

# Education Letter

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## Family Literacy

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## Family Literacy: What is it anyway?

DEBBIE NESBITT-MUNROE, *Early Literacy Specialist, Kingston and the Islands*

**D**efining family literacy is a challenge. Family literacy has been used to describe – literacy practice within the family or specific interventions that promote young children’s literacy development or programs which promote the literacy development of more than one member in a family (Casper, 2003). It is not surprising that this broad use of the term family literacy has led to it being described as “trying to capture a wide landscape with a single camera shot” (Thomas & Skage, 1998).

In some instances the definition of family literacy is based on literacy practices that happen in families. In Ontario, the Action for Family Literacy Ontario, an advocacy group states: “Family literacy is about the ways families use literacy and language in their daily lives. It is about how families:

- Learn
- Use literacy to do everyday tasks
- Help children develop literacy
- Use literacy to maintain relationships with each other and with the community
- Interact with organizations and institutions”

*(aflo.on.literacy.ca, 2006)*

In other instances, literacy practices in homes and/or efforts to improve literacy within the community have been used to define family literacy as in the International Reading Association’s Family Literacy Commission statement. “Family literacy encompasses the ways parents children and extended family members use literacy at home and in their community.

- Family literacy occurs naturally during the routines of daily living and helps adults and children “get things done.”
- Examples of family literacy might include using drawings or writings to share ideas; composing notes or letters to communicate messages; keeping records; making lists; reading and following directions; or sharing stories and ideas through conversation, reading and writing.
- Family literacy may be initiated purposefully by a parent, or may occur spontaneously as parents and children go about the business of their daily lives.
- Family literacy activities may also reflect the ethnic, racial, or cultural heritage of the families involved.
- Family literacy activities may be initiated by outside institutions or agencies. These activities are often intended to support the acquisition and development of school-like literacy behaviours of parents, children and families.
- Family literacy activities initiated by outside agencies may include family storybook reading, completing homework assignments, or writing essays or reports.”

*(Mandel Morrow, 1994)*

Family literacy often encompasses more than literacy as Family Literacy Alberta argues “Family literacy is not just about reading and writing. It’s about developing stronger ...continues on page 3



## Message from the Guest Editor

ELIZABETH A. LEE, *Faculty of Education, Queen's University*

**T**his issue of the Education Letter focuses on Family Literacy. Family literacy is the orphan area amongst education. It receives less attention in faculties of education than other areas in literacy. This may be because the majority of programs in family literacy address the needs of preschoolers or adult literacy learners, groups that fall outside of the main objective of education faculties in educating elementary and secondary school teachers. However, it is an area that could contribute much to the efforts of schools and teachers to educate children.

As described in this issue, teachers and schools have an interest in the development of children prior to school entry and have the potential to expand their role in supporting the families of the children in our classrooms to facilitate children's development.

This issue seeks to inform you about family literacy, describe some successful programs, and discuss principles that teachers and schools may draw upon to develop family literacy programs. A report on a conference co-sponsored by Queen's Faculty of Education that focussed on exemplary family literacy programs from coast to coast is included. Two of these programs (PRINTS and PALS) may serve as models to teachers and schools interested in developing programs for their parents.

In addition, with the goal of interesting you in becoming involved in family literacy programs in your community, lists of resources and organizations are provided throughout the newsletter.

*Elizabeth Lee*

**Next Issue**

Teacher Preparation

...continued from page 1 relationships between parents and their children and getting parents involved in their children's education. It is about building stronger families and healthy communities." (Centre for Family Literacy, 2006)

No matter how family literacy is defined, the concept of family literacy includes basic ideas such as: parents and family life influence the literacy and learning outcomes for young children; these outcomes impact children's future success in school and life in general; parent's literacy outcomes are enhanced by learning with and helping their children to learn.

Family literacy programming and curriculum are developed by drawing upon many areas of research and practice in education including; adult literacy, English as a second language, early childhood education, emergent literacy, cognitive psychology, child development and parent education (Caspé, 2003).

## Models of Family Literacy

There are four main family literacy program models (Cellan, 2003).

### 1. Intergenerational

A children's Early Childhood Education (ECE) program supports the development of emergent literacy in child participants, while separate programming for parents focuses on family literacy, parenting skills, and/or adult literacy and upgrading. Structured child-parent interaction, known as PACT (parents and children together), gives parents opportunities to practice the skills and strategies they have learned. Examples of this type of program are *Parenting for a Literate Community* and *From Lullabies to Literacy*.

