

# For My Child

## **A Study of the Impact of French-Language Family Literacy Programs on Francophone Families in Linguistic Minority Settings in Ontario**

Phase 2 - Cohorts 2 and 3 | 2005-2006

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For the  
**Coalition francophone pour l'alphabétisation  
et la formation de base en Ontario**

**December 2006**

## **For My Child**

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

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Funded by the National Office of Literacy and Learning,  
Department of Human Resources and Social Development Canada.

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## INTRODUCTION

Many studies confirm that young children acquire their reading and learning habits at a very early age and that, in the case of children from Francophone backgrounds, the linguistic and cultural experiences that they have before they even set foot in school will strongly influence their ability to learn and to live fully in French. Hence the responsibility for passing French on to the next generation falls on families first of all, and families represent one of the critical elements for ensuring that the Francophone community survives and flourishes. But Francophones who live in linguistic minority settings have limited access to French-language resources and activities. Opportunities to offer their children intellectual stimulation in their mother tongue are thus scarcer for these Francophone families than for Anglophone ones.

In order to better equip Francophone parents to act as their children's first teachers and to support them in this role, a number of French-language literacy centres have provided family literacy training programs in several communities in Ontario. These programs target Francophone families in minority settings. Composed of workshops given for a few hours per week over several weeks, these programs offer Francophone families the chance to share ideas, to learn and to pursue recreational activities entirely in French.

Though there have been a number of studies on family literacy training, our review of the literature uncovered few studies that examined the impact of such programs on families. Some studies did evaluate such impacts, but only on Anglophone families. The present study will therefore be of special interest for all Francophone communities in Canada.

## Purpose and Timeline of this Study

The study discussed in this report is entitled *A Study of the Impact of French-Language Family Literacy Programs on Francophone Families in Linguistic Minority Settings*. This study is being conducted by the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Citizenship and Minorities (CIRCEM) at the University of Ottawa for the Coalition francophone pour l'alphabétisation et la formation de base en Ontario (Francophone coalition for literacy and basic skills training in Ontario). Its purpose is to measure the impacts of family literacy training programs on Francophone parents and their children in Ontario.

This study assesses the changes observed in literacy habits and use of French among parents and children who have been involved in one of the French-language literacy programs offered by seven French-language literacy centres that are members of the Coalition. It also analyzes the various program models applied by these programs, identifies the challenges that they present and the factors for their success, and documents best practices.

The study has been funded by the National Office of Literacy and Learning and comes directly under the framework of the Action Plan for Official Languages that the federal government launched in 2003 to ensure the survival of Canada's linguistic duality and to provide better supports for Francophones living in minority settings. Citing data indicating that "one out of every four Francophone parents experiences difficulties in reading,"<sup>1</sup> the Department of Human Resources and Social Development Canada has made a commitment to "expand access to family literacy services for minority Francophone households."<sup>2</sup>

The study is being conducted over a five-year period. Within this period, CIRCEM plans to assess five cohorts of Francophone families

who participate in the family literacy programs offered at the seven French-language literacy centres. Each cohort will participate in a program composed of 8 to 10 workshops. A first report, dealing with the first cohort of families who participated in these workshops, was published in November 2005.<sup>3</sup> The present report deals with the second cohort (who participated in workshops from September to December 2005) and the third (who did so from January to April 2006). The third report dealing with the fourth and fifth cohorts will be published in the fall of 2007, and the final report will be published in 2008.



## Research Team

The Coalition francophone pour l'alphabétisation et la formation de base en Ontario commissioned and sponsored this study. To evaluate the impact of family literacy programs that are the subject of this study, the Coalition has retained the services of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Citizenship and Minorities (CIRCEM). CIRCEM's Research Director, Anne Gilbert, and its Director, Joseph Yvon Thériault, are co-leaders of the academic team working on this project, while CIRCEM'S Research Co-ordinator, Sophie LeTouzé, is responsible for collecting and analyzing the data and writing the research reports.

This team has also secured the assistance of two resource persons at the University of Ottawa: Diana Masny of the Faculty of Education and André Thibault of the Department of Sociology, whose job has been to develop and validate the measuring tools used in this study.



The Coalition has also formed a steering committee to oversee the research. The committee's members are: Suzanne Benoit, Executive Director of the Coalition francophone pour l'alphabétisation et la formation de base en Ontario; Marc Bissonnette, Executive Director of La Route du Savoir; Lucie Brunet, a consultant at Brunet Sherwood Consultants, who is acting as project co-ordinator; Margo Fauchon, Director of Development at the Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français (FCAF); Yvon Laberge, a consultant at Excel Learning Concepts; and Sophie LeTouzé, Research Co-ordinator at CIRCEM.

