

**Review of the scientific literature on family and community literacy**

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## **NOTE**

Note that this study was conducted jointly by two co-researchers, France Beauregard and Isabelle Carignan.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Action Plan on Reading in Schools (PALE) has been in existence since 2005. Its overall objective is to produce young readers who enjoy reading, who regularly use reading effectively, and who develop lifelong reading habits. The aim of this plan is to improve access to good quality resources at the material, pedagogical and cultural levels and to implement a series of measures to ensure their effectiveness (Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS), 2005).

Following a positive evaluation of Phase 1 of the plan, in 2008 the MELS launched Phase 2, which involves gradually deploying new measures aimed more specifically at: the recruitment and activation of school librarians, updating the teaching staff, reinforcing a regional dynamic and supporting families in the development of children's reading habits. In the evaluation, this last target was found to be weak, particularly with regard to supporting parents and making them aware of the importance of reading (MELS, 2008). Indeed, parents have a fundamental role in developing their children's reading skills, both in early childhood and when they are in school.

The *Service de la recherche et de l'évaluation* wishes to have a summary of current knowledge on effective family literacy programs. The objective of this study is to survey the family literacy practices and interventions that have the best scientific foundations to ensure success in developing reading enjoyment in children that will serve them throughout their lives. Particular attention will be paid to existing programs that foster reading in elementary and secondary school students.

In this report, we begin by presenting definitions of the concepts of "literacy", "family literacy" and "community literacy", followed by the methodology we used to survey and synthesize the studies. We then describe the programs evaluated and the literacy activities proposed, as well as the factors that may influence those activities. Finally, we make recommendations to promote the development of effective family literacy programs and the implementation of winning strategies.

## **DEFINITIONS**

The literature presents numerous definitions of the term “literacy”. Moreover, many authors include the aspects of family, community, school, media, etc., within their definitions of the concept of “literacy”. It is therefore difficult to find a definition of “literacy” on its own.

### **The concept of “literacy”**

The OECD defines “literacy” from a cognitive and linguistic standpoint, since they consider it to be the ability to understand and use written information in everyday life, at home, at work and in society to achieve personal objectives and to broaden one’s knowledge and skills (OCDE, 1994, in Viau and Bélanger, 2008).

Masny (2001) offers a definition that is both cognitive and socio-constructivist:

When we speak, write or read, we construct meaning by basing ourselves on a particular context. More specifically, this act of constructing meaning that we call “literacy” is integrated into the culture and into the sociopolitical and sociohistorical dimensions of a society and its institutions (Hornberger, 1999, 2000, in Masny, 2001). This view of a society’s literacy serves as a point of reference underpinning the learning of oral communication, reading and writing (Masny, 2001, p. 15). [Authors’ translation]

To this definition, following the example of the Centre for Literacy (2010), we would add the term “listen”, since effective communication requires both a transmitter and a receiver. Thus, the act of listening would appear to be as important as speaking.

Our definition of literacy is the development of the ability to read, to write, to speak and to listen. In addition, these "literacy" practices can be used in everyday life, at home, at work, in school, or in the community, depending on the goals of each individual, in interaction with their own values and their own culture.

### **The concept of “family literacy”**

The same problem is encountered in the different definitions of the concept of “family literacy”, since, in the first stages of learning, literacy develops from family literacy. We have opted here for definitions that are more socio-constructivist, without however neglecting the cognitive aspect: “in the context of family literacy, parents and significant others (including extended family members)



lend the necessary support in learning a literacy skill or concept but ‘hand-off’ the task to the children when they are capable of completing it independently” (Rogoff, 1990, p. 64, in Anderson, Lenters and McTavish, 2008).

Boudreau et al. (2006) refer to family literacy as consisting of the different interactions between parents and their children around reading and writing in daily life.

### **The concept of “community literacy”**

What is meant by the term “community”? For some authors, it refers to ONE specific community (language, tradition, etc.) (Dionne-Coster, 2006), while for others it connotes THE community, including such things as going to the library (Trenholm and Mirenda, 2006). Here are some definitions of community literacy:

#### ***One community...***

- “Targets a community’s appreciation, understanding and use of literacy practices, that is, how people in a particular group speak, write, read, and value the world.” (Pluri-elles, 2010) [Authors’ translation]
- “Understands that people’s ways of being, interacting, doing and saying things can vary according to different groups; respecting differences between diverse communities” (Pluri-elles, 2010). [Authors’ translation]

#### ***The community...***

- “Learning how to read the community (families, neighbours, and educational, religious, cultural or other types of groups, both francophone and anglophone): the visible and non-visible aspects, such as values and beliefs, ways of doing and saying things” (Pluri-elles, 2010) [Authors’ translation]

In summary, there are so many definitions that it is difficult to adopt a common one around which there would be consensus. It is important to note that, in the literature consulted, the concepts of “literacy”, “family literacy” and “community literacy” are rarely defined.

## METHODOLOGY

The texts included in this survey were selected in several stages. The first stage consisted of identifying key words and then the relevant databases, journals and websites. Then, to avoid collecting literature that was either irrelevant or out of date, we developed selection criteria. The last stage was the actual selection and reading of articles.

### Key words

Based on suggestions made by the MELS representative, to which we added terms using a thesaurus, we identified the most relevant key words for this literature survey in both English and French (Table 1).

**Table 1. Key words**

<b>French</b>	<b>English</b>
Littératie familiale	Family literacy
Littératie communautaire	Community literacy
Famille ou parent	Parent or family
Programme de lecture	Program
Alphabétisation	Program evaluation
Évaluation	Reading program
Pratiques	Evaluation
Interventions	Parenting skills
Stratégies	Strategy
	Practices
	Interventions

### Survey strategies

Following this, we combined different strategies to locate documents for the analysis. The first strategy consisted of searching the various computerized databases. To those suggested by the MELS—Francis, Repère, ERIC, PsychINFO and Education Research—we added Current Contents / Current Issues, Dissertations and Theses, and CBCA Fulltext Education. The first two of these databases contain articles in French, while the rest are mostly in English. These databases provided professional or scientific articles in the fields of education, humanities and social sciences

A second strategy consisted of a manual search of reference books, monographs and specialized journals. The reference books consulted were: *Handbook of Family Literacy*, *Handbook of Language and Literacy*, *Handbook of Reading Research*, *Encyclopedia of Education* and *Les littératies multiples*. The journals consulted were: *Reading Research Quarterly*, *Early Childhood Research*, *Journal of Literacy Research*, *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, *Review of Educational Research*, *Journal of Reading Education*, *Literacy*, *Journal of Literacy Research*, *Reading and Writing Quarterly*, *Reading Teacher*, *Bilingual Research Journal*, *Community Literacy Journal*, and *School Community Journal*. It should be noted that many reference books and journals were added to the original list proposed. In addition, we carefully examined the reference lists of the selected articles.

In the final stage of the process, we consulted a variety of websites of organizations involved in family or community literacy:

- *Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français (FCAF)*;
- Harvard Family Research Project of the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL);
- National Institute for Literacy;
- International Reading Association (IRA);
- United through Reading, of the *Fédération québécoise des organismes communautaires Famille (FQOCF)* with the “*Raconte-moi une histoire*” program.
- The “*Lire et faire lire*” program, supported by the *Ministère de la Famille et des Aînés*, of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions;
- *Coalition régionale de l'Ouest et du Nord pour l'alphabétisation en français (CRONAF)*, studies entitled “*Pour mon enfant d'abord*” and “*Main dans la main*”;
- *Centre d'alphabétisation familiale*;
- UNESCO study entitled “*Family Literacy: A Global Approach to Lifelong Learning*”;
- *Secrétariat national de l'alphabétisation*;
- Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation (APEF);
- Community Literacy Center;
- Community Literacy Collaborative;
- Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network;

- Websites of different provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Atlantic provinces, etc.).

### **Selection criteria**

To best demarcate the articles to be selected, we targeted a set of inclusion criteria. The first was the time frame to be covered by the literature survey. This criterion was set as the decade spanning 2000 to 2010, with the occasional inclusion of items from the 1990s. In fact, some articles presented the evaluation of a family literacy program developed in the 1990s, and it was necessary to return to the original source to properly understand the selected article.

The second criterion referred to the target population. The selected articles had to evaluate family or community literacy programs for families of children between the ages of 4 and 17 years. In addition, literacy programs for 4-year-old children had to be aimed at families who were socioeconomically disadvantaged or whose children were disabled, because Quebec’s public school system offers a pre-kindergarten for 4-year-olds for these two populations.

The third criterion referred to the scientific value of the article. Thus, we targeted primarily journals with peer-review committees. Finally, as the mandate progressed, we added a fourth criterion, which was that the articles should present results related not only to the evaluation of reading programs, but also to the parent-child relationship.

Many articles were compiled, but few were retained. Table 2 shows the number of articles surveyed, consulted and retained according to different databases.

**Table 2. Articles surveyed, consulted and read**

<b>Database</b>	<b>Articles compiled</b>	<b>Articles consulted</b>	<b>Articles read</b>
ERIC	10472	927	34
Erudit	8	8	8
Education Research Complete	1087	25	2
Handbook of Family Literacy			1
Internet		10 sites	12

We retained 48 articles that targeted different populations. Table 3 presents the numbers of articles retained according to the different populations. It should be noted that some articles cover more than one theme.

