2000), family literacy programs contribute to the emergence of literary practices in children.

According to the results found in the *For My Child* reports, the direct participation of the parent and the child reinforces the impact of the initiation to reading on both. For this reason, for cohorts 2 to 5 almost all of the models put forward included a direct intervention with the child and with the parent.

***“... the parent-child participation reinforces the impact of the initiation to reading on parents and children.”***

In an action research project of a Québec school board, Lyonnais (2005) tried to determine whether the help offered to parents through workshops on parenting skills made it possible to break the vicious cycle of illiteracy, reduce the risk of their child's academic failure, increase the parents' involvement in their child's success and progress, and increase the interest of both parents and children in reading and writing.

Here are the main outcomes of this research:

- The school was brought closer to families and families were brought closer to the school. The school recognized parents as essential partners in the children's success.
- The workshops influenced on the parents' involvement in their child's academic success by stimulating new and more effective supervision practices in many families and by generating “winning attitudes” that were permeated with emotional support in the parent-child relationships.

This research supports the results that were drawn from the *For My Child* reports in which the parents reported that

- they had learned strategies that they put into practice in their daily lives;
- they became more aware of the importance of living in French in the home;
- they had greater self-confidence;
- their participation in a family literacy program changed their way of using the French language;
- they were better informed about the resources in French available in their communities and that they had expanded their Francophone network; and
- they noticed changes in the attitudes and behaviour of their child: he was more confident, had enriched his vocabulary, was better at respecting routines and had developed a sense of connection to the French language.

### 4.3.2 Impacts on parenting skills

Family literacy programs emphasize the “adult” component. They pay particular attention to the parent-child learning experiences and interactions that can stimulate the child's development. Ponzetti and Dulin (1997) argue that the researchers in family literacy programs have paid little attention to the rather essential component of parenting skills.

Powell and D'Angelo (2000) and Powell (2004) have created a guide that creates a framework for parenting skills. This guide presents the following strategies:

- Encourage interactions between the parent and child that are linguistically rich.
- Support literacy within the family.
- Provide information so that parents have appropriate expectations about the child's development and learning capacity.
- Encourage the parent to fully assume his role as an educator of his child.
- Help parents to know about and use the community resources that support the family.

The research by Lyonnais (2005) cited earlier also concluded that the workshops were beneficial for parents, resulting in increased confidence in their parenting skills.

The majority of parents who participated in the Coalition francophone's research reported that they greatly appreciated the learning opportunities which helped them become better parents. The parents who participated in the *Grandir avec mon enfant* program model were particularly well served in this regard, since the program is wholly devoted to improving parenting skills.

### 4.3.3 Evaluation of the impact of the *Learning Together* model

Because there are few longitudinal studies of family literacy programs, it is useful to include one that evaluated the Albertan program *Learning Together* from 2001 to 2006. In their research, Phillips et al. (2006) demonstrated that the combined effect of the parents' education and ability to read has an influence on their child's reading ability before school begins. They emphasize the importance of the physical place where shared parent-child activities take place and suggest that the space needs to be large enough that both parents and children can move around without difficulty and parents can work individually with their child. The authors make comments on the quality and number of the planned activities:

- The parents must have sufficient time to discuss the parent-child activities and give their opinions on them.
- The parents must have time to think about what they can do to support their child in the setting of the shared activities.
- It helps to allocate sufficient time to each activity for parents and children to get the most out of it.
- In the choice of activities, it is important to take into account the age of the children, their level of development and their areas of interest.
- Offering appropriate activities will prevent the parents and the children from becoming frustrated.

Regarding the relationship between the practitioners and the parents, the research shows the importance of adopting a warm, constructive and collaborative approach based on mutual acceptance in the context of the parent-child activities. These are the characteristics of such an approach:

- sharing of tasks and responsibilities,
- good communication,
- shared leadership,
- mutual support of each other's decisions,
- collaboration to find solutions to problematic situations,
- modeling appropriate strategies of positive discipline and a good attitude to encourage risk-taking among the children,
- showing that there is more than one good way to do things, and
- cooperation in building a community of learners and demonstrating that they are part of this community.

Phillips et al. suggest that the practitioner helps the parents and the children, but also knows when to withdraw from the activity to allow the parents to play the role of primary educators of their child. This is why it is important to adopt strategies such as pedagogical support and shared reading that encourage the mutual involvement of the parent and his child in carrying out a task.

The program *Learning Together* had a positive effect on the development of the children's academic literacy, regardless of the level of ability assessed at the outset. This effect continued throughout the following years, except among children who obtained good results in the pre-test (20%-30% of the children). This observation leads the authors to suggest that it is important to try to reach the children with the weaker pre-test results (70%-80% of the children). They recommend nationwide screening to identify these children.

Phillips et al. did not find any significant improvement of the parents' reading levels. This finding supports the conclusions drawn in several other studies in the area of family literacy.

The results also show that the intervention had the same outcomes for the children, regardless of their age at the start of the program, for the age range between 36 and 60 months. What counted was their literacy level at the start. In light of the consistent effectiveness of the *Learning Together* program for this age group, it is sensible to conclude that work with families should start as early as possible.

## 4.4 Training for practitioners

The third report of the Coalition francophone's research mentions that only two practitioners had been trained in family literacy. By contrast, all of the directors who were in charge of a centre had received this training. Since there was some turnover in personnel, the practitioners were given training and support from their director. As this report recommends, it would be ideal if all of the practitioners received training in family literacy as well as training on the particular model adopted by the program that they offer.

Hayden and Sanders (1998) and Fagan (2001) observed that the community practitioners in the programs they studied had received six hours of training as family literacy practitioners, in order to give them an incentive to include literacy activities for the families in their organization.

These researchers noticed that after receiving this training

- The practitioners' perception of the acquisition and development of literacy had changed, moving from a more traditional perspective to a more global, socio-cultural approach.
- Their perception of parents with low-level reading skills had changed.
- They understood the direct link between economic poverty and illiteracy.
- They had the opportunity to rethink their belief that parents with low levels of reading skills are deficient and therefore mediocre models of literacy for their child.

Fagan (2001) suggests guidelines to become better practitioners. Practitioners must

- make a special effort to develop and encourage a positive attitude among parents with regard to the development of literacy,
- allow time for socializing between parents to give them a chance to discuss their concerns and their challenges,
- value the parents' feedback on the evaluation on how the program has affected them and their child, and
- understand the structure of the model and know how to make good use of the user guide.

## 4.5 Conclusion

The results of several studies support many of the results of the Coalition francophone's research. In addition, research shows that the more educated a person is, the more interested he will be in a family literacy program. Phillips et al. (2006) propose that family literacy programs become a means of encouraging more parents to seize the learning opportunities presented to them.

In general, documentation is lacking on parenting skills, the parent-child relationship, parent-child activities in relation to learning and the evaluation of family literacy programs.

Several researchers, including Hannon and Bird (2004), claim that enough evidence has been compiled from the evaluation of programs to conclude that family literacy programs that target parents of preschool children are effective. However, they note a lack of research on the development of literacies in parents and the participation of parents in the programs, as well as on the synergistic effects of programs that involve both parents and children.

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Finally, we emphasize that research on family literacy is focused on academic literacy. A focus on multiple literacies would embrace not only academic literacy but also personal and community literacy. In a minority setting, a family literacy program becomes a means of exploring and developing multiple literacies, which involves, among other goals, the creation of a sense of belonging to a Francophone community. In the *For My Child* reports, the parents emphasized the importance of using the French language and exchanging ideas with other parents in French. A family literacy program founded on multiple literacies can create these possibilities.

The next chapter explores several models of family literacy used in a minority setting elsewhere in the world.



## 5. *Family literacy in a minority setting*

### SUMMARY

- 5.1 Family literacy models oriented toward minorities
  - 5.1.1 The Kenan model – United States
  - 5.1.2 *Parent Empowerment for Family Literacy* (PEFaL) – Europe
  - 5.1.3 *Manukau Family Literacy Program* (MFLP) – New Zealand
  - 5.1.4 Other American models
- 5.2 Conclusion

This chapter has particular significance in the context of this report. As we have seen, there are many studies that assess the impact of family literacy programs. The Coalition francophone's research is different in that it focuses on the impact of family literacy in a Francophone minority setting in Ontario.

The challenges facing Francophones in Ontario are enormous. In most regions in Ontario, everything goes on in English, whether in the workplace or out in the community. Although it is possible to live in French in the family and at school, it is questionable whether this is enough to create a sense of belonging and of pride in one's language and one's culture.