### 2. Focus on parents

Parents participate in workshop-style training that focuses on enhancing their ability to support the development of children's literacy at home. Some programs focus on helping parents develop effective story-reading strategies and encouraging them to read to children at home; others include topics such as how children learn through dramatic play, developing children's self-esteem, and developmental stages. An example of this type of program is *Parents' Roles Interacting with Teacher Support (PRINTS)*.

### 3. Parents and children together

Parents and pre-school children participate in sessions together where they engage in language and literacy-related activities such as rhymes, songs, and storytelling. The emphasis in the sessions is on enjoyment, and the objective is to increase parental awareness and involvement in child literacy development. An example of this type of program is the *Parent-Child Mother Goose Program*.

### 4. Distribution of family literacy resources

Community volunteers and/or staff of literacy or family support organizations develop and distribute literacy resources to families. These "family literacy kits" can include children's books, games, craft activities and materials, and information for parents on how to use the kit at home. Examples of this type of program are *Reading and Parents Program (RAPP)* and *Storysacks*.

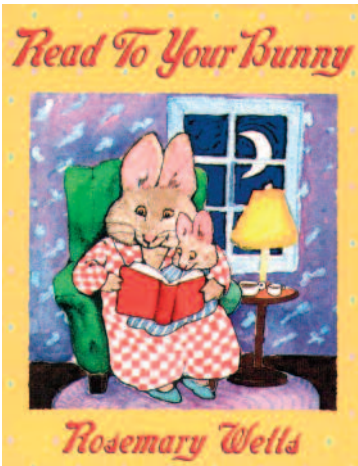
Family literacy is a young field and as yet has had limited research compared to that found in other areas of education. More is needed to guide the development of programming that is best for parents, children and families (Caspé, 2003). Some of the limited amount of research evidence indicates that family literacy programs benefit children, parents, families and society (Padak 1994). The UK has been a leader in this area. A follow up study to the Family Literacy Demonstration Programmes in 1994/95, undertaken by the Basic Skills Agency in the UK in 1997, concluded "that the Family Literacy children have successfully maintained the gains they made during the courses, and that the parents have continued to widen their participation in education and society" (Brooks, Gorman, Harman, Hutchinson & Wilkin, 1996). All fields of endeavour require time, investment and review to reach their best potential. Family literacy is at the beginning of this road.

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# Schools, teachers and family literacy

ELIZABETH A. LEE, *Faculty of Education, Queen's University*



**W**hy would teachers and schools take on another responsibility? Simply, because it is to schools' and teachers' benefit to involve parents. There is overwhelming evidence on the influence of early learning experiences on children's ability to respond to teaching at school entry. Literacy draws upon the child's language foundation. The critical period for language development is the first three years. A child's verbal ability is the result of the quantity and quality of the talk they have experienced. This varies among families, with some children receiving fewer than 500 words in an hour of family life while others are exposed to 3,000 words in an hour. By age four some children have heard 50 million words while others only 10 million. The quality of language also differs, by four some children have heard only 80,000 words of affirmation or approval while more fortunate children have heard 800,000. The least talkative families use language to control children while more talkative families in addition to using it for control also use language for description and explanations. This richer language exposure correlates with children's language and cognitive development (Hart & Risley, 1995). Talk in the home on average does vary by socioeconomic status, professionals talk the most, parents on social assistance the least, and working-class parents may have high or low levels of talk. This variation in talk in families is what correlates with later verbal ability not socioeconomic status per se (Risley, 2003).

The first analyses of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (Canada) that studied 22,831 children described, among other topics, the role of parenting behaviours on later developmental outcomes. Parenting practices have positive effects on children's school perform-

ance with an especially strong positive effect on pro-social behaviour. Socioeconomic status and parenting practices independently influence childhood vulnerability with the effects of good parenting far outweighing the effects of income (Willms, 2002).

Family involvement in children's education improves student achievement and attitudes toward learning (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Regular school attendance increases, school discipline problems decrease. A position paper by the International Reading Association summarizes the research on parent-school relationships and the benefits for schools "Schools that work well with families have better teacher morale, higher ratings of teaching by parents, and better reputations and linkages to resources in the community" (International Reading Association, 2002).

School and teacher efforts to build connections to families is also a matter of access and equity, helping more parents to become involved in the education of their children (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). ...continues on page 5

## Resources for teachers and schools

### Articles

These articles describe how schools have developed family literacy programs.