**Table 3. Theme or population**

<b>Theme or population</b>	<b>Articles retained</b>
Community literacy	4
Family literacy and fathers	6
Family literacy and families of children in difficulty	3
Family literacy and immigration, literacy, disadvantaged settings	12
Family literacy in general	8
Family literacy and adolescents	3
Family literacy programs	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>48</b>

### **Data analysis**

The articles were analyzed according to different criteria related to the specific objectives of the knowledge synthesis (evaluative, descriptive, correlational, etc.), the sampling, the program (universal, preventive, mixed), the analysis and interpretation, as well as the study's limitations. Each article was broken down into sections: definition of literacy (family literacy, community literacy, etc.); research question or hypothesis (as well as research objective); methodology (number of subjects, age, description of the program, etc.); results; conclusions; and authors' recommendations. The articles read for this survey are briefly summarized in a synthesis table found in Appendix A.

We were able to select more than 15 family literacy programs that scientifically demonstrated a certain success. We were also able to inventory the reading activities that researchers identified as being conducive to the development of family literacy. Finally, from these articles, certain factors emerged that appeared to have an influence on a literacy program's ultimate success or failure.

## **RESULTS**

In this section, we present the results of our research into family literacy practices and interventions that appear to have the strongest scientific foundations to ensure the successful development of young readers who enjoy reading, who regularly use reading effectively, and who develop lifelong reading habits. First we discuss community literacy, followed by family literacy. Our discussion of family literacy is divided into three sections: a presentation of family literacy programs; activities found in such programs, as well as family literacy projects; and a broad picture of individual and environmental factors that can influence the success of these programs.

### **Community literacy**

We did not find many articles on community literacy. However, we were able to draw several conclusions. First, it is often associated with family literacy, which makes it more difficult to disentangle community literacy from family literacy. Next, the articles surveyed revealed two types of activities geared toward community literacy. The first consisted of visits and reading workshops at the neighbourhood library (Trenholm and Mirenda, 2006; Ward and Wason-Ellam, 2005). The second type consisted of literacy activities belonging to a cultural group (Bloome, Katz, Solsken, Willet and Wilson-Keenan, 2000; Cairney, 2002; Jiménez, Smith and Teague, 2009). This type of project was seen among immigrant families or minority-group families. It was in these cases that community literacy and family literacy were intermingled. We present below the various programs inventoried from the articles surveyed.

### **Family literacy programs (evaluated and not evaluated)**

It is important to note that the programs described here were not all evaluated in the same way. Indeed, some family literacy programs only evaluated literacy performance (reading and/or writing). Others used questionnaires, carried out observations or conducted semi-structured interviews of parents and/or children about their representations/perceptions related to reading. In addition, some programs may not be described explicitly because information was sometimes sparse, or in some cases even absent.

It is also important to note that evaluated family literacy programs in secondary schools are relatively rare; most research has been carried out in elementary and pre-school settings.

### ***Secondary school programs***

#### *The Poetry Program*

The aim of Wiseman's study (2009) was to demonstrate how the attitudes, actions and feelings of secondary school students (11-14 years old) could have an impact on families' involvement in a poetry program intended to promote parents' involvement in school. This program was a partnership between a poet in the community, the teacher and the students. Because the article focused only on students' perceptions about their families' involvement in the poetry program, it did not specifically describe how the program itself functioned.

#### Students' perceptions about their parents

This study found three categories of perceptions among adolescents about their families: 1) some students believed the poetry program was the type of program that their parents could or would want to participate in; 2) some students constantly kept their parents from attending the poetry program because of its intimate nature; and 3) some students prevented their parents' involvement in activities proposed by the school because they felt their parents were too stressed and had no time.

The results of this study showed that the students played a very important role in how/whether their parents got involved in the proposed activities, and that students should play a greater role in setting up family literacy programs.

### ***Elementary school programs***

#### *The Fast Start Reading (FS) Program*

The *Fast Start Reading (FS) Program* is a program of parent tutoring in reading that was evaluated by Rasinski and Stevenson (2005). This project, carried out in Ohio (U.S.), ran for 11 weeks.

The program functioned in the following way: The first step consisted of an FS program training session (Fast Start Training). All the parents were invited to the school and, with their children,

underwent a 60-minute training session. The parents then received a manual about the program (Fast Start Parent Manual) that included a calendar, a letter with information on the FS program, a list of frequent words, and some word and rhyming games. The process was modelled and then parents were expected to practice at home with their children. Parents were supposed to read and re-read a short text to their children (between 10 and 15 minutes per day). The parent and child would then discuss the text they had read, and then the child would attempt to re-read the text on his or her own.

Parents were given new material each week (11 packets in all, one per week). The purpose of these materials was to help the child establish good reading and writing habits (literacy habits). Parents also had weekly access to telephone support. The parents appeared to appreciate this way of working.

The results appeared to demonstrate that time spent in dyads (parent–child) working on literacy increased after the FS program was implemented. In addition, the program seemed to have an overall positive impact on those children whose reading skills were weakest (in comparison with the control group). On the other hand, the experimental group and control group had similar results for decoding and fluidity, even though it was only the experimental group that went through the FS program.

It was also possible to see that, after going through a family literacy program such as the FS, parents often felt more confident afterward about helping their children. In general, the parents and children found the program useful and enjoyed the experience. Thus, the *Fast Start Reading* (FS) program appears to be an effective home tutoring option for parents and children at the beginning of the first year of elementary school.

#### *The PEFaL (Parent Empowerment for Family Literacy) project*

The aim of this project was to support vulnerable and marginalized families (primarily multicultural families) in developing literacy among children 6 to 8 years old (Camilleri, Spiteri and Wolfendale, 2005). Parents underwent 38 hours of training in the program, followed by two sessions a week for 10 weeks. In the eighth week, parents designed story bags and prepared the session in which they would use these bags with their children. A typical session in the PEFaL project was focused on discovering books, particularly Big Books. As they advanced through the



sessions, children learned to identify the titles, the names of the author and of the illustrator, the cover page, and the back cover.

Furthermore, an innovative element of this project was that it encouraged children and adults in different countries to communicate with each other by email. However, no details are provided on this aspect.

Finally, the premise of the project is that children with low literacy skills have parents with similar needs. In such cases, the parents' desire to help their children learn would serve as a springboard to their own literacy development.

There is still much to learn with regard to how family literacy programs can be adapted to different contexts, in different countries and among diverse target groups.

#### *The Letterbox Club Program*

The Letterbox Club is a family literacy program for foster families (Dymoke and Griffiths, 2010). This program, which originated in England, is aimed at children 7 to 11 years old.

This project was spread over six months, from June to November, to take advantage of summer vacation time. Books, math games at the child's level and stationery supplies would be sent by mail to the foster homes, addressed to the children themselves. The children were very excited at the idea of receiving a personalized package. Of interest is that the books were selected for their potential to stimulate and engage the children in reading.

More than 84% of the children enjoyed doing the family literacy program activities. This study showed, however, that it is difficult to change people's perceptions of what constitutes "real" reading and "real" books. For example, graphic novels and graphic books with CDs challenged the perceptions of the foster parents about what reading actually is. The purpose of sending the graphic book-CD was simply to provide different options for reading the same story.

The results showed that 5th- and 6th-grade students preferred to read and re-read own their own. Some children also said that they liked to share their reading or lend books to their brothers and sisters or to other members of the family. Other children, however, said they were reluctant to read with members of their family or for members of their family. Along another line, the most popular

book was *Where's Charlie?*, which was “read” (or rather, looked at) in a variety of ways and in different places (car, hospital, etc.).

### *The Read and Write Together Program*

Knafllic (2005) points out that many studies appear to have demonstrated the family's importance for the child's literacy development. To make up for the lack of encouragement for reading in the home, a variety of initiatives were implemented in Slovenia that integrated parents and children, as part of the intergenerational Read and Write Together family literacy program. This program was intended for parents with little education (10 years or less of schooling) whose children were in the early years of elementary school (6 to 9 years old).

The way the program worked was as follows. Small groups of six to eight parents plus their children were supported by two qualified teachers. These parents were, for the most part, very motivated to help their children. However, their basic skills needed to be improved to make them capable of providing the help their children required. This program involved two teachers, 50 hours of planning and 25 hours of work in the home.

The results of this program led to the categorization of three groups of parents. The first group was made up of parents who were very active (44%) in reading and had more schooling than the parents of the other two groups. The parents in this group read to their children, had books in the home and felt able to teach their children to read.

The parents of the second group (42%) did not read as actively. In fact, they were not in the habit of reading, but they bought books for their children. These parents accepted help from teachers, librarians and other professionals to improve their children's reading skills.

The parents of the third group (16%) were practically inactive when it came to reading. They had the least amount of schooling (eight years or less) and their living conditions were modest, even difficult, and they often were not able to take the time to read with their children. Therefore they did not read, did not encourage their children to read and were not interested in receiving professional support to help their children read.

Knafllic (2005) made reference to Nickse (1992), who considered that there were different ways of influencing a child's literacy. The most important of these were: fostering reading activities in the home, reading together and encouraging adults to read aloud to their children (thereby becoming models for reading).

One of the most positive experiences for the parents was that they were able to both play and learn with their children at the same time. Some of them even learned how to play with their children.

#### *The Even Start Family Literacy Program*

The objective of the study conducted by St-Pierre, Ricciuti and Rimdzius (2005) was to test the effectiveness of the Even Start Family Literacy Program. This program targeted children of ages 0 to 8 years and low-literate parents. The specific aim of the program was to improve school performance (especially in reading) of young children and of their parents, who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, by means of teaching done either in the home or in a community centre. The families were followed over two years.

According to the results, the effects were statistically non-significant. In fact, the test data showed that several of the teachers rarely paid attention to the children's ideas, i.e., very few of them listened to the children. It appeared that, instead, they spoke for the children rather than bringing them into the discussion. Along the same lines, several of the teachers made no mention of any interpersonal relationships with the children. Thus, language was not frequently used to encourage reading. Yet recent studies have demonstrated that children's language experiences are good predictors of later abilities in reading and problem-solving.