The more Francophones are in the minority, the more they will be bilingual and the more likely it is that the people they communicate with will be unilingual; as a result, a smaller place is reserved for French and it is normally limited to exchanges with other francophones (who are few in numbers). The place taken up by English expands as a result. In the context of this ever increasing marginalization and pervasive bilingualization of the Francophone minority group, it is not surprising to see these speakers display diglossic linguistic behaviour, whereby they reserve a different context and a different status for French and for English (Bernard 1998, p. 143). [Free translation]

The vitality of a cultural community is manifested by the use of its language. For the language to become enriched, the members of a community must be able to express their ideas and their dreams and play and learn in their language. They have to be able to use their language in a variety of activities. However, this is a difficult challenge to overcome in communities where Francophones are very much in the minority. "When the link is broken between the mother tongue and social reality, when the second language becomes the referential realm for the mother tongue, the linguistic vitality of the community is compromised. The mother tongue becomes corrupted" (ibid., p. 164). [Free translation]

Organizations that offer a family literacy program in French create a space where the French language and culture are validated. As we saw in Chapter 3, many programs are designed with this in mind, and the parents drew real benefits from them.

## 5.1 Family literacy models oriented toward minorities

Family literacy models designed specifically for linguistic and cultural minorities such as immigrants and refugees all integrate elements such as a critical dimension, autonomy and the social integration of families. As with any other model of family literacy, a participative and critical approach is recommended, with a focus on transformation or the capacity of “becoming,” to use the expression of Masny and Dufresne (2007). Models that adopt such an approach are particularly well suited to Francophones in Ontario because they try to answer the needs of linguistic and cultural minorities.

Three family literacy models that focus on linguistic and cultural minorities deserve a more in-depth description. These are the American model developed by Kenan, the *Parent Empowerment for Family Literacy* (PEFaL), which was implemented in six different countries, and the *Manukau Family Literacy Program* (MFLP) from New Zealand. We will also present a handful of other American models.

### 5.1.1 The Kenan model – United States<sup>15</sup>

Because of its influence on many family literacy programs, it is worth presenting the American Kenan model. Designed in the United States by the National Center for Family Literacy and originally developed in Kentucky, it includes the following four components:

1. **Adult education:** This component targets the acquisition of basic skills, including the ability to use critical and creative thinking, to solve problems, to set and meet goals and to acquire interpersonal skills.
2. **Children's education:** The aim of this component is to promote the growth and development of young children and the involvement of parents in their children's educational program.
3. **PACTT** (Parent and Child Together Time): This component targets the involvement of parents and children in interactive activities that stimulate the child's development, reinforce the parent-child relationship and lead to the acquisition of academic literacy skills.
4. **Education in parenting skills** This component aims to inform parents about very important subjects such as child development, the way a child learns to read and write and the resources available in the community to support parents. It also aims to create a forum for discussion on the well-being of families and for networking between parents and families (National Center for Family Literacy, 1989).

The Kenan model has been adapted to meet the needs of bilingual and multilingual families mostly from immigrant and refugee communities. The main elements of the model remain the same, but various other elements have been added, including helping parents understand the American school system, learning how to support their child in the system and learning English (McCollum and Russo, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> For more information on this model, see the National Center for Family Literacy website: <http://www.familit.org>

## 5.1.2 *Parent Empowerment for Family Literacy (PEFaL) – Europe*<sup>16</sup>

The PEFaL project is the model that most closely resembles those offered to Francophone minorities in Canada. This initiative, which Camilleri et al. (2005) documented between 2001 and 2004, brought together six European countries (Malta, Italy, Romania, the UK, Belgium and Lithuania). In addition to including the typical components of a family literacy program, PEFaL incorporates dimensions of interest to practitioners and managers working in a Canadian Francophone minority setting: the multicultural dimension, the transcultural dimension and the linguistic dimension.

The initial aim of the PEFaL project was to reach vulnerable populations that are often marginalized in their community and that schools and adult education systems have difficulty connecting with. Because its ultimate goal was to render the parent autonomous as a lifelong learner at home and at school, PEFaL emphasized the participation of parents and their learning as adults.

Attaining the goals of PEFaL involves accompanying the adults as parents. The program begins a cycle of self-affirmation that leads to social and economic inclusion and to lifelong learning for the whole family. The PEFaL model is founded on the literacy practices already present in the home.

PEFaL targets learning for both the adult and the child, which represents the model of the literacy cycle drawn from the writings of Hannon (2000). This model is based on the premise that children with low levels of academic literacy skills often have parents with similar levels. Therefore an attempt is made to reach parents by appealing to their desire to help their child in his learning and development, which will contribute to the social, cultural and economic integration of the family. Family literacy is therefore seen as a tool that can help the adult build his basic skills and his social integration.

**The innovative aspect of PEFaL: “parent-leaders”** – Parents enrolled in the programs who wish to become recruitment agents and promote the programs share their own experiences in family literacy and encourage other families to participate. They also support the practitioners in delivering the programs.

In Malta, parent leaders were encouraged to set up “parents in education” workshops in their schools and communities. Some of them have taken training that prepares them to participate on school boards in their communities and to manage continuing education projects for parents.

### **Goals of the PEFaL project**

- to render parents autonomous as co-educators, learners and parent-leaders, so that they can become lifelong learners;
- to encourage parents to translate their learning into better opportunities in their lives and into greater participation in the cultural, political and economic life of their community;
- to help children develop their social and academic skills;
- to support the partners of the PEFaL project in putting programs in place on the local, regional and national levels; and
- to ensure an infrastructure that allows programs to continue once the project is over.

<sup>16</sup> For more information on this model, see Camilleri et al. (2005).

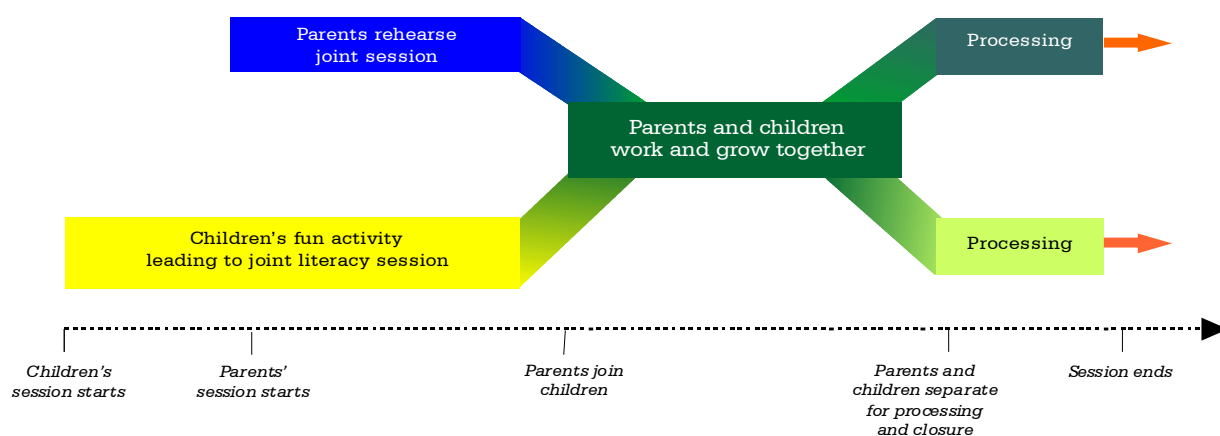
## Design of the PEFaL project

- practitioner training;
- delivery of programs: sessions for individual families, family literacy program;
- establishment of the common framework on which all family literacy programs are based;
- adaptation and design of the local program from the common framework; and
- development of sessions adapted to the local context.

**Format of the PEFaL workshops:** The design of a workshop for parents and children can be represented by the letter H in a horizontal position (see diagram 1). The first part of the workshop includes separate sessions for the parents and the children. The parents use this time to prepare the joint session. The parents then join the children for the second part of the workshop and do an activity with their child while putting into practice what they have learned in the parent group. The third and final part of the workshop provides separate sessions that enable parents and children to go over the experience they had with their child.

**Diagram 1: Sequence of a typical session**

## A typical session: PEFaL



Source: Camilleri (2006).

In Ontario, the model *Des livres dans mon baluchon*, from the Route du Savoir adult training centre in Kingston, corresponds most closely with the model proposed by the PEFaL project.

**Duration of the PEFaL workshops** – Each program welcomes between eight and twelve families for two meetings a week (morning, afternoon or evening) over a six-week period. One practitioner works with the parents and another with the children.

**Participation of fathers in the PEFaL workshops** – In accordance with the findings of the Coalition francophone's research and other research, few fathers (3.6% of parents) participated in the PEFaL project. Camilleri et al. note that excluding men from a family literacy program could have a beneficial effect in communities where men are perceived as dominant figures who wield all the power. In such a context, family literacy programs can become informal support groups for the women who participate.

***In Ontario, the Des livres dans mon baluchon program, delivered by La Route du Savoir in Kingston, is the closest model to the one proposed by the PEFaL project.***

### 5.1.3 *Manukau Family Literacy Program (MFLP) - New Zealand*<sup>17</sup>

In 2002, New Zealand created the *Manukau Family Literacy Program (MFLP)* based on the Kenan model. This program is offered to a population composed of Maoris, Pasifikas and new migrants living in an urban setting. It reflects the culture and the cultural and educational context of New Zealand. It is also an exemplary model of collaboration in a community to support families.

**Partnership et elaboration in the MFLP** – Founded on best practices in the field of family literacy, the MFLP is based on solid partnerships with schools, daycare centres and other community organizations. The program is built around existing pedagogical resources in the community and aims to have families and the community take responsibility for the program.