- Colombo, M. W. (2004). Family literacy nights...and other home-school connections. *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 61, Issue 8, 48-52.
- Crawford, P. A. & Zygouris-Coe, V. (2006). All in the family: connecting home and school with family literacy. *Early Childhood Education Journal*. Vol. 33, No. 4 261-267.

### Books

- DeBruin-Parecki, Krol-Sinclair, B. Eds. (2003). *Family literacy: From theory to practice*.
- Newark, De: International Reading Association.
- Mandel Morrow, L. Ed. (1995). *Family literacy: Connections in schools and communities*. Newark, De: International Reading Association.
- Thomas, A., Fazio, L. & Stiefelmeyer, B.L. (1999). *Families at school: A guide for educators*. Newark, De: International Reading Association.

### Leaflet

- International Reading Association. (2002). *Family-School Partnerships*
- [www.reading.org/resources/issues/positions\\_family\\_school.html](http://www.reading.org/resources/issues/positions_family_school.html)

### Children's Books

- Marzollo, J. (1999). *Mama Mama*. Toronto, ON: Harper Collins Canada.
- Wells, R. (1999). *Read to Your Bunny*. Toronto, ON: Scholastic.
- Reid, B. *Read Me A Book*. (2007). Toronto, ON: Scholastic.
- Bunting, E. (1989). *The Wednesday Surprise*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

...continued from page 4 By becoming involved in establishing strong parent-school collaborations teachers and schools are enhancing their ability to educate effectively.

The form of family involvement in education developed by schools and teachers will differ by school level, taking different configurations in elementary or high schools.

Some boards and schools have established their own programs, often at the primary level directed at early literacy using book bags with activities that go home with children. Allied with these there may be parenting programs. In some instances schools collaborate with local family literacy organizations to jointly provide programs for families. Such collaboration is mutually beneficial; schools can draw upon the expertise and resources already developed while family literacy organizations are able to connect to more parents. Both may expand their conceptualization of family literacy through understanding each other's perspective.

School staff needs time to become familiar with the research and to formulate for their own school a plan of action that arises out of their understanding of the unique characteristics of the particular school and community. Administrators can provide leadership by setting aside time to allow teachers to plan and coordinate a common approach. To effectively involve parents, schools should expect it to take time and effort. A good starting point is to examine attitudes about parents. Set small goals of building a welcoming environment and willingness to include every parent. Schools and teachers need to remind themselves that they can be intimidating for parents, the school needs to take the first step in communication. Many parents want to become involved beyond fundraising for the school. Emphasize how parents can support their children academically, through parent workshops on specific aspects of the curriculum. Teachers can provide parents with practice activities for skills that have been taught and learnt to enable children to become more proficient through additional practice at home. Some resources to serve as the start of such planning by a school staff are found below in resources for teachers and schools.

Collaboration between educators and families enables each to better foster their common concern, children.

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- Epstein, J.L., & Dauber, S.L. (1991). School programs and teacher practices of parent involvement in inner-city elementary and middle schools. *The Elementary School Journal*, 91, 289-305.
- Risley, T. (2003, May 5). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experiences of young American children*. Paper presented at the annual convention of the International Reading Association, Orlando, FL.
- Willms, J. D. (Ed.) (2002). *Vulnerable children*. Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press.

## Community READS: A University-Community Alliance in Language and Literacy Development

Community READS, an initiative of Queen's University Faculty of Education, three district school boards and nine community agencies develops and implements literacy outreach programs for children 7-12 years old. We encourage a sense of the love of reading through our programs, encourage parents to participate in their children's literacy growth, implement an evidence-based model of community reading intervention and raise awareness about reading and how to teach reading. Community READS programs include a two-week summer reading camp for children and a parent program.

Community READS identifies communities where there is a need for the service and works with local schools to select participants, regardless of ability to pay. Financial support from Queen's Faculty of Education and generous donations from community and regional organizations have allowed 220 children to participate in Community READS.

Moving forward, we are looking for community organizations interested in offering READS programs in partnership in their community. I encourage parents, teachers and community service agencies interested in Community READS to contact me by phone: (613) 533-6960 or email: outreach@educ.queensu.ca for more information.