The researchers concluded that the program's lack of effectiveness could be explained by two factors: 1) the lack of active involvement of families, and 2) the ineffectiveness of the teaching services (which may have been due to program content or to the teaching approaches).

On the other hand, even though the results did not appear to be statistically meaningful, the parents nevertheless saw improvement after having gone through the program. In particular, they mentioned that:

- their children now knew the alphabet, could count to 100, recognized many colours, were reading more, tried to write and were better able to understand written concepts

- they had more books at home and a greater variety of literary resources, they wrote more, the quality of their children's reading had improved and they were more involved in their children's school.

The program was tested in the early 1990s and again a decade later. Since the results were similar (i.e., non-significant), the researchers began to call into question the theoretical model underpinning the Even Start Family Literacy Program. Whatever the case may be, i.e., regardless of the results, the families had a positive opinion of this program.

### *The Berlin Parent–Child Reading Program*

In their study, McElvany and van Steensel (2009) explored the factors that could strengthen or weaken the effectiveness of the implementation of certain family literacy programs. These researchers presented data particularly from a parent-child reading program in Berlin targeting 4th-grade children and from the Dutch program *Opstap* (Step Up), aimed at kindergarten students, which will be presented in the section on pre-school family literacy programs.

The Berlin program they evaluated was geared toward 4th-grade students (9–10 years old) and their parents. It consisted of putting in place the prerequisite conditions for reading and for textual understanding, as well as for the ability to speak orally about the context of a text. In addition, the program aimed to develop effective reading habits among the participating families. The program consisted of three 30-minute sessions per week, for a total of 43 sessions over a period of three to four months. Each session involved reading aloud, followed by discussions. The participating families were given teaching materials at no charge.

Each individual training session was very structured and was divided into the following steps:

Step 1: reading texts aloud, for about 15 minutes (fluidity and vocabulary)

Step 2: discussions on general metacognitive questions;

Step 3: three or four basic questions addressed to the parent or child;

Step 4: conversations based on questions of elaboration and on activities;

Step 5: a final activity involving cognitive strategies and motivation.

Statistical analyses confirmed that the Berlin program helped to enrich vocabulary and metacognition. On the other hand, in general, the results regarding the program's effectiveness

were rather mixed. To explain these results, the researchers looked at the quality of the implementation.

The intensity and the quality of parent–child interactions. On average, the families attended 81.4% of the program sessions; 31% of the families attended all the sessions. In addition, 23.3% of the families indicated that another member of the family (instead of the mother) participated in the program. The results related to the intensity and the quality of parent– child interactions are mixed.

The intensity and the quality of support and training provided to parents. No training was provided to parents. The participating families received an introductory letter covering the structure of the sessions, books for children, instructions on the program’s implementation, and practical advice on the programming and location of the sessions; they also received a parents’ manual with advice on how to correct reading errors. In addition, parents were given a telephone number to call if they had questions or needed help with a problem.

Attendance. The attendance rate was low. Only 34% of the families contacted took part in the program, and only 13% of the families contacted carried out the program as it had been set up from the start. There appeared to be no explanation given for this low rate of attendance.

The authors cited recent studies showing that the home literacy environment remained a crucial factor in the child’s progress in school, even beyond elementary school. Also, families differed in terms of socio-economic status and ethnic background. Finally, the development of literacy in children is partially determined by the experiences to which they are exposed, so the close link between these variables and literacy development makes it crucial to pay particular attention to the family.

#### *The TV Tune Out Tuesday Program*

Clark and McDonnell (2001) described a program they evaluated entitled *TV Tune Out Tuesday* aimed at both kindergarten and 6th-grade children. The objective of this program was to improve reading practices at home and at school. However, the detailed workings of the program were not provided in the article.

The results of the *TV Tune Out Tuesday* program showed that providing low-income parents with a **weekly bulletin** on different strategies they could use, some literacy activities to try and current research in the field helped to increase their awareness of the importance of literacy and led them to encourage more reading at home. The weekly bulletin also gave parents more ideas for helping their children. Finally, it also appeared that the weekly bulletin convinced parents of the value of reading; both groups of parents appreciated the information provided.

In addition, **motivational activities in the classroom** (*book talks*), whose purpose was to positively change students' ideas about reading, had the desired effect. In fact, there was a positive impact on both groups because the students talked more about what they had read. In these motivational activities, students read aloud, discussed what they were reading, talked about the authors, etc. These activities were carried out over a period of 14 weeks.

With regard to the **activity for increasing awareness** of time spent watching television, the impact was positive for kindergarten children but very minimal for the 6th-graders. The objective was to turn off the television while doing family literacy activities (going to the library, playing board games, reading, etc.). Indeed, children from 9 to 16 years old spend 20% of their time watching television and 1% reading (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1993). According to the National Council of Family Literacy (1999), the less time children spend watching television, the better their reading habits are. The use of media thus prevents parents from interacting with their children and helping them to develop literacy (Clark and McDonnell, 2001).

The parents of kindergarten children were asked to complete a questionnaire. From this, it could be seen that after going through the program, families' reading time had increased and it appeared that more families engaged in reading activities at home. In addition, the interventions (various motivational activities in school) appeared to have positively influenced children's attitudes toward reading and resulted in their apparently having more confidence in their reading skills.

From observations of 6th-graders' parents, it appeared that the interventions had slightly increased the time students spent reading at home; however, there is nothing to indicate whether this reading time was with the parent. In addition, the motivational activities appeared to have had a very slight impact on the students' attitudes toward reading.

Thus, this program had positive results, particularly for the kindergarten students.

### *The Parents as Mentors Program*

In her article, Cook-Cottone (2004) presents an evaluated and effective family literacy program. This program, aimed at students from 7 to 12 years old, was created and funded through a college-community-school partnership.

The program consisted of several stages:

- 1) Parent mentors and participants (parents and children) were recruited; however, the selection criteria were not mentioned.
- 2) Parent mentors underwent two 2-hour training sessions with a reading expert on literacy techniques (read alouds, decoding, phonics, sight words, etc.).
- 3) The recruited families and the parent mentors met weekly over a 10-week period (after school or evenings) to work on literacy using the techniques they had learned. This was a more academic approach that was not focused on fostering a love of reading.
- 4) In the final meeting, each small group (parent, child and parent mentor) celebrated reading with a party that included reading games and dramatic readings.

For the purposes of program evaluation, the students underwent pre- and post-tests on a voluntary basis. These were tests on decoding and sight words. The results were significant, showing that students' skills had improved.

Also on a voluntary basis, the parents first responded to a questionnaire and later underwent a telephone interview. From the questionnaire, before the program, it could be seen that 90% of the parents believed the school saw them as partners. Also, few parents had literacy habits at home with their children. On the other hand, 48% of the parents said they were ready to learn how to help their children develop their reading skills.

From the telephone interviews, done after the program, it could be seen that the parents found the activities and materials very helpful (use of an erasable board, reading aloud, creating little books, going to the library or a coffee shop, etc.). In addition, all the parents said the program had helped both their children and themselves to improve their literacy skills. Finally, a very large majority of

the parents considered the program to be excellent, while the rest considered it to be good or very good.

### *The “Lire avec fiston” Project*

The “*Lire avec fiston*” pilot project was created to combine families and reading in a non-school environment for boys with reading difficulties who were in regular classes (Carignan and Beaugard, 2010; Beaugard and Carignan, 2010). These were elementary school children in the 3rd and 4th grades (2nd cycle). This project matched the children with male students in the baccalaureate preschool and elementary school teacher training program (BEPP) of the Université de Sherbrooke. Their objective was to develop an enjoyment of reading based not only on the children’s interests, but also by including a male parent (or other significant male figure) in the process. The project was conducted three times between 2008 and 2010 (three triads in 2008; three triads in 2009; seven triads in 2010).

The project involved seven meetings. The first meeting was a plenary session held in a school in the Eastern Townships of Quebec. In attendance at that meeting were the school principal, the special education teacher, the teacher, the three parents, the three students, the three student teachers and two of their university professors. At this meeting, the male triads were formed and the project was explained.

The three triads (student–student teacher–parent) then met in the family setting four times, every two or three weeks, over a period of approximately four months. The student teachers contacted the families by phone or email to set up the meetings at convenient times.

The school requested another plenary session at mid-project in order to find out how each of the male triads was progressing.

Finally, the seventh session was a plenary session in the community. In 2008 and 2009, this meeting was held in a sugar shack in the region. In 2010, because the researchers had seven triads rather than three, a catering service was used to save on expenses. That meeting was held in the school and therefore had much more of a “school” ambiance than the two sugar shack meetings. This last meeting was the ideal occasion for gathering everyone’s impressions of the project, the changes seen in the students and how the project might be improved in the following year. At that



meeting, the student teachers presented the students with books matching their interests as well as certificates recognizing their participation in the project.

Despite the fact that the student teachers had to work with very different family situations, the preliminary results, obtained from the teaching staff, indicated that the students seemed to have acquired a feeling of competence in reading. They also noted improvements in both behaviour and school performance which helped with the students' inclusion in regular classes. The school principal also felt that family-school relationships seemed to be more positive.

It should be noted that the parents did not have to pay to participate in this project. A grant from the Université de Sherbrooke's "École en chantier" covered all expenses for students and their families. The project was also replicated in other schools, where it was adapted in accordance with available resources (Beauregard and Carignan, 2010). In the winter of 2011, it will also be implemented in an English-language setting in an elementary school in Pennsylvania.