#### **The six principles of the MFLP**

- Define clear goals for the programs.
- Offer meaningful and useful learning experiences.
- Create *whanaungatanga* (relationships-bonds) within the families.
- Allow schools and daycare centres to support adult learning.
- Emphasize the wished-for results.
- Appreciate and value the existing framework that supports learning.

**Components and targeted results** – The model includes four equally important components, covering results similar to the Kenan model:

#### **1. Adult education** – targeted results

- Adult literacy.
- Basic job-related skills.
- Self-confidence – development of cultural awareness: The adults are asked to write non-fiction stories that reflect their cultural heritage and what they know.

#### **2. Education in parental skills** – targeted results

- improved understanding of the child's development,
- improved relationships between family members,
- improved health of family members,
- improved understanding of the education system, and
- improved parenting skills.

#### **3. Education of the children** – targeted results (according to the national program for young children)

- academic literacy skills appropriate to the age of the child,
- social and cultural development, and
- consistent attendance in the program and daily participation of the child in learning activities.

#### **4. Parent-child activities** – targeted results

- improved relationships between family members,
- increased involvement of the adult in the school and the daycare centres,
- personal empowerment,
- cultural well-being, and
- increased exposure to experiences in the community.

<sup>17</sup> For more information on this model, see the web site of COMET: <http://www.comet.org>

## Parent-child activities in the PACTT

There are three kinds of parent-child activities in the Parent and Child Together Time (PACTT).

1. **Daily visit – *Tahi* PACTT:** The adult has the opportunity to visit the child in his preschool centre for a short period each day and to work with him.
2. **Monthly activity – *Rōpu* PACTT:** A monthly literacy activity takes place with the preschool and primary school children (e.g., visit to the school or local library).
3. **Sessional activity – *Whānau* PACTT:** Each session includes an activity that takes place after school. This gives the other members of the family the opportunity to participate in the learning of the participants.

**Intensity and duration of the MFLP** – One of the most interesting aspects of the New Zealand program is its intensity (20 hours a week) and its duration (a full school year).

Research carried out in the United States (Paratore, 1992) shows that intensity and duration are decisive factors for obtaining significant short-term and long-term results. This intensity and duration are not found in the family literacy programs in French Canada.

*...the intensity and the duration are decisive factors for obtaining significant short-term and long-term results.*

An evaluation of the program reveals a range of results obtained between 2003 and 2005 (Benseman, 2004; Benseman and Sutton, 2005). Here are some salient points:

- The majority of participants followed the program through to the end (76%-91%).
- The preschool programs reported an increase in parents' participation.
- Practitioners noted a marked difference in the parents' long-term aspirations for their child after the program.
- Evidence shows that the learners talked about their participation in the program with friends or family members and that this had a great influence on the family dynamic and the family's long-term goals.
- With regard to parenting skills, the parents reported that the program contributed greatly to improving their family life.
- The children's transition from the preschool program to school was made easier.
- According to the parents, their child had made marked progress and demonstrated better aspirations for learning and positive changes in behaviour.
- The majority of parents who received a program diploma (90%) said that they felt more effective in supporting their child during his school years.

### 5.1.4 Other American models

The models presented in this section emphasize various learning and experiences through the medium of life stories and the creation of various printed texts and through the learning of a second language. They draw on the participants' creativity by asking them to write about their experiences and make up children's stories.

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Janes and Kermani (2001) documented and demonstrated how the initial strategies at the outset of a family literacy program were changed for greater effectiveness after the interest of the participants, a high proportion of whom were immigrants, was taken into account. Practitioners first tried to show the parents how to read to the children in an interactive way, by asking questions that require high cognitive skills. This approach quickly discouraged adults with low reading skills, as well as their children. To make the activities more enjoyable, the practitioners changed their strategy and asked participants to create their own stories to share with their children. Positive effects were subsequently observed on the retention rates of parents as well as on the reading outcomes. Parents were proud of their creation of texts and there was an exchange of positive values between parents and children.

Osterling et al. (1999) documented two programs in Virginia, *Empowering Families Through Literacy* and *Escuela Bolivia*. The workshops in these programs were conducted in Spanish in order to acknowledge and value the participants' first language. These programs pursued the following goals:

- Teach the language, culture and traditions of parents and grandparents.
- Improve reading, writing and numeracy skills.
- Create a community for which its members assume responsibility and support the families' values and culture.
- Establish cooperation between parents, community organizations and schools.

These goals are applicable to family literacy programs in French in a Francophone minority setting.

Caspe (2003) documented the *Intergenerational Literacy Project (ILP)*, which was designed for immigrant families who want to improve their literacy in English and be more supportive in their children's education. The point of departure is the hypothesis that the family environment as well as the literacy skills of the parent exert an influence on the child's cognitive development. The participating parents are encouraged to read, respond to literary material of interest to them, learn strategies for talking with their children about books and share their literacy experiences with their friends and their teachers. The workshops include four elements: daily reflections, group discussion, analysis and summaries in small groups. It focuses on the knowledge and information that enable families to survive, progress, and experience success. In this approach, the experiences and knowledge of families are used as learning resources that serve as the basis for educational programs.

The literacy program of the Jane Adams School for Democracy differs from other models in that it does not require following a complicated manual of learning activities. The parents merely gather together and become co-creators of the learning process. They use learning circles that include two components: the big circle and learning dyads. The learning circle or cultural circle, inspired by Freire, aims at building critical literacy among individuals and groups. It involves a discussion group in which the educators and learners use photos, drawings or words to represent their daily lives with a view to engaging in a dialogue on their life experiences. The group, accompanied by a facilitator who sees to it that the point of view of each participant is fully valued, is a context that makes it possible to share one's concerns and find ways of improving problematic situations (Freire, cited in Caspe 2003).

## 5.2 Conclusion

This chapter was devoted to a variety of programs designed for minorities, including the Kenan model from the United States, which is no doubt the model that is most often cited, the *Manukau Family Literacy Program* (MFLP), which was developed from the Kenan model, as well as the PEFaL model.

Most of the models aim to show parents how to help their child through activities in academic literacy. Others are focused on parenting skills. The ultimate goal is to help parents become autonomous so that they can help their child become autonomous in a manner that promotes his academic success.

Family literacy programs aimed at minority communities must overcome other challenges. In the United States, for example, access to the language of learning, which is often the second language in the family, is an important goal for these programs. It is also important to make resources available and to ensure that people know how to access them. In the same way, the family literacy programs designed for Francophone minority communities in Canada attempt to make parents more aware of their language and of the cultural resources in the language of the minority.

Finally, it must be emphasized that a growing number of participants in family literacy programs in Ontario come from different cultural contexts, especially in Toronto and Ottawa. The family literacy program must therefore take into account diverse belief systems, social realities and academic backgrounds.

Qualitative research on programs targeting immigrant and refugee populations also suggests that these programs should share explicit information about the dominant cultures and the values of the schools in the host country, while building on the family's pre-existing literacies as support for the children's success. These guidelines are relevant to family literacy programs in French in a Francophone minority setting.

The next chapter is devoted to best practices.

# 6. *Best practices in family literacy:* *Research outcomes*

## **SUMMARY**

- 6.1 Definition of the concept of best practice
- 6.2 Best practices drawn from the Coalition francophone's research
- 6.3 Information sources
- 6.4 Factors to consider
  - 6.4.1 Cultural differences
  - 6.4.2 Differences in perceptions and beliefs
  - 6.4.3 Gender-based differences
  - 6.4.4 A participative and critical approach based on the participants' pre-existing literacies
  - 6.4.5 Partnerships
    - 6.4.5.1 The Epstein partnership model
    - 6.4.5.2 Partnership between the home, school and community in francophone Canada
- 6.5 Conclusion

After having studied the family literacy models used in Canada and elsewhere in the world, we can turn our attention to best practices. The goal of this chapter is to take stock of what the research suggests are best practices in the area of family literacy. This will enable organizations working in the field to improve their programs.

## **6.1 Definition of the concept of best practice**

Since the earliest programs in family literacy, practitioners and managers have continually tried to improve program quality by seeking out best practices. Best practices are conceived as “ideals” and play the role of guidelines for program directors and practitioners (FCAF, 2007).

In the context of this report, best practices are defined as initiatives

- that have a demonstrable (immediate) effect and a tangible impact (long-term) on the improvement of the program, and
- that are the result of effective and durable partnerships between the public and private sectors on the social, cultural and community levels.

## 6.2 Best practices drawn from the Coalition francophone's research

Many best practices are described in the *For My Child* reports. They are presented here in point form, and will later be confirmed and further enriched by other research done in Canada and elsewhere.

- A quality family literacy program is based upon a written mission and clear objectives.
- The model on which the program is based includes an accessible guide that is adaptable to the situation of the groups participating in the program.
- Practitioners are trained in the foundations of family literacy and in the particular program model their organization is using.
- The chosen program model is tailored to the needs of the target group.
- The program model takes into account the specific needs of Francophones.
- The organization offering the program has close and positive ties with other stakeholders: schools, daycare services, social services and child and family services, for example.
- The organization uses various means to recruit families.
- The organization chooses a location that is safe, accessible and adaptable, in order to contribute positively to the learning of both parents and children.
- The organization plans on offering the families resources so that learning continues at home between workshops (these can be in the form of kits that include books, games and activities, or Internet references).
- Evaluation is a key component of the program. It includes measuring the impacts of the program on the participating families, evaluating the program itself and evaluating its partnerships.