*Malcolm Cunningham, Coordinator, Education Outreach  
Faculty of Education, Queen's University*

### Resources of Interest

- United States**  
National Center for Family Literacy  
[www.familit.org/](http://www.familit.org/)
- Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy**  
[www.ed.psu.edu/goodlinginstitute/](http://www.ed.psu.edu/goodlinginstitute/)
- Harvard Family Research Project**  
[www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/index.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/index.html)
- Child Development Fact Sheets (0-3)**  
[www.zerotothree.org/](http://www.zerotothree.org/)

# A snapshot of National Family Literacy

ANNE JACKSON, *Family Literacy Coordinator, Kingston Literacy and CEFL*

## Resources of Interest

If you would like to become involved with a family literacy program in your area, there are provincial organizations and also many community programs at a local level. These programs are always looking for support and ways to build connections with the education system. See the list of some of websites below.

### Canada

[www.abc-canada.org/fld/parents.shtml](http://www.abc-canada.org/fld/parents.shtml)  
(National)

[www.nald.ca/famlit/](http://www.nald.ca/famlit/)  
Family Literacy Database (National)

### Provincial

[www.kingstonliteracy.com/FamLit/whatis.htm](http://www.kingstonliteracy.com/FamLit/whatis.htm) (Local)

[www.familyliteracyexpertise.org/](http://www.familyliteracyexpertise.org/)  
(Eastern ON-Regional)

[www.occl.ca/famlit.htm](http://www.occl.ca/famlit.htm) (Ottawa)

[www.famlit.ca/index.html](http://www.famlit.ca/index.html)  
(Alberta-Regional)

[www.nwt.literacy.ca/famlit/famlit.htm](http://www.nwt.literacy.ca/famlit/famlit.htm)  
(NWT-Regional)

[www2.literacy.bc.ca/family.htm](http://www2.literacy.bc.ca/family.htm)  
(BC-Regional)

[www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/sasksmart/resources/resources.htm](http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/sasksmart/resources/resources.htm)  
(SK-Regional)

[www.ednet.ns.ca/index.php?sid=125314042&t=sub\\_pages&cat=323](http://www.ednet.ns.ca/index.php?sid=125314042&t=sub_pages&cat=323)  
(Nova Scotia-Regional)

[www.edu.gov.mb.ca/aet/all/directory/list\\_family.html](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/aet/all/directory/list_family.html)  
(Manitoba-Regional)

[www.advancededucation.gov.ab.ca/other/literacy/famlit.asp](http://www.advancededucation.gov.ab.ca/other/literacy/famlit.asp)  
(Aboriginal-AB)

Over the last ten years in Canada there has been an increased awareness of and interest in family literacy as a means of preparing children to enter school ready to learn. There are many definitions of family literacy and equally numerous approaches to the subject, depending upon the province or territory.

Despite this variation, one fact remains constant throughout Canada. Family literacy is still in an embryonic stage compared to the rest of education. This is startling when, according to the 2005 International Adult and Skills Survey (IALSS), 3.3 million adults in Ontario alone do not have the literacy skills necessary to meet the demands of a modern, knowledge-based society. The situation is similar in the other provinces and territories. Aside from their own needs these adults are the parents of the nation's children. If we acknowledge the fact that literacy begins at home, what supports are in place for a parent who is struggling with literacy? Parents will encounter an array of programs that are short term and which struggle to stay afloat.

In Canada there is no central body or particular ministry that takes responsibility for bringing all family literacy programs together. This results in a chaotic national picture, with many good programs starting and then fading away due to the lack of an integrated, comprehensive approach. Other countries such as the United States and Britain do have a national approach to family literacy.

An issue for the field of family literacy is a need for some standardizing of training and program design nationally. Education is provincially managed and so encouraging cooperation at the national level is a challenge. The National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) has supported family literacy across the country to some extent. The Movement for Canadian Literacy (MCL) is comprised of representation from all the literacy coalitions in the country and has talked about representing family literacy nationally, although this again, is still largely at the discussion stage.

Provincially, some provinces and territories have taken up the challenge by supporting family literacy programs but this is by no means universal. In Ontario for example, Action for Family Literacy Ontario (AFLO) is a provincial working group of the Ontario Literacy Coalition, committed to developing a plan to move family literacy forward in Ontario. The Centre for Expertise in Family Literacy (CEFL) is dedicated to supporting organizations and their staff and volunteers in introducing and operating family literacy initiatives in Eastern Ontario, these are both supported by national and provincial funding. The Centre for Family Literacy in Alberta has created the Foundational Training in Family Literacy for practitioners and this curriculum has been used in other provinces.