### ***Preschool programs***

#### *The Family Literacy Bag Program*

The *Family Literacy Bag* (FLB) was a preschool family literacy program aimed particularly at Hispanics (Dever and Burts, 2002). The aim of this program was to encourage home book-reading among children and to foster literary discussions at home. To spark children's interest in the FLB and to make them want to use books at home, other books were brought into classroom activities.

At the start of the school year, parents attended a preparatory meeting whose purpose was to help them define their commitment and their role in the FLB program. Then, every three weeks, the children brought home a new bag from school. This family literacy "bag" contained three high-quality books of different genres and levels. It also contained additional activities and a parents' guide to help them read with their children and then discuss the readings together.

The evaluation of the FLB program showed that it fostered family reading at home. In addition, the results seemed to indicate that the families used and appreciated the bags of books. In fact, they became more involved in reading than in the activities available in the FLB. It appeared that the suggested activities were less appreciated by the families.

The results showed that 82% of the families appreciated the books; 31% of the families read the books more than once; 45% of the families enjoyed the suggested activities; and 58% of the families found the information provided to be helpful.

Finally, it appeared that parents and their children spent more time together reading after having gone through the program. In fact, parents reported spending more “positive” quality time with their children and spoke, for example, of experiencing emotions related to reading. In general, the families said that the project had encouraged reading and interacting with books at home. The parents spoke of having discovered their children through this experience. In summary, the project helped make reading a regular home activity.

### *The PRINTS (Parents’ Roles Interacting with Teacher Support) Program*

The objective of Fagan’s study (2001) was to describe a process for evaluating the effectiveness of family literacy programs. To understand these programs, there are two factors to consider: 1) the content and format; and 1) the participants. The program evaluated here was called *PRINTS (Parents’ Roles Interacting with Teacher Support)* and was geared primarily at children 1 to 6 years old. The program could also be used throughout elementary school for children with reading difficulties.

Functioning of the PRINTS program. The program was based on five components: oral language, games, book sharing, situational writing (*environmental print*) and drawing. At each of these stages, a parent or caregiver could play five roles: 1) create opportunities for discussion with the children; 2) give positive feedback; 3) interact effectively; 4) model their literacy; and 5) set guidelines.

The program’s implementation material included a manual for the facilitator and a demonstration video on the parents’ and children’s involvement in the literacy activities. The parents’ manual provided basic information on how to carry out the activities. The facilitators attended a training session of 5 to 6 hours. They then trained the parents over a period of 12 weeks, in 2-hour weekly sessions.

The program's structure was preset, but there was some openness to parents' suggestions. The program was originally developed for low-income parents. They received a kit containing glue, pencils, scissors, etc., as well as a children's book at the end of each session.

Results. The results of the program evaluation revealed six categories of parental responses: 1) experiencing a change in attitudes/judgments or ideas (*insight*); 2) knowing the conditions of use; 3) developing a sense of ownership; 4) understanding the program's organization and structure; 5) knowing how to obtain materials and resources and how to use them; and 6) developing an awareness of their children's characteristics and needs.

1) Parents' attitudinal change. The parents were not aware that they were already doing literacy activities at home. Some parents realized that it was never too early to involve their children in literacy activities. Finally, and most of all, parents understood that game-playing was a major learning opportunity and that it was important for them to engage actively in family literacy activities with their young children.

2) Knowing the conditions of use. Many school-centric family literacy programs are based on sending home books for parents to read. Integrating this task into the family's daily activities can be difficult. With PRINTS, the parents understood that there was no specific time designated for reading. This lack of pressure and the recognition of the importance of interacting with their children sparked parents' creativity: a) recognizing hard work at home; b) having conversations on the street on a variety of subjects; c) playing guessing games; and d) reciting nursery rhymes on the bus. Thus, the child's daily life, rather than any specific activity, became the focal point for learning.

3) Developing a sense of ownership. The confidence placed in parents meant no one was telling them what to do; they were not required to report to anyone at all (development of a sense of ownership). The result was a stronger self-image and a sense of personal effectiveness.

4) Understanding the program's organization and structure. As the parents developed a better understanding of the program's structure, they became more likely to interact with their children.

5) Knowing how to obtain materials and resources and how to use them. The success of the learning activities depended on an adequate supply of materials (books, etc.). Since the participants

were often on welfare, the program was developed using very inexpensive materials. Parents used their creativity and ingenuity to carry out a wide range of very interesting activities. In addition, the book given to parents at the end of each session was a reward for them and a motivation for the children.

6) Developing an awareness of their children's needs. The PRINTS program allowed parents to see that they were not alone in their situation and to let go of feelings of guilt about their children's learning difficulties. The program allowed them to share their experiences. It also gave their children an opportunity to be members of a community. PRINTS thus helped parents to develop a sense of empowerment and to have greater confidence in their abilities to help their children.

In conclusion, we feel it is important to point out that parents often engage their children in literacy activities without realizing it. Literacy programs that hope to elicit more participation from their target groups need to start from families' backgrounds and cultural capital.

#### *The Dutch program Opstap*

As mentioned earlier, the study by McElvany and van Steensel (2009) analyzed factors that could strengthen or weaken the effectiveness of implementation of certain family literacy programs.

This second program they evaluated, which was aimed at kindergarten children from low-income families, was adapted from the Israeli program HIPPY (Lombard, 1981). The Opstap program, which spanned two years, required parents and children to do literacy activities every day. Mothers, the main participants, joined the program on a voluntary basis and were supported by trainers from the same social and ethnic backgrounds. Every two weeks, these trainers helped the participating families by explaining the program activities and showing them strategies to encourage interactions. In addition, parents underwent training sessions over a period of two weeks led by professional supervisors. The program covered a variety of activities (group reading, discussions about pictures in books, language games, rhyming, singing). This was a home language program offered in The Netherlands in Turkish and Arabic, which were the maternal languages of the target groups who had come from other countries. The basic procedure included three steps:

Step 1: parents and children looked at a picture and then talked about it;

Step 2: parents read the story related to the picture;

Step 3: parents and children talked about the story.

The results of the program evaluation, however, appeared to be inconclusive. This was apparently due to the way in which the program was implemented:

The intensity and quality of parent–child interactions. In most cases, parent–child interactions were reciprocal, according to both the parents and the children. Also, in most families the interactions were limited to the first level, meaning that the parent and the child only named the objects and described the actions in the picture.

The quality of interactions was probably influenced by the language that was used, i.e. Dutch (the language of schooling), instead of the maternal language for 17 of the 54 families in the program. In addition, in 21 of the 54 families, someone other than the mother (father, older sibling, etc.) carried out the program. Such a situation can have negative impacts if that family member is not trained and does not know the program's objectives.

The intensity and quality of support and training provided to the parents. One-third of the families appeared not to have received adequate support, given that the trainers followed up with them in Dutch, a language that these families did not speak fluently. This was the language used in schools, but not the language spoken in the home.

Attendance. The trainer assigned to each family indicated the number of home visits and the frequency of parents' attendance at the meetings. The frequency of home visits was optimal; however, parents' attendance at meetings was particularly low. Even though 50% of the parents regularly attended meetings, more than one-third attended only a few times or not at all. Most absences were due to logistical problems (inconvenient times, location, etc.). Some absences were temporary (illnesses, pregnancies), and others were more structural (both parents working during the day). Finally, some mothers were absent because they could not coordinate attendance at meetings and with their responsibilities for other small children at home.

#### *Family literacy programs for low-literacy families*

The objective of Letouzé's study (2007) was to measure the impacts of family literacy programs on parents and children in a minority francophone environment in Ontario. These programs are

geared toward children in kindergarten and first grade. These programs were entitled: *Des livres dans mon baluchon* [*Books in my Bag*] (development of linguistic, cognitive and emotional skills); *Grandir avec mon enfant* [*Growing up with my Child*] (improvement of parental skills in reading and writing); *Lire et écrire à la maison* [*Reading and Writing at Home*] (helping low-literate parents to support their children's learning); *Je m'éveille à la maison* [*Waking up at Home*] (phonics awareness and developing a love of reading). These programs provided opportunities for children to talk together and learn French for a few hours each week over several weeks. Here we will focus on the results obtained rather than on a description of each program.

The results indicated that the families had undergone changes. In fact, their literacy habits and use of the French language had changed positively. It could be seen that:

- the frequency of literacy activities and the use of French increased between the program's start and its end;
- viewing of films or DVDs (English and French) increased from 39.6% to 51.1%;
- reading newspapers, magazines and comic books increased from 44.2% to 60.4%;
- use of writing increased from 67.5% to 74.4%;
- use of the French language increased from 23.3% to 30.3%, in terms of watching television in French;
- viewing of films, videos or DVDs in French increased from 20.9% to 25.6%;
- reading books in French increased from 34.9% to 51.2%.

They also were able to observe increases in the frequency of parent-child interactions and in the use of language (French or English) in sports activities, crafts projects, conversations and helping with homework.

According to the trainers, the parents were better equipped to assume their role as the children's primary educators and were more confident in their abilities. However, the trainers were disappointed to see that francophones were less involved in family literacy programs.

### ***Main criticisms of family literacy programs***

The objective of the study conducted by Anderson, Anderson, Friedrich and Kim (2010) was to present the developments in family literacy over the past 10 years. In particular, they highlighted the main criticisms that have been raised concerning family literacy programs:

(1) the lack of systematic evaluation;

(2) the fact that women are unfairly, or by default, given the responsibility for their children's literacy development;

(3) the fact that foreign languages and family literacy practices are overlooked, while school literacy is "imposed", particularly in families of marginalized communities where the language spoken at home is not the dominant language. The language of schooling is thus imposed.