## 6.3 Information sources

The concept of “best practice” has evolved since 1994, when Taylor undertook to define a set of guidelines for literacy programs for the International Reading Association (Taylor, 1997). These guidelines served as the basis for at least one Canadian publication on family literacy (Purton, 2000).

In 1997, an international declaration of 126 principles for family literacy practices emerged from the efforts led by Taylor (1997). The declaration is intended as a guide to the development of practices and policies that recognize the need to build on the knowledge foundation that each family brings to every learning situation, such as languages, different forms of literacies and the capacity to solve complex problems.

Finally, the partnership project called QualiFLY deserves mention because it focuses on best practices in family literacy. As it will end in 2008, the results have not yet been made available.

## In Canada

In English-speaking Canada, several provinces, including Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario, have each published a document presenting their best practices. Alberta has produced *Setting the Compass: A Program Development and Evaluation Tool for Volunteer Programs in Alberta* (Skage and Schaetti, 1999) and British Columbia, *The BC Framework of Statements and Standards of Best Practices in Family Literacy* (Rasmussen, n.d.). In Ontario, the group Action for Family Literacy Ontario published *Family Literacy in Ontario: A Guide to Best Practices* (2005). These documents are valuable tools for two reasons: they serve as official documents that define the standards of quality for offering a program and as foundation documents for the preparation of position papers.

On the Francophone front, the publication *L'alphabétisation familiale au Canada: Profils de pratiques efficaces*, by Thomas (1998), provides an overview of the Canadian programs that have proven effective. In 2003, the Coalition régionale de l'Ouest et du Nord pour l'alphabétisation en français (CRONAF) published the *Rapport sur les pratiques optimales en alphabétisation*, describing 62 best practices, 36 of which are transferable to other adult training programs. That same year, the Coalition francophone pour l'alphabétisation et la formation de base en Ontario in collaboration with the Centre FORA published a guide called *L'alphabétisation familiale: c'est l'affaire de tout le monde* (Brunet, 2003) to support the implementation and the evaluation of programs in Ontario. In 2004, Duguay, Bernard and Deschênes-Doucet published the *Répertoire commenté: Matériel d'animation en alphabétisation familiale* (2004), which documents 20 models used in family literacy in French Canada in both majority and minority settings and gives information on the materials available for group animation in family literacy.<sup>18</sup> In 2007, the FCAF published its *Guide de pratiques exemplaires en alphabétisation familiale en contexte francophone minoritaire*, which is based on a detailed inventory of writings on the subject. This guide should serve as a support to the programs offered in French by the FCAF's member organizations working in the Canadian provinces and territories, but it will need to be amended in light of new information that has come out of the current report.

## Elsewhere

Numerous publications on family literacy promote best practices and contribute a social perspective that takes into account the contexts of family life and culture (Anderson, 1995; Auerbach E. R., 1989; Auerbach, A., 2003; Brown, 1998; Caspe, 2003; Heath, 2001; Klassen-Endrizzi, 2000; Pahl and Kelly, 2005; Vernon-Feagans et al., 2004; Voss, 1996).

The socio-contextual approach to family literacy is based on the principle that to maximize the effectiveness of family literacy programs, the family's social reality must be acknowledged and their knowledge and experience made known and developed (Auerbach, 1989; Neuman, 1996; Neuman and Gallagher, 1994; Potts, 1994; Topping, 1986; Wolfendale, 1994). This kind of intervention is much more durable because it is integrated into family life and has significance for family members.

**...to maximise the effectiveness of family literacy programs, an acknowledgement of the family's social reality is indispensable and their knowledge and experience should be made known and developed.**

<sup>18</sup> Note that an up-to-date description of family literacy models in French available across Canada is currently available on the FCAF website: [www.fcfa.net](http://www.fcfa.net)

Auerbach (2003) explains that family literacy programs are built around three different approaches:

1. an intervention-prevention approach which tries to change values and skills,
2. a multiple literacies approach, which takes into account the differences between the literacies in the family context and those that the school promotes while appreciating family cultures and using them in the process of learning literacies. (On a theoretical level, this approach is used in the family literacy programs in French in Canada), and
3. a social change approach, which is interested in political, social and economic factors associated with low literacy levels, and which works with families and communities. (This approach is closely related to the multiple literacies approach.)

Auerbach (2003) invites the practitioner to think critically about the ideology that informs the programs offered to families, to ask whether if their practice really corresponds with the recommended approach, and to create connections between the literacies, culture, context and everyday lives of the participating families.

## **6.4 Factors to consider**

### **6.4.1 Cultural differences**

According to Neuman et al. (1995), it is important that practitioners and researchers do not perceive cultural groups as homogeneous. They observe that profound cultural differences exist within groups belonging to the same community in the United States. These differences have an impact on the language and the literacy models found in the homes. There is also great diversity within the Francophone minority communities in Canada, which has to be taken into account when programs are developed and implemented.

According to Gadsden (1999, 2004), it is important to rethink the way approaches in family literacy have been reduced to a certain uniformity, to describe the variety within populations, to document how families and the culture create learning experiences related to literacies and to study how this learning finds its place in the world.

With regard to preparation for school, the second *For My Child* report highlights the fact that family literacy programs should take into account the first grade entrance profile for children living in a Francophone minority setting that has been developed by the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF, 2005).

### **6.4.2 Differences in perceptions and beliefs**

Parents and children have different perceptions of what constitutes a "success" in academic literacy. Orellana et al. (2002) documented these perceptions; they affirm the importance of building mutual understanding between parents and teachers in order to provide better support to the child in his academic development and, more generally, his success in life. The practitioners must base their interventions and the program on in-depth knowledge and understanding of the participating families and the contexts of their lives, including the parents' beliefs about literacy, learning and school.

Hannon et al. (1997) propose that preschool educators change how they perceive the differences between the way children learn, and that they recognize that parents are the experts where their child is concerned, that parents have their own perceptions of academic literacy and of their role in their child's learning, and that bilingual parents have different learning needs than unilingual parents. We can extend these proposals to practitioners in family literacy programs.

Vernon-Feagans et al. (2004) maintain that the community and its professionals bear the responsibility for understanding children who do not belong to the social mainstream and for understanding their family cultures and their particular needs related to preparing for school. These authors are interested in the myths that are detrimental to these children in educational settings in the community, including myths that the parents lack motivation or skills or are dysfunctional. Practitioners must question their own perceptions with regard to myths that give rise to a "deficiency approach" to family literacy (the idea that the parents are lacking in ways that must be compensated for).

### 6.4.3 Gender-based differences

#### Fathers

In the *For My Child* reports as well as several other reports reviewed, the observation is made that few fathers participate in family literacy programs. It has also been noted that the majority of fathers who have participated in the programs were enrolled in a program model targeting parents of school-age children. This observation echoes that of Ortiz et al. (1999), who note that a child's entry into the school system is important to fathers.

A number of recent publications coming mainly from the United States and the United Kingdom focus on the role of the father. In the European project PEFaL, the suggestion has been made that in communities where men have greater prestige as figures of authority than women, it is important that family literacy programs be offered mostly to women.

The research by Ortiz et al. (1999) has already been presented in chapter 4, but it is pertinent to mention it again here. They make the following recommendations to practitioners:

- encourage fathers who already participate in programs and invite them to share their experiences with other fathers,
- reassure fathers about the importance of their contribution to building their children's literacies, and
- help them recognize the benefits of their participation as a way of improving the emotional bond with their child.

Green (2003) has described the benefits and challenges of fathers' participation in the four-week long American program *Fathers Reading Everyday Program* (FRED). In this program, the fathers read to their child for 15 minutes a day for the first two weeks, and then 30 minutes for the last two weeks. The program aims to increase fathers' participation in encouraging a love of reading in their preschool and first-grade child and in improving the quality of the father-child relationship, which in turn raises the child's potential for academic success as well as his self-esteem. The fathers who participated in the program reported that the program helped them read to their child every day, increased the quantity and quality of the time spent with their child, raised their satisfaction level as a parent and improved their relationship with their child.



Karther (2002) is interested in the influence of fathers with low level reading skills on their child's life in the context of building their academic literacy in the *Even Start*<sup>19</sup> program. The goals of the program are

- to enrich vocabulary and foster successful learning for children from birth to the age of seven and their parents,
- to offer literacy services of a reasonable duration to allow for durable change,
- to include parents and the children in activities that encourage the development of life-long learning habits, and
- to support the families involved in their education and their quest for economic empowerment.