In many areas of Canada wonderful family literacy programs take place in isolation. A common problem, acknowledged by many, is the sporadic funding. There are few sustained programs due to erratic and unstable funding. Admittedly there is some financial support from all levels of government but there is no core funding as such. Usually, government funding has to be used to provide family literacy training and support for family literacy practitioners, resource development and information sharing rather than program delivery. Most funding seems to be project-based and nearly always for only one year at a time. In some cases, the only way to provide family literacy programming is to integrate it into adult literacy programs but few such partnerships exist.

## KINGSTON LITERACY

# A representative community organization

CARYNNE ARNOLD, *Executive Director, Kingston Literacy*

*Kingston Literacy furthers the development and growth of adult and family literacy in Ontario, and works with other organizations and individuals having a similar goal.*

Kingston Literacy has provided literacy programs and services in Kingston and the neighbouring communities since 1977 when a local initiative demonstrated the need for a new literacy program. A committee of local service providers including the Frontenac Board of Education, St. Lawrence College and the Kingston Public Library established the Kingston Literacy Council and its Adult Reading Program. Even after it was incorporated as a not-for-profit agency in 1984, Kingston Literacy continued to receive funding from the Frontenac Board of Education and St. Lawrence College. From its beginning, a one-to-one tutoring program was a major part of its service and Queen's student volunteers were talented tutors.

The barriers adult literacy students faced supporting their child's literacy development sparked the search for suitable support programs. We focus on prevention, and supporting families with pre-school children. Since 1987, the majority of our family literacy projects, beginning with the Story Centre Project and the Reading And Parents Program (RAPP), have been initially supported by the National Literacy Secretariat. Since there is no ongoing government funding for family literacy programming, Kingston Literacy has maintained programs over the years through community support of its fundraising efforts and numerous foundation grants.

The first Reading And Parents Program (RAPP) was developed in 1990. It was designed to encourage family reading and help parents support their children's emergent literacy skill development. The RAPP pack contains a quality children's book, reading and language hints, a craft idea, and poetry and activity sheets, all relating to the theme of the book. The content is adjusted to meet the needs of individual families. At first, the program involved parent-child groups for eight weeks. It has now become a bi-weekly lending system and is added to many of our other programs. The development of five RAPP

Collections has extended the availability of this program beyond Frontenac and Lennox and Addington Counties to where it is now used in locations across Canada. This has become Kingston Literacy's signature family literacy program.

In addition to maintaining the RAPP program, there have been two major program and service developments in recent years: intergenerational literacy programming and the Centre for Expertise in Family Literacy. The intergenerational programming combines activities for literacy skill development with information about child development for parents, with a child development program for their pre-school children. The development of the Centre for Expertise in Family Literacy has provided us with the opportunity to support other groups in Eastern Ontario striving to extend family literacy services.

For many years, Kingston Literacy has benefited from the volunteer commitment from gifted students, faculty and staff from Queen's University. The Work Bursary Program and the option for a community teaching placement have brought the enthusiasm and skill of Queen's students to Kingston Literacy on a regular basis. In addition to spearheading the Queen's contribution to the recent conference, *Family Literacy: Programming that Works*, and serving on the advisory committee for the Centre for Expertise in Family Literacy, Dr. Elizabeth Lee has a new research project that will extend our RAPP program development into the area of informational text. For its part, Kingston Literacy serves on an advisory group for a community outreach program of the Faculty of Education, "Community READS". This new initiative extends a successful summer reading camp program model for children run at the university to communities in three counties. We hope that the increased collaboration with Queen's over the past two years represents a future of increased partnership in the area of adult and family literacy.



Source: Kingston Literacy

### Resource of Interest

**Kingston Literacy**  
[www.kingstonliteracy.com/  
FamLit/whatis.htm](http://www.kingstonliteracy.com/FamLit/whatis.htm)

## THE CENTRE FOR EXPERTISE IN FAMILY LITERACY

# Supporting regional cooperation

ANNE JACKSON, *Family Literacy Coordinator, Kingston Literacy and CEFL*

### Resource of Interest

Centre for Expertise in Family Literacy

[www.familyliteracyexpertise.org](http://www.familyliteracyexpertise.org)

The Centre for Expertise in Family Literacy (CEFL) was established in 2004 to ensure that stakeholders in the Eastern Region of Ontario who are interested in family literacy could access information, resources and expertise on family literacy, particularly for those who work with hard-to-serve families.