In addition, family literacy is conceptualized very conservatively by the public, decision-makers and those who create the programs. In fact, parent-child shared book reading has become practically synonymous with family literacy.

### **Family literacy activities and practices (without evaluation)**

In this section, we present the different activities and diverse literacy practices that take place in families. First, we discuss families whose language at home is different from the language of schooling. Then we discuss families for whom the language of schooling is the same as the language used at home.

#### ***Families whose language at home is different from the language of schooling***

Sturtevant and Kim (2010) studied adolescents 11 to 14 years old who spoke Spanish at home and for whom English was the language of schooling. They particularly noted the following non-school family literacy practices:

##### *Role reversal: the student helps the family with literacy*

- Students/children help their parents prepare for exams (because the parents have difficulty understanding English);
- Students/children tutor a parent or another adult in the family in English;
- Students/children teach a younger sister how to read in their maternal language (i.e., Spanish);
- Students/children help to fill out legal documents (interpreting contracts, passport forms, communications with employers, etc.)

##### *Family supporting and encouraging the child's learning*

- The family considers learning to be important;
- Mother encourages the child to read books (female figure and reading);
- Parents encourage writing;
- Parents go to the library with their children (community);
- Discussions about books borrowed from the public library (sharing a love of literature).

It can be seen from this study that adolescents whose parents are immigrants can sometimes teach literacy (reading and writing) to their families. It is nevertheless important to point out that the family is there to support them and encourage their learning.

#### *Literacy practices in an Indo-canadian family*

In addition, the study by Mui and Anderson (2008) documented the family literacy practices of a 6-year-old Indo-Canadian student whose mother tongue was Punjabi. In this home, the grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins all lived together and assigned much importance to literacy. Within this family, there was someone (an extended family member) who played a significant role in developing literacy among the children of the family: the “nanny”. Some of the literacy practices that the nanny carried out with the children were:

- pretending to be a student when the children “played school” (role playing);
- taking part in games and theatre plays created by the children and referring directly to what they had seen on television;
- playing board games with them.

Looking at these family literacy practices carried out by the nanny, it may be interesting to question and reconsider the meaning given to the term “family” and to interpret it more broadly.

The mother in this family preferred to sing to her children at bedtime because she did not enjoy shared book reading. Culturally, this is not necessarily a valued family literacy practice.

#### *Other literacy activities/practices seen in diverse multicultural studies*

- Reading stories to children (Sturtevant and Kim, 2010);
- Chanting songs (Sturtevant and Kim, 2010);
- Older children reading to younger ones (Sturtevant and Kim, 2010);
- Using “language brokering” (alternating between two languages approximately equally) in which children serve as translators between their parents and school staff (Moll and Gonzalez, 1994, in Sturtevant and Kim, 2010).
- Using the different opportunities provided by the library (Ward and Wason-Ellam, 2005)
  - Link with popular culture



- Using the computer and electronic media (Ward and Wason-Ellam, 2005)
- Reading books in one's maternal language (Bloome *et al.*, 2000)
- Parents showing and discussing their literacy practices with students. Reading the Koran, reading in Urdu, etc. (Patton, Silva and Myers, 1999)
- Role playing and imaginary games (Burns, Espinosa and Snow, 2003)
- Using a variety of materials (book, paper, pencil, etc.)
- Reading something and then discussing the subject
- Making up and telling stories
- Singing in one's maternal language
- Parent-child shared reading activities (Beer-Toker and Gaudreau, 2006)
- Telling stories without using a book (Armand, Gagné, De Koninck, and Dutil, in press)
- Reading magazines, newspapers, educational books and comic books
- Playing electronic games
- Reading traditional poems (Janes and Karmeni, 2001)
- Creating one's own storybook
- Organizing a literary fair

***Families for whom the language at home and the language of schooling are the same***

*Various family literacy activities in the maternal language*

- Playing rhyming games and phonics games (Boudreau, St-Laurent and Giasson, 2006; Giasson and St-Laurent, 2004)
- Playing with sight words (Cook-Cottone, 2004)
- Reading and writing words (Boudreau et al., 2006)
- Art activities (Karther, 2002); making decorations (Masny and Waterhouse, 2009)
- Making dolls (Karther, 2002)
- Using dictionaries, for adolescents (Bursuk, Robbins and Lazaroff, 2010)
- For unmotivated readers: letting them choose for themselves something to read (Baker, 2003)
- Viewing a film based on a book, and reading the book afterward (Baker, 2003)
- Doing art activities in books and magazines (Baker, 2003)

- Parent–child shared reading; modelling (Masny and Waterhouse, 2009; Baker, 2003)
- Teachers sending books home with a child
- Inviting parents to school for specific activities
- Using audiobooks
- Sharing books with friends and family members
- Providing interesting reading that is unrelated to school
- Using CD-ROMs, email and the Internet (Carrington and Luke, 2003)
- Doing activities that are visual, oral, written or tactile (Masny and Waterhouse, 2009)
- Children writing texts
- Making seasonal greeting cards
- Creating recipes
- Expressing one’s ideas about a text
- Writing for everyday needs (shopping list) (Dionne, St-Laurent and Giasson, 2004)
- Reading the newspaper
- Parent–child reading at bedtime (Giasson et al., 2004)
- Parents listening to their child read aloud (Sénéchal, 2008)
- Parents reading aloud (Sénéchal, 2008; Cook-Cottone, 2004)
- Interactive reading with family members or friends (Chui and Ko, 2005)
- Using technologies (computer, radio, television) (Saracho, 2002)
- Making predictions while reading
- Playing family syllable games (Cook-Cottone, 2004)
- Making little books at home
- Family visits to the library
- Attending a presentation by a professional author
- Family visit to a bookstore and coffee shop
- Comparing, at home, reading approaches used as games
- Making T-shirts with poems on them

#### Father–child activities

- Exploring rhythm in language (Saracho, 2008)

- Pointing to and naming a picture (Saracho, 2008)
- Touching and feeling a book (Saracho, 2008)
- Father reading books, newspapers and magazines
  - Child then asking the father questions about what he has read
- Father encouraging the child to read
- Father encouraging reading, using pictures (the child takes over the story)
- Making sure the child can easily see the pictures while the father is reading (Stile and Ortiz, 1999)
- Fathers reading to children whenever they want to
- Identifying books that both adults and children can enjoy
- Choosing a time for reading when the children are most awake
- Making a special time for reading that will become a part of the children's daily routine
- Letting children be an integral part of the reading process, such as by letting them turn the pages
- Teaching children to point to the pictures as the story is being read, to show their understanding
- Using the voice as a tool to express emotions while reading

*Positive points of family literacy programs*

Family literacy programs offer undeniable benefits for, among other things, the development of language and reading, school learning, and the development of parental reading skills, especially for immigrant families, rural families, and low-education families (Anderson et al., 2010; Chiu and Ko, 2005; Dionne, Giasson and Saint-Laurent, 2005; Letouzé, 2007; Knafllic, 2005; Maltais, 2007; Sénéchal, 2008). However, to ensure the success of any literacy program, certain factors and conditions must be in place. Beer-Toker and Gaudreau (2006) identified four types of factors for literacy programs:

- Cognitive: phonic awareness, awareness of writing, knowledge of the alphabet, representation of the reading process, language development and memory;
- Affective: interest in and attitudes toward the written word, sense of competence, value accorded to the written word, teacher–student relationship;
- Social: beliefs, attitudes and practices of the family and cultural milieu, atmosphere in the classroom;

- Didactic: teaching methods and strategies.

Even if not all these factors, particularly the didactic ones, are related to family literacy programs, several of them have been identified in studies on family literacy.

### **Factors influencing family literacy practices**

These factors are quite varied and can have both positive and negative impacts on family literacy programs. Moreover, they are interrelated; one can result from another, and vice versa. We have targeted those that were most often referenced by the authors. They fall into two categories: individual and environmental. Individual factors are related to the child, the family, the teacher and any other person designated as a mentor in family literacy programs. They can also be related to beliefs, perceptions, reading skills, feelings of competence and culture. Environmental factors are more organizational and structural (materials, availability, etc.). Note that the factors listed below are not presented in any particular order of importance.

#### ***Individual factors***

Individual factors refer to family culture, perceptions about reading, each person's role in a family literacy program, the sense of competence and the interrelationships required by such a program.

#### ***Valuing the family culture***

To start with, it is important to ask ourselves what we mean by family. When we consider the notion of "family", our first thought is of a father and a mother. However, the different studies we surveyed indicated that other people can be significant figures and play an important role in a child's literacy development. Thus, Baker (2003) notes the importance of using brothers and sisters as motivators in a family literacy program. For their *Lire avec fiston* project, Beauregard and Carignan (2010) called upon grandfathers or stepfathers. The same is true in foster families (Dymoke and Griffiths, 2010), where foster parents would be asked to participate in the program. This "new" view of the family calls into question the nuclear family's default position as the preferred model (Mui and Anderson, 2008). In fact, Mui and Anderson (2008) consider a "nanny" to be a member of the family. For Cairney (2002), community leaders can play an important role

in promoting family literacy by participating in such projects. In short, in any family literacy program we need to broaden our idea of what constitutes a traditional family, particularly when we are addressing immigrant families, rural families or low-education families. It is only in this way that the understanding of family culture becomes truly meaningful.