Karther makes the following recommendations:

- The fathers must participate in academic literacy activities with the children.
- To get fathers interested, practitioners must include activities that correspond to the fathers' abilities and books that present traditional masculine roles.
- The programs must consider how fathers can benefit from participating in the program and adapt it accordingly.
- Practitioners must be aware that children can act as motivators for their fathers' academic literacy learning.
- Fathers who read to their child and who participate in their child's literacy development can have a direct, positive impact on this development.

Elfert (2007) reports that the *Father Support Program*, implemented in Turkey by AÇEV, was designed to increase the father's awareness of children's development and education, raise their level of knowledge of child development, help them develop communication skills that will have a beneficial effect on their child's attitudes, guide them to do literacy activities with their child and spend time with him. The fathers became less traditional and authoritarian and more permissive in their parental role. In addition, communication between father and child improved (Koçak, 2004).

In Québec, Judith Poirier (2007), who headed the project "Familles et monde de l'écrit" (family and the written word) run by the Fédération québécoise des organismes communautaires Famille (Québec federation of family-oriented community organizations), puts forward guidelines that make it possible to adapt family literacy programs to the specific needs of men. For example, since it appears that reading and writing activities in the family are often initiated by women, Poirier suggests activities that are of interest to fathers at whatever stage of literacy they may be at.

## Mothers

Hutchinson (2000) invited women to build their critical literacy by doing their own research on the socialization process in connection with literacies, and to document the practices around literacy that they find in their own family. Instead of receiving information that comes from the outside, the women documented their own behaviour with regard to their own writing and their child's. Hutchinson used the women's collective knowledge as a basis for a program that aims to inform them on the key principles of teaching academic literacy, including reading, writing, numeracy and technological literacy. This research underlines the importance of flexibility with regard to which models to use.

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<sup>19</sup> The *Even Start* family literacy program is based on school-community partnerships that contribute to finding a way out of the vicious circle of poverty and illiteracy by integrating preschool education, adult literacy or basic skills training for adults and education in parenting skills into a unified program of family literacy. *Even Start* program: <http://www.evenstart.org/>

Smythe and Isserlis (2003) examined the role of mothers in the preparation of their child for school as well as the important role they play in the creation of quality schools. They composed a mothering discourse from interviews held with teachers, administrators and mothers. This mothering discourse is built on the idealized images and stereotypes of the middle-class mother and the “standard” North American family. The interviews demonstrated that working-class mothers live with financial constraints related to their jobs, which undermine their capacity to participate in school life. According to Smythe and Isserlis, when schools depend on the volunteerism of mothers, a kind of inequality is created that helps perpetuate educational and social differences between families.

This is why the practitioners must ask themselves the following questions: Do mothering discourses limit opportunities for women’s education beyond their role as a parent? Does our teaching reinforce mothering discourses, or provide women and men with opportunities to question, reflect upon, and perhaps resist images of the “ideal” mother and parent? Are we, as literacy educators, contributing to a shift toward making parents – and mothers in particular – responsible for their children’s educational achievement, in a context of unequal distribution of social resources? We can open up a discussion with learners about family literacy texts by asking whether the advice learners receive for supporting their children’s learning is realistic, about who does the homework supervision and “teaching” in the home, and about their experiences. In looking at images of mothering on posters and promotional materials, we can ask: Is this what literacy looks like in our homes? What else could it look like? Is reading with our children always easy and happy? Does it always feel natural? How else is literacy part of our children’s lives? What does it mean to be involved in our children’s schooling? Perhaps in creating family literacy texts based on the actual experiences of mothers and families, the field of family literacy can map out a more inclusive and diverse understanding of the best approaches to supporting literacy in families and in schools (Smythe and Isserlis, 2003, p. 33).



Britto et al. (2006) carried out a quantitative research based on Vygotsky’s theory of learning. They studied the associations between how mothers taught reading skills and how well the children were prepared for school in low-income African-American families. They found a strong correlation between the teaching models of the mother (e.g., guided supervision, instructions, answers to the child’s needs, clear verbal indications, emotional aspect of reading, use of vocabulary, choice of the time for conversation during shared reading) and the use of expressive language and preparation for school. The researchers recommend that family literacy programs emphasize a variety of interactive activities beyond shared reading activities. This recommendation could also apply to fathers.

#### **6.4.4 A participative and critical approach based on the participants’ pre-existing literacies**

Caspe (2003) indicates that in spite of good intentions, some family literacy programs too often discourage the families they are trying to help. For example, the discussion of gender within the programs tends to reproduce the traditional roles of the father and the mother.

According to Caspe, programs need to try instead to allow parents to draw on their strengths and encourage them to revisit the idea of the authority role, recognize the importance of personal experiences as a source of knowledge and explore the perspectives of race, social classes and different cultures. This involves building personal and critical literacies, which requires considerable tact on the part of the practitioner as well as an open mind and mutual respect on the part of all of the participants in family literacy programs that broach such sensitive subjects.

#### 6.4.5 Partnerships

Some researchers are particularly interested in the importance of collaboration between practitioners, directors of organizations that offer family literacy programs, and the resources of the local community, as well as partnerships that must be established to support the programs and families (Alamprese, 1996; DeBarysche, 1995; Kerka, 1991; Laberge, 1994, Padak and Sapin, 2001; Tice, 2000). They all agree that a collaborative approach must include a shared vision, mutual trust and a commitment on the part of the partners and that such an approach be centred on parents and their children.

The European projects PEFaL and QualiFLY are concrete demonstrations of the importance and benefits of a collaborative approach to supporting families who are participating in family literacy programs. The New Zealand *Manukau Family Literacy Program* is a particularly interesting example of a family literacy program that derives its significance for the collaboration it creates between schools, preschool centres, colleges and universities.

Laberge (1994) proposes that all family literacy interventions be established on solid partnerships with the community: between parents and schools, between parents and community organizations, and between the organizations and governments. For example, programs may be provided in elementary schools and preschool facilities, in homes and in various institutions in the community, including local libraries, children's services centres, resource centres and adult education facilities (Darling, 1993; Nickse, 1990).

According to Alamprese (1996), little research exists on inter-organizational collaboration (the process of two or several entities working together toward a common goal). American programs founded on the Kenan model (see chapter 5) consider it important to have collaboration between the practitioners and program directors who work with the child and parent and between all the other community organizations that can support families.

Alamprese notes that considerable difficulties surround the implementation, support and durability of collaboration in programs, especially in the case of

- strategies for developing the relationships between partners, and
- mechanisms for communication that will support the collaborative relationship.

#### Four essential elements in a successful collaboration (Alamprese, 1996)

1. The benefits of working together outweigh the effort required to offer, implement and maintain services (a win-win partnership).
2. The boundaries of each partner are respected. The responsibilities of each partner must be clearly stated, and each partner must agree on these responsibilities.
3. There are clear and established lines of communication within the organizations and between them.
4. The personnel in the programs assume a certain leadership on the local level and with the government.

### 6.4.5.1 The Epstein partnership model

The partnership model developed by Epstein et al. (2002) proposes six types of partnership between the school, the family and the community. According to these authors, it is up to the program directors and practitioners of the family literacy programs, in concert with the families, to select the types of partnerships that are suitable to their particular group. We have added some guidelines to illustrate each type of partnership.

**Type 1 – Providing help to parents:** Support parents in the area of parenting skills and understanding of child development.

**Type 2 – Communication:** Find ways of facilitating the communication between families and practitioners: newspapers, mail, telephone, meetings and other means.

**Type 3 – Volunteering:** Encourage families that are able to volunteer (e.g., helping with daycare or training in family literacy).

**Type 4 – Learning at home:** Motivate families to support their child's learning at home. Encourage parents to apply what they have learned in family literacy workshops.

**Type 5 – Decision-making:** Consult parents or ask their opinion about decisions to be made about the children's group or the parents' group.

**Type 6 – Collaboration with the community:** Inform parents about the resources and services available in the community. Ask community organizations to support the program or help parents directly with specific tasks or activities.

### 6.4.5.2 Partnership between the home, school and community in Francophone Canada

We have found the following information and research on home-community-school partnerships in Francophone Canada particularly noteworthy: the *Guide de partenariat: vers des partenariats communautaires rassembleurs* published by the Franco-Manitoban literacy organization Pluri-elles (2004) and studies by Masny (2002) and Kanouté (2003) that focus on the home-community-school partnership.

#### The partnership project in Manitoba

Pluri-elles is the only Franco-Manitoban organization working in the field of literacy, and it is a leader in implementing win-win partnerships in Francophone communities in Manitoba that support French-language family literacy programs. The organization has produced a set of documents and tools to this end. The *Guide de partenariat: Vers des partenariats communautaires rassembleurs*

- describes an approach for creating partnerships,
- provides information on access to training for partners,
- offers a grid for evaluating the effectiveness of partnerships,
- provides a list of elements to include in a partnership agreement, and
- presents a table of results that the partners should aim to achieve as well as performance parameters.