In 2004, Kingston Literacy commissioned a study, funded by the National Literacy Secretariat, “*Family Literacy in Eastern Ontario*”, to

provide background and planning information prior to the development of a regional centre. The purpose of the study was to analyze information on the state of family literacy, specifically in Eastern Ontario but also from other parts of the English-speaking world. It sought to explore the ways people most likely to benefit from family literacy programs were attracted to programs, how family literacy and adult upgrading could be linked successfully and ways to address practitioners’ training needs.

An Advisory Committee was formed and includes people from diverse walks of life.

The need for improved communication was found to be crucial, as well as opportunities for partnerships and networking. The main work of the centre was identified as training, research, and program and resource development. As there is no core funding for family literacy in Ontario, sustainability is a major problem for programs and so the promotion of consolidated family literacy core funding was also suggested.

A report, “*Reaching Across the Barriers: Increasing Outreach and Participation in Family and Adult literacy Programs*” by Trevor Pross and Susan Barry examined the barriers to participation that many potential learners face and suggested ways to overcome these barriers, through well-planned outreach and promotional strategies. It also discussed the pursuit of collaborative partnerships with other organizations to help increase enrolment and build community cooperation.

The area covered by CEFL’s mandate stretches from Peterborough in the west, to Cornwall in the east and as far north as Deep River and Hawkesbury (including Ottawa) along the Ottawa River Valley. Because its focus is on supporting organizations and practitioners, the Cen- ...continues on page 9



*Alphabeasts*, Wallace Edwards.



...continued from page 8 tre for Expertise in Family Literacy provides access to resource materials and family literacy experts. This access is particularly important for groups that are starting family literacy programs, having difficulty sustaining programs, or reaching families that most need help. The stakeholder consultations identified five roles for the centre as to how it should serve the region most effectively.

- **Organizational infrastructure** to support **regional collaboration and information sharing**, particularly on “what works” and the experiences of others.
- **Program development consultation** service to agencies wishing to develop or integrate family literacy into their programs.
- **Training and development** for practitioners who may have literacy experience/expertise but have not yet been able to access/incorporate learning about family literacy.
- **Information about efficacy/evaluation research**, which involves identifying and translating academic research into field-usable guidance; support for developing research considerations and proposals for programming within the Eastern Region.
- **Support for policy development** in concert with provincial associations and working groups.

Given the vastness of the area CEFL has to serve, a website has been designed to provide information and services online. The website is managed and kept up-to-date by Kingston Literacy IT staff working in conjunction with the CEFL staff. Many resources are created by the staff and a number of them are available free-of-charge through the website.

The Centre also makes presentations and facilitates workshops. Consultations take place with stakeholders who request this type of service. Staff will spend a day on site, anywhere throughout the region, to offer advice on beginning a family literacy program or helping to identify areas that could be improved. It is

apparent that whereas distance delivery has advantages, it is usually valuable to supplement this type of connection with face-to-face meetings. Stakeholders expect CEFL to consult with them, communicate with them and share current research with them. The latter is done partly by means of a quarterly electronic newsletter.

The partnership CEFL has developed with Queen’s Faculty of Education has proved to be an invaluable link to current research that can be disseminated in a palatable form for all those in the field of family literacy who wish to be informed. In order to make good program model choices, the best programs are those that encompass the results of valid research.



*Alphabeasts, Wallace Edwards.*

# Family Literacy: Programming that Works

A NATIONAL CONFERENCE SPONSORED BY QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY AND  
THE CENTRE FOR EXPERTISE IN FAMILY LITERACY

DEBBIE NESBITT-MUNROE, *Early Literacy Specialist, Kingston and the Islands*

This conference took place June 1 and 2, 2006 at Queen's University Faculty of Education. Its aim was to present a national perspective on exemplary family literacy programs and it was the first family literacy conference ever held in eastern Ontario. It attracted 145 Adult and Family Literacy Practitioners, Early Childhood Educators, Ontario Early Years Staff, Public Health, Social Services and teachers from Eastern Ontario. Participants came from all over Ontario as well as out of province.

To present a national perspective keynote speakers were invited from British Columbia, Toronto, and Newfoundland. The programs were, "From Lullabies to Literacy", "Parents As Literacy Supporters (PALS)" and "Parents Roles Interacting With Teacher Support (P.R.I.N.T.S.)". Each keynote speaker addressed the entire conference on the first day, giving an overall view of their respective programs and on the second day, they provided a full day workshop to enable conference participants to acquire the necessary training in the program in order to take it back to implement in their community. These three models of family literacy are described in greater detail below.