### Family culture

Several authors spoke about the need to know and understand family culture when implementing a family literacy program or project (Arzubiaga, Rueda and Monzó, 2002; Baker and Scher, 2002; Caspe, 2003; Janes and Kermani, 2001; Saracho (2002). According to Burns, Espinosa and Snow (2003), for a program to succeed, a respect for families' cultural capital is essential. This cultural capital refers not only to the language spoken at home, particularly in the case of immigrant or minority-language families (Jiménez et al., 2009; Masny and Waterhouse, 2009), but also to family literacy practices that are already in place (Bloome et al., 2000; Cairney, 2002). These practices should, in fact, be valued and not excluded from the program.

It is especially important for school staff to have this knowledge, as they are often the ones serving as investigators in a family literacy project. Some authors point out that family literacy programs are often created in response to school needs rather than to family or community needs (Arzubiaga et al., 2002; Cairney, 2002). Moreover, such a disregard for cultural capital results in adjustment problems between the family's way of functioning and that of the school (Saracho, 2002). The proposed activities sometimes produce opposite results from what was expected. Neuman (1996, in Burns, 2003) observed that different families can have different reactions to the same reading; for instance, some may be shocked by a piece of writing that goes against their beliefs and values (Janes and Kermani, 2001). Similarly, it is a mistake to assume that family literacy practices will be the same in all families belonging to a particular group or economic status (Armand, Gagné, DeKoninck and Dutil, in press; Beer-Toker and Gaudreau, 2006; Janes and Kermani, 2001). In fact, it appears that mother's education is a positive factor for family literacy, and not family income or father's education (Giasson and Saint-Laurent, 2004).

In addition, when developing a family literacy program, particular attention should be paid to immigrant families. Indeed, they experience many adaptation problems, of which the school staff are not necessarily aware. First, it is important to take into account the parents' immigration

experience and pre-immigration factors (Armand et al., in press; Arzubaiaga et al., 2002; Patton et al., 1999). Some families immigrate to find work and others to escape war or political/religious danger. Thus, families will not all have the same emotional availability to a family literacy project. In addition, understandably, some topics of reading should be avoided, depending on the various cultures. Then, for many families there is a linguistic barrier to consider (Beer-Toker and Gaudreau, 2006; Mansy and Waterhouse, 2009). For children who are learning to read in a second language, it is very important to acquire a solid base of communication in the language of the new country before beginning to learn how to read or write (Burns et al., 2003). These authors believe it is important, in a literacy project, that parents be able to use their maternal language. In addition, Burns et al. (2003) consider that membership in a particular culture influences the development of reading and writing. At the same time, immigrant parents are concerned about making sure their children do not lose their culture and language of origin.

### *Perceptions about reading*

What is reading? What do we mean by “real reading”? Are there “real” books and “false” books? Many questions have been raised which indicate that people have very different ideas about what reading is.

### Children’s perceptions about reading

Literacy is often considered to be a cognitive process, but actually, it is primarily social (Cairney, 2002). Thus, some children see reading as a collaborative, or even communal, activity. These are children who read their books with the family and for the family. Besides the feeling of competence, which we will look at later, certain factors appear to influence children’s perceptions about reading: the purpose of reading, and their parents perceptions about reading.

Many children do not understand the purpose of reading. Often they see the purpose as academic (Bloome et al., 2000; Ward and Wason-Ellam, 2005), especially those children who have negative attitudes toward reading (Bursuk et al., 2010). Yet reading can be utilitarian, friendly, etc. In fact, good readers see reading from this angle and enjoy reading (Chui and Ko, 2005; Giasson and Saint-Laurent, 2004). On the other hand, reading is meaningful for children only to the extent that it is related to their reality (Dionne et al., 2004, 2005; Saharo, 2008). Therefore, if we hope to reach

children in a family literacy program, the focus must be on reading enjoyment (Collins and Matthey, 2001).

The second factor influencing children's perceptions of reading is how their parents perceive reading (Baker and Scher 2002; Baker 2003). These perceptions will affect their level of commitment to the family literacy program (Wiseman, 2009).

#### Parents' perceptions about reading

Parents have different perceptions and beliefs about reading. Some see reading as a school matter and do not feel that a family literacy project should concern them. This may be due to the fact that many family literacy activities are initiated by the school and take place in the school (Cairney, 2002; Collins and Matthey, 2001). Yet it appears that programs in the home produce better results than school-based programs (Cook-Cottone, 2004). Likewise, the meaning parents give to literacy is also important (Arzubiaga et al., 2002; Bursuk et al., 2010). Thus, some families have literacy practices that include reading children's literature or books that are scientific or even religious (Armand et al., in press; Janes and Kermani, 2001; Saracho, 2002). It may be that these families consider reading children's books or magazines to be inappropriate. In such cases, it is important to widen the scope of possible reading. Some studies incorporated reading activities that used different types of books and other media: graphic novels, graphic books with CDs, comic books, viewing a film based on a book and then reading the book afterward, etc. (Baker and Scher, 2002; Dymoke and Griffiths, 2010). These studies have shown that it is possible to change these perceptions. Thus, Clark and McDonnell (2001) found that, according to parents, the *TV Tune Out Tuesday* family literacy program had a positive influence on students' attitudes toward reading and on their levels of confidence in their reading skills, particularly among the youngest (kindergarten vs. 6th-grade students)

Another belief is that, for "real" reading to occur, it must be the child who reads. Yet some children, especially those who cannot read well, prefer to listen to a story on CD and follow along in a book, or to have a story read to them rather than to read it themselves (Baker, 2003; Dymoke and Griffiths, 2010). Some parents, however, believe that "real" reading is supposed to be a solitary and silent activity (Dymoke and Griffiths, 2010).

In addition, some studies showed that parents did not always realize they already had family literacy practices (Fagan, 2001; Karther, 2003). Other parents realized that it was never too early to engage in family literacy activities with their children. Finally, there were parents who understood especially that play activities provided major learning opportunities and that it was important to engage actively in such activities with their children. Also, parents who enjoy reading transmit this pleasure to their children (Giasson and Saint-Laurent, 2004; Saracho, 2002).

Finally, particular attention should be paid to the perceptions of immigrant parents and parents who are undereducated or illiterate. Their own school experiences will influence their perceptions of the school system and of reading (Armand et al., in press). Thus, illiterate parents with poor reading skills would have received very little literacy stimulation, and their school experience would often have been negative. They generally have traditional beliefs about the acquisition of reading skills and their idea of literacy development is focused on mastering habits in isolation; consequently, their children are at risk of developing similar notions (Dionne et al., 2005).

#### Teachers' perceptions

As mentioned earlier, family literacy programs are often created in response to the school's needs. The books and strategies that are taught are therefore in line with what is taught in school. In this respect, Baker (2003) suggests that teachers should never assume that parents have the same literacy as they do, because each has a different culture. Also, it is important that teachers understand the interdependence of oral–writing–reading skills (Patton et al., 1999), and so it is essential to work on this aspect with them.

Certainly, people's perceptions of reading will influence their idea of their own role and of the practices they should implement to carry out this role.

#### *Each person's role*

##### The role of the student

On one hand, in any family literacy program, children are very active. They read, and they may also be the ones choosing what to read. However, the types of activities are often decided by the adults around them. Yet children might be able to suggest avenues of intervention that would not



occur to adults. Indeed, in a study of 3rd-grade students, Masny et al. (2009) observed that their creativity led to activities that had not originally been envisioned in the family literacy project.

On the other hand, children play a key role in their parents' commitment (Wiseman, 2009). In fact, parents engage in a family literacy program first and foremost because of their children (Chui and Ko, 2005; Knafllic, 2005; Letouzé, 2007; Wiseman, 2009). However, some families wait for the child to take the initiative (Burns et al., 2003; Collins and Matthey, 2001).

#### The role of the parents (family)

First, there appears to be a wide range of family literacy practices that are not necessarily associated with any particular socioeconomic status or cultural group (Arzubiaga et al., 2002; Baker and Scher, 2002; Caspe, 2003; Dionne et al., 2004; Giasson and Saint-Laurent, 2004). Therefore, it should not be assumed that all families from socioeconomically disadvantaged settings or of the same ethnicity have the same family literacy practices. Then, before proposing new practices, it is important to take into account the daily family practices already in place. In fact, parents' and families' views on what literacy is and their roles in it are important when it comes to acquiring and using family literacy practices (Armand et al., in press). Finally, it is important to prepare parents adequately for the role they are being expected to play. Otherwise parents may feel incompetent or overwhelmed. To ensure they are confident in themselves and their methods, they need to be given support and practical ideas (Bursuk et al., 2010; Collins and Matthey, 2001; Cook-Cottone, 2004; Sénéchal, 2008). If not, the outcome will be the opposite of what is sought, i.e., parents will disengage from the project (Dymoke and Griffiths, 2010). This observation applies equally to anyone who has a "mentoring" role in a family literacy project (Anderson et al., 2008). In this regard, see our earlier definition of the notion of family that widens the scope of this idea.

Along other lines, family literacy practices can also depend on the parents' reading skills. Thus, parents who are competent readers will help their children to see links between what they read and their experiences, which is not the case for parents who are poor readers (Chui and Ko, 2005; Dionne et al., 2005). Burns et al. (2003) add that parents' attitudes toward reading and their language skills will determine the types of experiences and interventions they will undertake with their children. Moreover, their perceptions of their children's reading abilities will influence how

they behave when reading. Parents who demonstrate that reading is pleasurable will provide their children with the motivation they need to work at learning to read, even if they find it hard (Baker, 2003).