## Home-school-community partnerships to support parents living in a minority francophone setting

Masny (2001) assigns parents the responsibility of supporting the social, linguistic and cultural well-being of their child in a Francophone preschool. In a Francophone minority setting, this means that the parents make a commitment, without denying the family's previous history, to create an environment that fosters the development of a Francophone identity and a feeling of belonging to the Francophone community. But parents also need the support of the school and the community to create such an environment. The appropriate support for eligible parents varies according to their linguistic, cultural and regional background. Whatever the family's history, it will be necessary to put in place a coordination service for the following purposes:

- Reassure parents by giving them tools that will enable them to learn best practices for developing additive bilingualism: for example, developing communication kits to distribute in schools that explain the basic principles and practices that guarantee a solid acquisition of the two languages.
- Acknowledge the validity of varieties of French that are different from the French used at school (e.g., the use of casual French at home and more formal French in school) and provide an opportunity to enlarge the linguistic range of parents who do not know French well.
- Support the experience of living in a minority setting and promote French in the context of additive bilingualism by making available lists of resources (e.g., games, Internet, television and radio programs, videos, DVDs etc.) and services in the French language offered by the municipality and the provincial and federal governments.
- Organize networks that support parents who want to encourage their child to do sports or participate in artistic activities in French, and help them learn the terminology that belongs to the area of interest.
- Develop policies of inclusion so that parents who do not speak French are comfortable at the daycare or school and can support the French-language school's mandate.
- Anchor parents in their Francophone society, facilitate the reception of new arrivals and make them aware of their responsibility to contribute to the school and the community.

In addition, it is important to develop community responsibility for daycare services at the preschool level. One example would be locating the daycare in a French-language school or community centre. This means the children do not have to move around as much and they develop a sense of belonging to the community, which contributes to building their Francophone identity (Masny, 2000). It is also important to establish a close connection between the programming at the daycare and preschool and the elementary school curriculum (Masny, 1995, in Masny, 2000).

The home-school-community connection plays an important role with families that have a low socio-economic status. A research carried out in Québec by Kanouté (2003) looked into the educational support of parents in underprivileged contexts. Her findings show that the failure rate of children is higher in underprivileged areas in Montréal. However, the parents are aware of their responsibilities and of the importance of school. They want to be made more welcome in the school and want the school to take into account the limitations they have in helping their child at home. Kanouté suggests that the schools need to know and recognize the home environment and the resources available to the family, take the parents into account in educational projects and respect their capacity to support their child.

Family literacy practitioners working with these parents could design ways of implementing interventions that create a stronger connection between the home and the school.

## 6.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented best practices from Canada and elsewhere. Nowadays, a socio-cultural approach is often recommended to come up with best practices. However, certain nuances have to be taken into account. Auerbach (1989) mentions three different approaches: the intervention-prevention approach, the multiple literacies approach and the social change approach. In addition, cultural differences, differences in belief systems and differences related to gender are important factors in implementing best practices.

Partnerships are a key feature of best practices for family literacy programs. A collaborative approach must include a shared vision, mutual trust and a commitment on the part of the partners and must be centred on parents and their children. The European projects PEFaL and QualiFLY are concrete demonstrations of the importance and benefits of a collaborative approach to supporting families who are participating in family literacy programs. The New Zealand *Manukau Family Literacy Program* is a particularly interesting example of a family literacy program that derives its significance for the collaboration it creates between schools, preschool centres, colleges and universities. This chapter also described the well-known research on partnerships by Epstein et al. (2002) in which various types of effective partnership models are described. Finally, in French Canada, a useful guide from Manitoba on partnerships was described, and two studies on partnerships between the school, the home and the community were presented.

The next chapter addresses multiple literacies applications in connection with family literacy programs.



# 7. *Implementation of multiple literacies*

## **SUMMARY**

- 7.1 Description of multiple literacies
- 7.2 Guidelines for the implementation of family literacy programs based on multiple literacies
- 7.3 Conclusion

The concept of multiple literacies is relevant to family literacy programs in a minority setting, and thus, a chapter describing how it can be implemented is warranted.

According to Masny (2002), multiple literacies include personal, academic, community and critical literacies. The Coalition francophone prefers the term “cultural literacy”. By cultural literacy, the Coalition francophone means

An intervention that associates and integrates into language learning—whatever the approaches and methods used to this end—a special program of facilitated group learning and cultural information that aims to increase the participant’s personal store of knowledge, to reinforce his sense of belonging, and to appreciate and value his culture of origin and his own acquired cultural resources (Coalition francophone, 2005b, p.9). [Free translation]

## **7.1 Description of multiple literacies**

According to Masny (2002), literacies are

A social construct that includes words, gestures, attitudes, social identities or, more precisely, ways of speaking, reading, writing and appreciating--in short, a way of becoming in the world... Literacies contain inherent values. They are often entrenched in dimensions derived from religion, gender, race, culture, identity, ideologies and power. When we speak, write or read, we construct meaning by referencing a particular context. More precisely, this act of constructing meaning that is called literacy is integrated into the culture and the socio-political and socio-historical dimensions of a society and its institutions. The meaning of literacies becomes operational and is realized from a specific context in time and space where it finds itself and where it functions (p. 15). [Free translation]

In an era of globalization and an evolving knowledge-based society, the conceptual framework of multiple literacies serves to make family literacy practitioners more aware of the forms of knowledge belonging to the minority community that is in the process of becoming and that must confront tensions and ambiguities.

In addition, the concept brings about a new understanding of the process of reading, of reading oneself and of reading the world. It stimulates thinking and questioning. It also provides a backdrop to the development of a social and pedagogical project in the minority Francophone setting.

Finally, the concept can be a starting point for the development of concrete proposals that bring the school-home-community together. Multiple literacies shape and transform a community and its members. They are perfectly suited to the social and educational needs of Francophone minorities.

In trying to rethink the notion of literacy, it is important to position it within the framework of multiple literacies: personal (or cultural) literacy, community literacy, academic literacy and critical literacy. In school, the emphasis has traditionally been on the language aspects and the psychological aspects of learning to read. However, if, as Masny (1995) proposes, we enlarge our concept of literacy such that we can perceive it as a social phenomenon, we recognize that different literacies exist depending on the particular context of the school, the home and the community.

Personal literacy can be seen when the individual moves from the act of reading a printed text to the act of reading in a larger sense of the word, namely "reading the world" and "reading oneself." This complex model of literacy corresponds with a vision of the world in which an individual is immersed in different environments in society (school, home and community), which are themselves situated in various social, cultural and political contexts.

Community literacy's goal is the appreciation, understanding and use of the literacy practices of a community. It can be seen, for example, in the practices of a community of newly arrived individuals who integrate their written and oral culture into their new community. It can also refer to the uses community members make of that community's written and oral culture, whether it be a composer writing songs, a painter speaking about his canvases, a farmer who documents the production of his fields or a tailor who calculates measurements for a suit. In each example, this call to the written, oral or tactile culture occurs in a particular social, cultural and political context that is the foundation for a vision of the world of the individual in his community. This perspective of community literacy can also increase the feeling of belonging to the community.

In today's technological era, most of the information that is given is complex, whether it is transmitted orally, visually or by the written word. Oral transmission of information, for example, requires the use of many aspects of the written code (e.g., finding the most appropriate words, with recourse to various syntactical resources, etc.). In this context, literacy becomes a means of accessing information and passing it on through acts of effective communication, not only in writing, but also orally and visually. Academic literacy therefore refers to the learning of processes of interpretation and communication required for social adaptation in the school environment and in other settings.

The term critical literacy is borrowed from Freire, but not the concept. In the context of multiple literacies, critical literacy refers to the individual who, in reading himself and reading the world, is engaged in a process of becoming; he is searching for and creating meaning for his new way of becoming through the medium of a text.

***...the conceptual framework for multiple literacies makes it possible to read, to read oneself and to read the world.***

## 7.2 Guidelines for the implementation of family literacy programs based on multiple literacies

Brown (1998) recognizes multiple literacies as a relevant approach for family literacy programs. She suggests that rather than promoting only academic literacy, family literacy programs should take into account the family unit as a whole and design the curriculum to take into account factors such as the culture, gender and age of the participants, as well as the relational, professional and community parameters.

She recommends spending time looking at literacies that are passed on from one adult to another, between adults and children, and between brothers and sisters, as well as literacies that one finds in the community, including those that are job related. Brown claims that it is important to promote various types of literacy-determined behaviour that require close cooperation between the members of a family, schools, communities and workplaces.

Literacies that are passed on between adults (e.g., through exchanges and discussions among parents on various subjects) and between children and adults have been acknowledged and promoted within the programs mentioned in the *For My Child* reports. The parents who participated in these programs said that they had greatly appreciated these exchanges.

***The parents who participated in the research by the Coalition francophone said that they had greatly appreciated the exchanges between parents.***

Osterling et al. (1999) studied two American models of family literacy that have been used with parents from ethnic minorities. They concluded that to be successful, the implementation of family literacies must include the following:

- teach the language, culture and traditions of parents and grandparents (community and personal literacies),
- improve reading, writing and mathematical skills (academic literacy),
- create a community founded on members who take responsibility for and support the values and culture of the families (personal and critical literacies), and
- establish collaboration between parents, community organizations and schools (community literacy).