For those who were interested in a wider variety of shorter workshops, seven were offered on topics related to excellence in family literacy such as, "How to Identify and Support Pre-School Children At-Risk" and "Parents as Partners in Education". Action for Family Literacy Ontario, the provincial family literacy organization, described their work and presented the results of a recently completed environmental scan into the current state of Family Literacy in Ontario. The conference provided the perfect venue to share this important, recent information.

The conference was very successful and provided an opportunity for practitioners to learn more about outstanding family literacy programming from across Canada.

Conference attendees participated in workshops for three family literacy programs. Two, *PRINTS* and *PALS*, have been developed to link to children's early schooling. They serve as exemplars of successful school-community collaboration. The third, *Lullabies to Literacy* works with parents and young children and thus is less closely linked to schools. ***PRINTS, PALS and From Lullabies to Literacy are described in more detail in the following three articles:***

## Parents' Roles Interacting with Teacher Support (PRINTS)

LISA DACOSTA, *Family Literacy Program Facilitator, Kingston Literacy*

The PRINTS program is a workshop-style family literacy curriculum for parents and caregivers. Developed by Dr. William T. Fagan of Memorial University in Newfoundland and Dr. Mary C. Cronin of the University of Regina in Saskatchewan, PRINTS grew out of a study that showed that families and schools frequently misunderstood each other's roles. Children's learning is most successful when both schools and parents recognize the important role that families play in literacy learning, and PRINTS aims to provide a basis on which parents and teachers can become effective partners in children's literacy development. The PRINTS program is organized into twelve training sessions for parents on how to support their young children's literacy development. PRINTS strives to empower parents as early literacy

providers by helping them become more aware of what they are already doing well, and giving them the tools and information to continue to create a home environment that fosters literacy development.

Through hands-on learning, parents are introduced to a variety of activities based on free or low-cost materials that they can share with their children. There are 45 literacy and health activities for parents of children aged 3 to 6 and 37 activities for parents of children aged 0 to 2. PRINTS also provides parents with a framework for literacy interaction with their children. The five parental roles encourage parents to: find opportunities for parent-child sharing, provide recognition and feedback to their children, motivate their child's involvement, model literacy behaviours, and set appropriate guidelines. The parents' roles are discussed as each new activity is introduced so that parents have a plan for sharing that activity with their children when they leave the program. Time is also allotted during each session for parents to share their experiences and to ...continues on page 11

...continued from page 10 offer suggestions and support to one another.

The goal of PRINTS is not just to teach parents a set of activities, but to help them develop the skills, confidence and creativity to take advantage of any situation in daily life and turn it into a meaningful learning opportunity for their child. Parents become partners in their child's literacy development through integrating literacy activities into their home and community life. This program is a good match for adult literacy programs.

## Parents As Literacy Supporters (PALS)

SUSAN RAMSAY, *Early Literacy Specialist for Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox & Addington, Kingston Literacy*

**J**im Anderson, Professor of Early/Family Literacy with the University of British Columbia, and Fiona Morrison, Provincial Coordinator of Literacy Now, 2010 Legacies Now, have developed a highly respected family literacy program for 4 and 5 year old children and their parents within the school setting. PALS, an acronym for Parents As Literacy Supporters, was initiated six years ago in British Columbia. It is now also offered in Ontario and the Northwest Territories, and is currently being modified and adapted in Uganda.

PALS builds on the strengths of families. Through PALS parents or primary caregivers learn to identify components of early literacy acquisition, recognize ways in which they already support their child's early literacy development, and discover new strategies to assist their child's literacy development within their unique family context.

Morrison emphasizes that PALS is, and must be, both respectful and joyful. Parents come to the program from a variety of cultural and social backgrounds. Some arrive with low literacy levels, or as new immigrants without fluency in the English language. Wherever possible, Morrison works with program and community leaders to adapt and translate PALS into the language and social context that best reflects the ethnic background of families attending. PALS has recently been adapted for

use within Aboriginal settings.

The framework for PALS, in any language, is the same. Beginning in fall, parents with 4 or 5-year-old children meet once every two weeks for 2 1/2 hour sessions in the community school. PALS sessions always begin with food, usually breakfast or lunch. After sharing a meal together, parents engage in a session about early literacy development while their children take part in a children's program. Child-care is also provided for younger children in the family. Parents then join their children at activity centres in the classroom to implement their discussion topic through play. About one hour before the session ends, parents break away from their children once again to talk about their observations and experiences in the program with their child and to gather specific materials for family literacy activities when they return home. Each session ends with a story time with all PALS participants.