The role of the school (teacher, principal, special education teacher, leader of a literacy project)

When working with parents, the school, and more specifically the teachers, should be sensitive to parents' beliefs, attitudes and roles in literacy development (Baker and Scher, 2002; Saracho, 2008). They should also examine what role they expect parents' to play in a family literacy project—active or passive? Their vision of that role will influence what activities they propose. By that very fact, teachers should not assume that parents know how to carry out literacy activities (Baker, 2003). To understand the scope of this reflection, we need only to consider those parents who are poor readers. The authors recommended that teachers show parents current approaches to teaching reading and help them to support their children with strategies that are more oriented to meaning than to decoding (Dionne et al., 2005). For example, they could show parents how to teach their children self-correction, and give them examples of questions they could ask the children to help them self-correct. Parents value this support. In fact, parents seem to appreciate the interventions proposed by teachers to deal with their children's problems (Trenholm and Miranda, 2006).

It is the school's responsibility to create opportunities to encourage parents' involvement (Arzubiaga et al., 2002; Burns et al., 2003). Each family's sociocultural characteristics are meaningful for them and provide opportunities for activities that can foster the parents' and children's involvement. However, teachers need to pay attention to how certain cultures react to some writings, especially those that contradict their cultural beliefs (Jiménez et al., 2009; Janes et al., 2001).

Burns et al. (2003) observed that teachers who speak the same language as immigrant families can facilitate integration. These authors consider that it is very important to support children's cultural heritage by fostering the development of a self-image and a feeling of family belonging, and by strengthening their learning skills. However, many teachers come from the middle-class Caucasian culture (Patton et al., 1999). Thus, an important success factor for family literacy programs is

teacher training about different cultures. Finally, Masny et al. (2009) and Letouzé (2007) encourage the use of community resources, such as community leaders or significant community venues, that help to create meaningful experiences for families.

### *Feelings of competence*

#### Among students

Children's feelings of competence in reading will influence their participation. This feeling is related to reading skills. The more easily a child can read, the more pleasurable it is, and the more that child will become engaged in the process (Chui and Ko, 2005). At the same time, there is also a perception of an activity's value and its impact on a person's commitment and level of perseverance (Beer-Toker and Gaudreau, 2006; Clark and McDonnell, 2001). Thus, the more a child sees a task as difficult, the less that child will be motivated to engage in the activity (Baker, 2003). This suggests that even a good reader will disengage if an activity is beyond his or her skill level.

Students with reading difficulties feel less competent and less personally effective than do children without difficulties (Baker, 2003; Bournot-Trites et al., 2003; Bursuk et al., 2010; Collins and Matthey, 2001). They are also more inclined to listen to others read than to read themselves. Their motivation to keep on reading is affected because they are constantly coming up against an activity that raises negative feelings for them. In a study of students with reading problems who had participated in literacy programs, Bournot-Trites et al. (2003) observed that these students continued to have reading problems even if they had found the program effective.

To this feeling of incompetence is added the stress of wanting to meet the expectations of their family and school (Baker, 2003). In a family literacy program in which parents suggested voluntary reading programs, Bursuk et al. (2010) observed that the project had a negative impact because, on one hand, the expectation of positive outcomes put pressure on the children. On the other hand, the children did not clearly understand the purpose of the readings suggested by the parents, because these readings were too far removed from their own reality. Also, people had a tendency to focus on reading problems, which had the effect of only making things worse, for both the children and their parents (Baker, 2003).

### Among parents

Parents' feelings of competence also influenced their involvement in a family literacy program. However, their reasons could be different from those of the children. Certainly, parents who have reading problems will be less interested in getting involved in a family literacy project, and it is not unusual for the parents of children with reading problems to be poor readers themselves (Baker, 2003; Chui and Ko, 2005). Still, it appeared that these parents assigned importance to reading because they were aware of its impact on daily life (Dionne et al., 2004).

Immigrant parents who do not have a good command of the language in their new country would also find it difficult to support their children in reading, not because they have reading problems, but because they are unable to read and write well in the language of their new society (Burns et al., 2003; Carrington and Luke, 2003; Janes et al., 2001; Patton et al., 1999). These authors also note that many family literacy programs were created for Caucasian families and do not respond well to the family literacy needs of immigrant families.

Most often, when parents have participated in a family literacy program, they feel more confident in themselves (Rasinski and Stevenson, 2005; Camilleri et al., 2005; Letouzé, 2007) and feel more prepared to help their children in turn, in their role as primary educator. Moreover, when they see their children motivated by a reading activity, they themselves become motivated and reassured and are more inclined to encourage it (Collins and Matthey, 2001). Parents also have a better self-image, more self-respect and a greater sense of personal effectiveness when they do not have to account to anyone and are not being told what to do (Fagan, 2001). In this case, parents develop a strong sense of ownership. This is what happened particularly in the PRINTS program.

It is well understood that creating positive family literacy practices at an early stage will help parent to feel valued, and they will then be more likely to continue supporting their children's learning thanks to family literacy activities (Boudreau et al., 2006; Giasson and Saint-Laurent, 2004; Heydon and Reilly, 2007).

### *Parent-child relationship*

Some authors consider that parent-child interactions are more crucial to the success of a family literacy program than the program itself (Bloome et al., 2000; Caspe, 2003; Collins and Matthey,

2001; Enz, 2003; Saharo, 2008). According to them, the program provides an opportunity to strengthen the parent–child emotional bond (Arzubiaga et al., 2002; Hannon, Morgan and Nutbrown, 2006). Thus, some parents transmit to their children a love of reading (Chui and Ko, 2005). Others share activities with their children that they otherwise would not have thought of.

In addition, parents learn a great deal. First, some begin to realize that a literacy activity does not necessarily involve reading a book of children’s literature (Burns et al., 2003; Camilleri et al., 2005). Others learn new things about their children: their interests, their creativity, their knowledge (Masny and Waterhouse, 2009; Saracho, 2002). Finally, parents learn many things about themselves, such as the fact that they have more skills than they thought, or that they can develop social and communication skills when they take part in a family literacy program within a group (Camilleri et al., 2005; Collins and Matthey, 2001).

Along other lines, a cautionary note is in order regarding shared reading. First, it should be distinguished from interactive reading, in which parent and child interact around a reading. Then, shared book reading with a parent is not a universal phenomenon (Anderson et al., 2010; Carrington, 2003; Janes and Kermani, 2001; Mui and Anderson, 2008). Some families do not do shared reading, either because this practice is not part of their culture (Anderson et al., 2010), or because it is hard to find books in their maternal language (Mui and Anderson, 2008). When parents read a book in a language they do not know well, they are set up for failure because they will have problems expressing themselves. Parents experience this as a punishment (Janes and Kermani, 2001). Carrington and Luke (2003) believe that parent–child shared reading is in fact a social and cultural practice associated with the Caucasian middle-class. It therefore has cultural limitations and does not necessarily concern immigrant families. In short, according to them, shared reading is not part of family literacy, but rather one type of reading.

#### *Father–child relationship*

Few studies have investigated the place of fathers in a family literacy program. Those that have, showed that fathers were often absent because these programs most often took place while they were at work (Karther, 2002; Morgan, Nutbrown and Hannon, 2009; Saracho, 2008). Yet fathers are involved in literacy activities with their children, especially those who are well equipped for it. Fathers are as involved with their sons as with their daughters and prefer reading activities to

writing (Morgan et al., 2009). Moreover, fathers select readings based on their own interests as well as those of their children (Saracho, 2008). Thus, they are just as likely to read a book of children's literature as books of non-fiction, newspapers or magazines. While these fathers will use the approaches recommended by the programs, often they will also use their own approaches, which are also effective (Carignan and Beauregard, 2010; Morgan et al., 2009; Saracho, 2008). Similarly, fathers may use the same reading strategy for different purposes. For example, some fathers encourage their children to read from pictures because they believe that: a) it is better for the children to read their own story; 2) it encourages the children to imitate reading behaviours; or c) it allows the children to interpret the story in their own way. Finally, fathers' involvement in family literacy programs has an impact on their parental practices and strengthens their bonds with their children (Karther, 2002; Morgan et al., 2009; Saracho, 2008). It should be noted that all these projects had a parent-child component. These studies therefore showed the importance of including fathers in family literacy programs, since they bring their own perspective, which may be different from those of the mothers.

### *Adolescence*

While the ages of the children in these family literacy programs are rarely specified, certain observations can be made. The books selected, topics addressed and approaches used vary according to whether the children are just starting to read or are further advanced in school. Thus, as we noted earlier, adolescents may be reluctant to have their parents involved in a family literacy program, either because they find the proposed activity to be too intimate (poetry), or because they think their parents are too busy to participate (Wiseman, 2009). Also, in a family literacy project in which parents suggested readings to their adolescent children, Bursuk et al. (2001) observed that parental expectations and the proposed reading materials were too far removed from these young people's reality and were detrimental to the project. Therefore it is important to find a reading project that can bring parents and adolescents together.

### *Family-school relationship*

Family literacy programs are an opportunity for schools to either draw parents closer or push them away. An important first step is for the school to show respect for the family culture (Cairney, 2002; Jiménez et al., 2009). Thus, the identification of family-school-community relational

practices will have an influence on what activities are proposed (Bloome et al., 2000). If they are complementary, non-assimilative and adaptive, the chances for success are greater. In addition, it is important to differentiate school literacy practices from family literacy practices (Saracho, 2002).

The study by Anderson et al. (2010) revealed that socioeconomically disadvantaged families felt alienated from the school and often felt guilty about their children's learning problems (Fagan, 2001). Some families also said the school and the community did not understand them (Timmons and Walton, 2003) and that they were constantly afraid of being judged (Timmons, 2008). The fear of being judged by others might also explain why some families are reluctant to admit that literacy is a major challenge for them (Timmons, 2008). The situation among immigrant families is similar (Jiménez et al., 2009; Janes et al., 2001).