In her research, Masny (2002) points out that the families targeted by family literacy programs are likely to present differing profiles in relation to the acquisition of literacies. To appreciate and acknowledge the literacies of each family at different times, family literacy programs in the minority Francophone setting must go beyond academic literacy to include multiple literacies.

It is especially important to include in family literacy programs the dimension of the Canadian French-speaking context as well as activities that make it possible to live in French and that contribute to all of the literacies. Multiple literacies are a very recent concept in the area of family literacy in French in Canada. In Ontario, a family literacy program model that was used in this research, *Des livres dans mon baluchon*, integrates multiples literacies.

## 7.3 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the definition of multiple literacies and demonstrated their pertinence in family literacy programs.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to integrate multiple literacies into some existing programs because they have been designed with other objectives in mind. For example, *Lire et écrire à la maison* is aimed at improving academic literacy. *Grandir avec mon enfant* is aimed at improving parenting skills and is not well suited to the changes needed to address multiple literacies. On the other hand, the *Des livres dans mon baluchon* program was designed using concepts linked to multiple literacies.

Other programs have been modified to include activities that promote multiple literacies. These changes have generally been made directly in the field and have therefore not been systematically recorded for sharing with other organizations.

The FCAF and the Coalition francophone will have to deal with this challenge and find ways to support those organizations that wish to include multiple literacies in their practices.



# 8. Guidelines for the planning, management and evaluation of family literacy programs

## SUMMARY

- 8.1 Characteristics of the Francophone minority setting in Canada
- 8.2 Guidelines for program directors
- 8.3 Guidelines for practitioners
- 8.4 Guidelines for the evaluation of programs
- 8.5 Conclusion

The guidelines for family literacy programs presented in this chapter are drawn from a review of writings relating to best practices. They differ from best practices in that they relate to organization and the management of a family literacy program, that is, how it is designed and evaluated. The FCAF's *Guide de pratiques exemplaires en alphabétisation familiale en contexte francophone minoritaire* (Guide to best practices in family literacy in a francophone minority context) (FCAF, 2007) explains the use of such guidelines:

To provide practitioners and program directors with guidelines for the orientation and support for the implementation of high-quality family literacy programs that answer the particular needs of Francophones living in a minority setting. This guide will also help them to examine the program they offer (FCAF, 2007, p. 8). [Free translation]

## 8.1 Characteristics of the Francophone minority setting in Canada

The Francophone minority setting presents challenges that are specific to the members of this community. Practitioners need to take this into account in their interventions. In particular, they must take into consideration the following elements:

- the socio-cultural context in which the parent and the family evolve,
- the French language and Francophone culture,
- the development of a positive Francophone identity and a sense of belonging to the larger French-speaking world, and
- the effects of linguistic, cultural and identity factors on self-esteem.

### The adopted approaches must

- appreciate and value families as principal resources for the children's literacies, and the parent as the primary educator of his child;
- appreciate and value all languages and the varieties of language, as they have the same power to express a full range of thoughts and emotions;
- ensure that the staff members of the organization have an opportunity to reflect on the organization's values and to see how they can integrate and apply them on a daily basis;
- celebrate and value families' social and cultural diversity;
- encourage the active involvement of participants;
- maintain a relationship of equals with the families;
- train the practitioners and volunteers; and
- show appreciation for the literacies of each family at different times.

Finally, guidelines for the development of a program must apply the following five tenets:

1. Contribute to the creation of a partnership between the child's school, parents and community.
2. Design programs as tools for the development and the fulfilment of each member of the family.
3. Contribute to the development of a family environment that offers each child all options for the future.
4. Contribute to keeping the parents' role current in the face of the children's development.
5. Support the development of a positive relationship between parents and children in a Francophone cultural context (FCAF, 2007, p.14).

The family literacy programs offered by the six centres that participated in the Coalition francophone's research were trying to give parents the necessary skills so that they can fully assume their role as their child's primary educator.

The programs encourage the active participation of parents. However, as a general rule, the programs could be improved, by ensuring that the practitioners receive training both on the fundamentals of literacy and on family literacy program models. Once multiple literacies become well established and underpin a literacy program, languages, the varieties of language and the different literacies will be better appreciated and valued. A family literacy program model like *Des livres dans mon baluchon* that is founded on a framework of multiple literacies is a good start.

In the following pages, we present important guidelines for program directors and practitioners as well as guidelines for evaluating the programs.

## 8.2 Guidelines for program directors

- Keep precise financial records in good order and up-to-date.
- Ensure stable and adequate funding for the organization's short and long-term operations.
- Use effective recruitment and promotion strategies that can reach a large number of families with particular needs and that take into account the human and material resources of the organization.
- Inform the community about family literacy and its importance for everyone.
- Encourage everyone in the community to support literacies in their personal, family and community lives as well as in their workplaces.
- Offer services that facilitate access to the program.
- Choose a time that suits the participants.
- Choose an accessible location for the program.
- Ensure the physical and emotional safety of the participants at all times.
- Implement high-quality family literacy programs that answer the needs of families and take into account their areas of interest and their life context.
- Plan the family literacy program with great care.
- Recruit facilitators and volunteers actively, especially those who have high-level skills, training and experience suitable for their tasks and responsibilities.
- Create a document that describes the roles and responsibilities of the staff members and the board of directors.
- Provide support to newly recruited practitioners and volunteers on an ongoing basis, according to their needs and those of the families they work with.
- Do a formative evaluation of the performance of volunteers and practitioners with their participation and consent.
- Create win-win partnerships with groups whose goals, objective and mandates are compatible with those of the organization.
- Put in place the necessary conditions for win-win partnerships.
- Foster the attitudes and kinds of behaviour that promote win-win partnerships.
- Put effective procedures in place to create win-win partnerships.
- Write up a partnership agreement that describes the roles and responsibilities of each partner and gives details about the coordination of the program and have it approved by the partners.
- Give all of the partners an information kit.

In the Coalition francophone's research, the program directors were very aware of the measures they would have to undertake to make the community aware of the family literacy program and to recruit the families that could be interested in participating in them. Challenges persist for the recruitment of families and of fathers, particularly in settings where Francophones are a very small minority.

### 8.3 Guidelines for practitioners

- Support participants in the construction of their Francophone identity.
- Celebrate and value families' social and cultural diversity.
- Encourage the active involvement of participants.
- Maintain a relationship of equals with the families.
- Acknowledge, celebrate and draw attention to the participation and the learning of participants.
- Pay attention to the regularity of participants' attendance.
- Use an approach and content that is appropriate to the development, ages, areas of interest, aptitudes and the life context of the children and the adults.
- In collaboration with the program director, choose and evaluate high-quality resources that suit the areas of interest and the needs of participants.
- Present high-quality learning activities that suit the needs of participants and reflect their areas of interest (including the acquisition of writing skills).
- Share with participants effective strategies that can be used with children.
- Make use of the techniques and strategies that help participants learn (e.g., discussions, demonstrations, use of images and diagrams).
- Help participants to access information on child development and the acquisition of writing skills and show them what they can do to help their child along.
- Help participants access information about the Francophone minority setting.
- Help participants access strategies for parenting that support the well-being of their child.
- Help participants improve multiple literacies in French and integrate these into their daily activities with their child.
- Put together resource kits in French that families can take home.
- Produce one's own resource materials or adapt existing resources to take into account participants' needs.
- Inform participants of Francophone resources in their community.
- Assist in the integration of participants in a Francophone network.
- Make participants aware of the importance of registering their child in a French-language school.

According to the Coalition francophone's research, partnering centres made use of best practices when they created resources that would answer the particular needs of their clientele. The program *Lire et écrire à la maison* is an example. In the program *Des livres dans mon baluchon*, families received a resource kit in French to take home. The parents reported that they appreciated the strategies for improving their parenting skills. The literacy programs gave them the opportunity to socialize in French, establish a network in French and access information about the Francophone minority setting, among other things.

## 8.4 Guidelines for the evaluation of programs

- Take into account the criteria for quality in a family literacy program in the program evaluation.
- Study the program model before offering it, to ensure it fulfills the criteria.
- Take into account the needs of participants that are identified at the time the program is implemented.
- Develop an evaluation plan at the outset of the program.
- Evaluate all aspects of the program.
- Make the evaluation participative so that participants can reflect on their learning.
- For practitioners and volunteers, have participative evaluations on questions about the teaching approaches and the evaluations.
- For the manager, focus the evaluation on the way he manages families, partners, practitioners and volunteers.
- For the children, use a formative evaluation.
- Evaluate partnerships in collaboration with the respective partners.

The *For My Child* reports state that each year, the family literacy programs in the six partnering centres were evaluated at the end of the program. In addition, the reports recommends that each centre choose a family literacy program model that answers its needs by using the criteria set out in section 3.3.1.

It is important to include a formative evaluation. The results allow the development of ongoing training for program directors and practitioners to improve their practice. It is an opportunity to reflect on how to go about integrating and applying the values that inform a family literacy program based on multiple literacies. Note that in the Coalition francophone's research, after each cohort was evaluated, the participating centres integrated the various recommendations, and by doing so improved their program's quality.