Session topics are discussed with the parents at the initial session of each PALS program and may be modified according to the interests or needs of the group. Typically, however, PALS sessions explore letter recognition, environmental print, reading and storytelling, the link between literacy and play, computer literacy, early math literacy, early writing and phonemic awareness.

Both formative and summative approaches to outcome measures are used to determine the value of PALS to early literacy development. Formative approaches include focus groups and interviews, as well as body language or non-verbal responses to determine the receptivity of parents to involvement in the program, clarity of program content, and its perceived application within the family context. Summative approaches are multi-layered and include field notes and journal entries, as well as formalized assessment tools such as the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test*, *Concepts of Print*, *Letter Recognitions*, *Letter Segmentation/Phonemic Awareness Tests* and *The Parents Perception of Literacy Learning Interview Schedule*. These assessment tools capture a variety of statistical data about the impact of PALS on parent's early literacy knowledge and on children's early literacy acquisition.

The value of PALS to children, to families, to schools and ultimately to our communities, continues to be tested and modified. PALS is too new to have long- ...continues on page 12

### Resource of Interest

#### PALS

[www.lerc.educ.ubc.ca/fac/anderson/pals/](http://www.lerc.educ.ubc.ca/fac/anderson/pals/)

## Queen's Education Letter

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...continued from page 11 term statistical results, but parents are overwhelmingly positive about their participation in the PALS program. As Stacey Cody of Langley British Columbia writes, "PALS is truly a program where not only the children walk away with something new, but the parents walk away with the gift of knowing you have the power to enhance your child's learning."

## From Lullabies to Literacy

ANNE JACKSON, Family Literacy  
Coordinator, Kingston Literacy & the Centre  
for Expertise in Family Literacy

The third exemplary program was, From Lullabies to Literacy. Maria Velasquez and Heather Anderson-Ross from the Macaulay Child Development Centre in Toronto facilitated the workshop. The Macaulay Child Development Centre is a non-profit, multi-service childcare and family support agency that provides a range of early intervention and prevention programs in high-need communities in Toronto. With a grant from the Atkinson Charitable Foundation, the Macaulay Centre developed From Lullabies to Literacy, a complete family literacy workshop-format curriculum. The project included a comprehensive evaluation, which showed the program had a positive impact on the language development and emergent literacy skills of children and resulted in increased use of child literacy promoting activities and strategies for parents and caregivers. Each of the ten, theme-based, ninety-minute sessions has three components:

- A discussion where parents relate their own experiences to the session's theme and learn strategies for supporting their children's early literacy.
- Interactive play and a book blanket where parents practice the strategies they have learned while playing with and reading to their children

## Resource of Interest

### Lullabies to Literacy

[www.macaulaycentre.org/familit\\_train.html](http://www.macaulaycentre.org/familit_train.html)

- "Rhyme time" where parents and children are introduced to a rhyme or song focusing on a particular letter sound.

At the end of each session, parents are encouraged to plan a literacy activity they can share at home with their child.

The themes for discussion include: building self-esteem, talking and listening, songs and rhymes, sounds in language, storytelling, sharing books with children, choosing children's books, drawing and writing, environmental words and sounds and, a final session that summarizes the preceding discussions.

From Lullabies to Literacy is an example of an intergenerational program for adults and their children 0-5 years of age. It is designed for use either in a group or in a one-to-one setting. The curriculum does not use expensive resources but focuses on the sort of items parents and caregivers will have readily available at home. It demonstrates how literacy skills build up through every day activities. As a result of attending this program, children become more used to routine and their social skills improve which helps to prepare them for school.

### Program goals:

- Increase adult and children's use of child literacy activities
- Increase participants' knowledge of child development related to literacy
- Enhance child/parent interaction
- Increase children's language ability

The program is portable, flexible, and addresses cultural diversity. Recently, the key points of the curriculum have been translated into Hindi, Portuguese, Spanish, Somali and French addressing the needs of an increasingly diverse population.

## Wallace Edwards, Illustrator

Wallace Edwards is a Canadian illustrator who has worked on several children's books, commercial art and editorial art for magazines. Wallace Edwards received the Governor General's Award for Children's Illustration in 2002 for his work on *Alphabeasts*.