### *Environmental factors influencing practices*

Besides individual factors, a system's organization and structures can also hinder the success of a family literacy program. Although fewer in number, these factors are equally important. We have classified these factors into four categories: training, parent availability, materials and the Internet.

#### *Training*

According to the researchers, the training of parents, teachers, mentors and anyone else involved in the family literacy program is indispensable. Training covers not only reading but also family culture. In a meta-analysis, Sénéchal (2008) observed that the training provided to parents by educators could have an impact on performance. Neuman (1996, in Burns, 2003) stated that teachers' training in family literacy allowed them to understand the difference between family literacy and school literacy and to better understand parents' and children's reactions to certain activities. We therefore see that training is related to individual factors.

These types of training make it possible, in particular, to better recognize and understand reading problems and useful strategies to create a supportive environment for learning to read (Bournot-Trites et al., 2003; Bursuk et al., 2010; Collins and Matthey, 2001). Moreover, the program should include post-training follow-up. In this way, if a literacy practice is not working, it is easier to correct it immediately (Baker, 2003). Some authors recommended broadening the notion of what

constitutes reading: choosing a book based on the child's interests and not from an educational standpoint, viewing a film based on a book and reading the book afterward, or doing art activities in books and magazines (Carignan and Beauregard, 2010; Cook-Cottone, 2004).

In addition, all the researchers who worked among immigrant families, families from socioeconomically disadvantaged settings and undereducated families strongly recommended that teachers be trained to understand these families' cultures. They also recommended that families receive training to better understand the school system, reading and their role in a family literacy program.

Finally, some authors highlighted the need for a guide to setting up and operating a family literacy program (Letouzé, 2007).

#### *Parent availability*

The proposed location and time for family literacy activities will affect parent's involvement in a program. This is especially true for immigrant families or families in socioeconomically weak environments (Arzubiaga et al., 2002; Letouzé, 2007). Although it is difficult to find a time that is convenient for all families, the families must still be consulted. An activity that can be done at home is less demanding than a school-based activity and appears to produce better results (Collins and Matthey, 2001; Cook-Cottone, 2004). Moreover, the schedule should not be modified without consulting the parents. In their project with immigrant families, Patton et al. (1999) had problems with parents' attendance because of transportation (the project took place at the university with student teachers). Also, parents had problems attending because the activity was scheduled for a time when they were out job-hunting.

#### *Materials*

Another factor that can influence the family literacy program is the materials available at home. Several researchers noted that some families in socioeconomically disadvantaged environments had fewer literacy materials than families that were better off, and what they did have was generally worn out, outdated and without variety (Dionne et al., 2004; Morgan et al., 2009). The school or community could arrange for these families to borrow or receive materials. Again, it is important to pay particular attention to these materials to be sure they do not go against the culture



of certain families (Letouzé, 2007). In fact, the resources, the materials and the variety of activities should all be related to the children's daily lives (Saracho, 2002). Finally, Boudreau et al. (2006) mention that it is not so much the material that is important, but rather the way in which it is used. Hence the importance of providing training for this purpose.

### *The Internet*

Tools such as CD-ROMs, email and the Internet are increasingly being used as literacy activities (Ward and Wason-Ellman, 2005). Although some families have adapted to these new reading tools, there are still some problems, especially for those without access to a computer or to the Internet (Carrington and Luke, 2003). Along the same lines, the study conducted by Anderson, Lenters and McTavish (2008) showed that websites related to family literacy programs referred to families from a very traditional standpoint. In fact, these sites rarely made reference to other members of the family (uncles, cousins, etc.) or significant persons (friends of the family). As has been mentioned several times in this report, it is essential that this vision of the family be transformed. Some websites state, explicitly or implicitly, that less educated parents are incapable of functioning because, among other things, of a lack of self-confidence. Such statements might affect these parents' sense of competence and lessen their motivation to get involved in a family literacy program.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In order for family literacy programs, pilot projects and activities to be more effective, certain key factors must be taken into account. Here we offer some recommendations for implementing effective family literacy programs, in light of the literature survey we conducted. The objective is to build upon winning strategies when developing or revising family literacy programs. It should be noted that these recommendations are based on the work of many authors.

Choosing the right program is important. The program should be clear and structured, and it should be accompanied by an instruction manual. This approach will ensure the best results. It should also be easily modifiable to adapt to the specific needs of different clienteles and settings. Indeed, this is a key issue, because these programs are not always adapted to the family's realities. Nevertheless, a person or group could implement a project or some activities.

We have arranged our recommendations into three categories: families/children/community, organization/structure and program evaluation. It is important to emphasize that every one of these recommendations is important.

### **Families/children/community**

- Value the families' culture. Take into account their cultural background and use it in the activities (e.g. choose topics related to the family culture).
- Keep in mind the program's objectives and ensure they are in line with how the families interact.
- Inform parents about the project by explaining the purpose, the objectives, and what is expected of everyone involved (e.g. specify the role of every participant), all in language that is easily understandable. This recommendation applies equally to everyone involved in the project (mentors, teachers, etc.).
- Involve the parents in designing family literacy programs, whether in the choice of types of activities, the topics to address, etc. Think self-determination. Also, parents know their children very well, and can therefore provide useful information about them.
- Involve the children/students in the project, as well. Adolescents and older children (age 9 years and older) know what they want and don't want.
- Take into consideration the ways in which parents are capable and feel comfortable about participating in family literacy programs.
- Parents' and children's participation should be voluntary and non-obligatory; otherwise the project will fail. It is therefore necessary to accept that not all parents will want to take part.
- The parents and children should enjoy the activities, as should everyone else involved in the project.
- Emphasize the father's role in literacy development, particularly for boys.
- Plan activities according to the skills (language and reading) of both the children and their parents.
- Do not hesitate to call upon the families' creativity.
- The proposed activities should be meaningful for the parents and the children and be in line with the families' realities.

- Call upon the community (families sponsoring other families, community and sports leaders, etc.).
- Listen to what people have to say about the activities or the project. Those comments are useful in making adjustments, as necessary.

### **Structure/organization**

- Train everyone involved in the family literacy project (parents, teachers, mentors, etc.). This provides an opportunity to get to know the families and to share information and thoughts about the project:
  - on what reading is: perceptions, roles, motivation, sense of competence, etc.
  - on the families' culture: language, traditions, religion, etc.
  - reading strategies: making parents aware that they already have family literacy practices;
  - ensure post-training follow-up.
- Take into account families' availability:
  - parents' work schedules;
  - other family activities;
  - needs of other children.
- Provide materials and books to the parents and the children:
  - access to resources and materials is a determining factor for low-income families;
  - receiving books is a motivation for children and a reward for the parents;
  - take-home kits are important (a winning strategy because of parents' sometimes limited means);
  - vary the reading media (CD-ROMs, films, magazines, newspapers, comic books, etc.)
- The activities should be close enough in time to each other without being too intensive (once every week or two weeks). The duration should be about two hours, otherwise motivation may fade. The project should be spread over a period of 3 to 4 months.
- The project should occur as much as possible outside the school, to differentiate it from school literacy. This also helps to broaden people's concept of what reading is.

- If the project takes place outside the home, provide refreshments, transportation, meals, daycare and moral support.
- Prepare a checklist of all the steps in the project or program.

### **Program evaluation**

To identify winning practices in family literacy, the programs should be evaluated and be the subject of research. The evaluations should look not only at the reading aspect, but also the relational aspect. The evaluation should be repeated a year later to see whether any families are continuing the activities. Finally, the perceptions of the parents, children and adolescents should be explored because very few studies have been done on that subject to date.

### **Reasons given for being absent or dropping out of a family literacy project**

- Some families drop out of the program for personal reasons;
- Some have problems related to transportation, child care, money;
- Single parents may be working long hours; a parent might decide to drop out of the program or be absent from time to time because of fatigue.
- Parents may have had negative experiences of their own in elementary or secondary school;
- Finally, there are some parents who will not get involved, for whatever reasons.

## **CONCLUSION**

Our mandate was to survey the literature on literacy practices and interventions that appeared to be the most scientifically grounded. We began with a presentation of the different definitions of the term “literacy”, of which there are many. Some target primarily linguistic and cognitive skills, while others adopt a socio-constructivist perspective. We then presented the methodology we followed to carry out this survey: the databases, the reference books and scientific journals consulted and the criteria we applied in surveying the literature. Based on this process, we were able to present around 15 family literacy programs and to inventory dozens of activities proposed in these programs. We were also able to identify individual and environmental factors that could influence the success of a family literacy program and the participation of children and parents.

Finally, we offered more than 20 recommendations to consider when implementing a literacy program, project or activity. These are also aimed at developing winning practices.

A certain number of conclusions emerge from this study. First, few researchers have defined what they mean by literacy, and even fewer, family or community literacy. Yet these are often related. Then, our study shows that the family offers fertile ground for literacy development, and equally, that literacy programs can potentially have a positive impact on families. Unfortunately, there has been little investment in such programs, since there is a lack of research in this field. We also note that the different factors influencing a program's success or failure are interrelated. We cannot examine them independently from each other; they form a coherent whole.

In every family literacy project, there is one limitation to keep in mind: the families that participate do so because they want to and because they ascribe a certain importance to such projects. On the other hand, this does not help to reach the parents who do not participate.

Finally, few programs have been evaluated. In those that were, most often it was the reading and writing aspects that were evaluated. The relational aspect has generally been neglected. Yet the few studies that looked at families revealed that the relational aspect was just as important as the others and could even be more significant than the literacy activities themselves.

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