## 8.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we reviewed winning features for the implementation and ongoing delivery of a high quality family literacy program. Organized and written in bullet points, these guidelines are easy to refer to and can aid organizations in offering a family literacy program. They can also be used as items in program evaluations.

The next chapter contains recommendations that we have formulated after analyzing the information presented in this report.



# 9. Recommendations

## SUMMARY

- 9.1 Members of the Réseau d'experts en alphabétisation familiale
- 9.2 Researchers
- 9.3 Program directors
- 9.4 Practitioners

The following recommendations are derived from our analysis of the various research studies cited. They are addressed to the members of the Réseau d'experts en alphabétisation familiale and to researchers, program directors and practitioners.

## 9.1 Members of the Réseau d'experts en alphabétisation familiale

1. Ensure consistency between the concepts of family literacy and multiple literacies.
2. Develop a five-year strategic plan to allow for a tactical development of family literacy in Canada and to ensure its sustainability.
3. Develop a common framework based on multiple literacies: specify the goals, determine the learning outcomes, propose a curriculum and suggest partnerships.
4. Investigate, with Francophone community colleges, the possibility of developing a diploma course to provide training in family literacy.

## 9.2 Researchers

1. Carry out research designed to improve the choice of programs and the offering of family literacy services.
2. Evaluate approaches and practices considered exemplary.
3. Study the effectiveness of approaches to the development of education and training.
4. Study the long-term development of the field of family literacy.
5. Evaluate the benefits that can be derived from partnerships that aim for complementarity between literacy centres, daycare centres and schools.
6. Evaluate family literacy programs using qualitative and quantitative methods (i.e., going beyond the framework of a questionnaire or survey).
7. Study the determining factors for fathers' participation in family literacy programs.
8. Study the determining factors for the recruitment and the participation of parents with low literacy skills in family literacy programs.
9. Study the impact of programs with a "child" component to the impact of those without one.
10. Study the effectiveness of family literacy programs on the integration of immigrants.

### 9.3 Program directors

1. Determine hiring criteria for practitioners (i.e., competencies, qualities, experience).
2. Ensure that before delivering the program, all practitioners receive the training *Fondements de l'alphabétisation familiale dans un contexte minoritaire francophone*, as well as training in the selected program.
3. Reflect on the values associated with multiple literacies to see how to they can be integrated into the program models.
4. Use effective programs and methods to answer the needs of fathers, ethnic groups and individuals with low literacy skills.
5. Establish solid partnerships with schools, child care centres and other community organizations.
6. Seek out new methods of recruiting families, young parents, individuals with low literacy skills, fathers, recent immigrants and grandparents.
7. Make sure to use a space that is accessible and appropriate for adults and children.
8. Include an evaluation strategy.

### 9.4 Practitioners

When practitioners make participants' learning meaningful and useful, the parents are motivated to become more deeply involved in the program, particularly if they see that it can help them in their role as a parent. The learning goes beyond the academic framework; it provides ways to read, to read oneself and to read the world.

1. Create the proper conditions so that everyone who participates in a family literacy program becomes a life-long learner.
2. Adapt the content to different groups, including fathers and immigrants.
3. Encourage all of the participants to share their experiences with others.
4. Adopt and maintain a positive perspective; build on the parents' backgrounds and provide resources so that they can be confident in their ability to fulfill their role of primary educators of their child.

## 10. Conclusion

What can we draw from this research on family literacy in Ontario and in French Canada? To put things into perspective, let us first return to the beginnings of family literacy. Family literacy programs were launched because children of low-income families were not doing well at school. To address the problem, the American government sponsored *Even Start*, a program designed to support local family literacy projects by integrating preschool education, adult literacy (basic skills training, secondary education, as well as ESL programs), education in parenting skills and parent-child family literacy activities for low-income families.

Fifteen years ago, the members of the FCAF launched their own family literacy programs in Francophone minority settings. Since its creation in 2004, the Réseau d'experts en alphabétisation familiale has played a front-line role in carrying out research and has provided support to its members, including the Coalition francophone.

Today, members of the Coalition francophone offer family literacy programs in eleven centres in Ontario. Six of these centres took part in the Coalition francophone's research, a five-year research of the impact of family literacy programs on Francophone families. This is the first research in this field to be carried out in Francophone minority settings in Canada. The current report not only describes and analyzes the data gathered in the research, but it also positions the results in the larger context of other national and international researches that evaluate the impact of family literacy programs on the national and international levels. What can we say at this stage about the outcomes of family literacy programs?

The Alberta Centre for Family Literacy provides an excellent point of departure that we present in greater details:

Family literacy is not just about reading and writing. It's about developing stronger relationships between parents and their children and supporting parents in their own learning process. It is about building stronger families and healthy communities (Centre for Family Literacy, 2008).

**Family literacy is not just about reading and writing.** Indeed, literacy is much more than knowing how to read and write. It is true that one can think of literacy as primarily academic: this is the reason family literacy programs were started. Raising children's literacy skills was correlated with their academic success. Children who were considered in need of help were from low-income families, belonged to minorities, or did not speak the language of instruction, or not very well. Family literacy programs were designed to prepare parents to help their child acquire literacy skills and, as a result, improve their success at school. However, the research carried out by Heath (1983) proved that certain ways of speaking were not recognized as valid by schools and by the evaluation criteria. Consequently, many forms of discourse and varieties of language that were a mark of identity and of belonging to a community became invisible.

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These results are significant for Francophone minorities. Although reading and writing, or academic literacy, are a very important success factors in life, one must also take into account the fact that other literacies also contribute to success and to lifelong learning. Certain models of family literacy adhere to the principle of multiple literacies. The Coalition francophone uses the term “family literacy” in the context of cultural literacy, community literacy and academic literacy. This position is very recent and its effects are beginning to have a positive impact on the family literacy programs offered by the Coalition francophone’s members.

A number of results found in the *For My Child* reports include elements of multiple literacies. The adult participants indicated that they had changed their ways of using French. Families living in a bilingual setting reported that they were speaking French more often both at home and in the community. All of the adults tried to participate in more cultural activities in French and, thanks to the program, they created a network that enabled them to socialize in French. These are examples of family literacy programs that promote community and cultural literacies. With regard to academic literacy, the participants said they were very satisfied with the support they received to help their child to read, write and do his homework.

**A family literacy program helps develop a closer relationship between the child and the significant adult in the child’s life.** The programs delivered by the partners in the Coalition francophone’s research included a component on parenting skills. The parents said that this aspect of their program was very informative. For Francophone minority parents, acquiring such skills also gave them the opportunity to enlarge their vocabulary related to these strategies and, as a result, to describe their life experiences in French.

**A family literacy program supports parents in their own learning process.** The programs delivered by the members of the Coalition francophone are generally focused on the adult and often include a “child” component. They give the adult the opportunity to improve his linguistic abilities and his literacies, as well as to acquire parenting skills. An adult participates in a family literacy program mainly to help his child. A family literacy program must help both the adult and the child. The child gets help when he needs it, and the same is true for the adult.

**A family literacy program builds stronger families and healthy communities.** Many families in a Francophone minority community live in a precarious situation. In Ontario, for example, Francophone communities are scattered across the whole province. For a language and culture to maintain itself and to flourish, the members of the community must actively participate to keep it vital. The results of the Coalition francophone’s research demonstrated that family literacy programs have helped establish a network for socializing in French while keeping families informed about the Francophone community and giving them the opportunity to use the services offered in French in their city or region.

Much work remains to be done to support adults as lifelong learners, and current efforts must be sustained. To continue to achieve good results, family literacy programs need to be able to rely on solid sources of strategic, long-term funding. Research has shown that family literacy programs produce good results. All of the necessary evidence is there to demand such funding. We must add, however, that other elements need to be put in place. First, it is necessary to ensure that practitioners currently employed in family literacy programs are trained in the various approaches and family literacy models; this is essential for the success of the programs. In addition, program evaluations should be done on a continuous basis, as should the creation of partnerships in the community. Finally, we recommend the conception of a common framework and a family literacy program based on multiple literacies.

The act of participating in a family literacy program in a minority language context goes beyond the simple framework of academic literacy. In the perspective of multiple literacies, a family literacy program is parent-focused, so that the parent can help the child succeed at school. It helps families develop a feeling of belonging to the community by showing them how to access cultural resources and how to “read” them, when those resources are not easily available. This means that one accepts the families or the individuals at whatever point they are at in their relationship with their community, or, in other words, whatever their current capacity is to “read” their communities. Thus, as the parents reported in the Coalition francophone’s research, one can explore the possibilities for making enlightened decisions and for undergoing transformations to “become.”

A number of challenges persist in the offering of ongoing, quality family literacy programs suitable for Canada’s minority Francophone communities: stable funding so that strategic long-term plans can be developed; the development of programs; practitioner and program directors training; and mechanisms for the evaluation of the programs. Although it is clear that family literacy programs play a positive role in the improvement of French-language competencies and learning, as well as in the survival and construction of the Francophone community in Ontario, the task is far from complete, principally in the areas of funding and research. We know that we can succeed if we work hand in hand.

**So let us move forward, hand in hand!**





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