## Partners

Seven French-language literacy centres in Ontario were chosen as key partners in this study because of their experience with family literacy programs. We wish to thank the directors of these centres for their interest in and support for this project. They are: Marc Bissonnette (La Route du Savoir), Diane Corriveau (Alpha Huronie), Denyse De Bernardi (Le Centre d'alphabétisation ALEC du Nipissing), Louise Lalonde (Centre Moi j'apprends), Lyne Martineau (Le Centre d'apprentissage et de formation d'Ottawa (CAFO), Normand Savoie (ABC Communautaire), and Anna Veltri (Le Collège du Savoir).

## Definition of Family Literacy

The many different definitions of alphabétisation familiale<sup>4</sup> (family literacy) reflect the many different kinds of French-language family literacy programs that were implemented in the 1990s. For the purposes of this study, we define "family literacy" as follows:

An approach that supports the parents or other significant adults in children's lives in their role as these children's first teachers, thus helping these children to develop their cultural, academic, and community literacy.<sup>5</sup>

When Francophone adults in minority language communities attend a family literacy program, they also develop these forms of literacy<sup>6</sup> themselves and thus attain a better understanding of what it is to be a Francophone living in a minority setting. They become more aware of the importance of taking the steps needed to improve living conditions for themselves and their children. They become better prepared to play their rightful roles as their children's first teachers. They improve not only their ability to express themselves orally in French, but also their reading, writing and numeracy skills in this language. Lastly, they become better able to actively contribute to the development of their communities.<sup>7</sup>

The above definition recognizes the various facets of daily life and the various levels of literacy among Francophones in minority settings. The process of family literacy can thus lead to many forms of literacy. It is up to the centres that provide such training to decide which forms of literacy they wish to emphasize.

Family literacy is based on the following four main principles.

1. Parents, children, and extended-family members use the various forms of literacy at home and in their community.
2. Children begin to develop the various forms of literacy at birth, and the subsequent development of these forms of literacy is conditioned by children's experiences in the settings in which they live.
3. Parents are their children's first and most important teachers.
4. Not all parents have the same skills to support their children in learning.

In general, French-language family literacy programs:

- promote reading and writing in French as important family activities;
- improve parents' abilities to help their children learn French-language literacy skills;

- provide learning experiences that are appropriate to children's level of development;
- increase parents' own awareness and understanding of Francophone culture;
- encourage parents to participate in positive ways;
- give parents opportunities to pursue their own French-language educational objectives;
- provide opportunities for schools, communities, community agencies, and government to work together.

## Seven French-Language Literacy Centres

In Ontario, French-language literacy centres that are members of the Coalition receive funding from the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to provide literacy-training services to Francophone adults. Before this study began, seven of these centres had been offering one or more French-language family literacy programs for several years, but had had to fund these programs themselves. These centres were therefore selected to participate in this study. They are listed in **Table 1**.

## Diverse Communities

In preparation for this study, we developed social and demographic profiles of the communities in each of the seven participating literacy centres' service areas, as well as some characteristics of these areas themselves. As **Table 2** shows, four of these centres serve metropolitan areas, while the three others serve non-metropolitan areas.<sup>8</sup>

Only one of these seven centres serves an area where Francophones are in the majority: the Centre Moi j'apprends, in Russell County, a part of eastern Ontario where Francophones account for 62.5% of the total population.<sup>9</sup> Two other centres serve areas where Francophones represent





a sizeable minority: the Centre d'alphabétisation ALEC du Nipissing, in the District of Nipissing, with a 27% Francophone population,<sup>10</sup> and the Centre d'apprentissage et de formation d'Ottawa, serving the City of Ottawa, with a 16.3% Francophone population.<sup>11</sup> The four other centres serve areas where Francophones represent a very small minority. These centres and the percentage of Francophones in their services areas are: ABC Communautaire (3.9%<sup>12</sup>), La Route du Savoir (3.4%<sup>13</sup>), Alpha Huronie (3%<sup>14</sup>), and Le Collège du Savoir (1.7%<sup>15</sup>).

## Methodology

In order to measure the impact of the seven literacy centres' family literacy programs on the families who participated in them, we gathered data in semi-directed interviews with the participating parents, their literacy trainers, and the directors of these centres. We used four questionnaires to structure these interviews. These interviews

enabled us to define the conditions for the success of such programs, the challenges that they present, and the distinctive aspects of each of the programs used.

We administered one questionnaire to the participating parents before they started and one after they completed their programs, in order to gather basic data on their personal characteristics, attitudes, habits, and behaviours. When these parents first signed up for the programs, we asked them 18 questions to determine how often they engaged in literacy-related activities (both on their own and with their children) and in what language or languages they did so. At the last workshop of each program, we asked these parents these same questions again. By asking the same questions at the start and end of the programs, we were able to measure whether, once these parents had completed them, they engaged in literacy-related activities more often, less often, or just as often as before, and whether

they did so in French more often, less often, or just as often as before. We also asked these parents another series of open-ended questions that let them express themselves freely, give their impressions of the program in which they had participated and talk about the changes that had occurred in their families as a result of their participation.

We also administered semi-directed interviews to the literacy trainers. The purpose of these interviews was to get a basic picture of who the trainers were, along with information on the participating families and the trainers' reactions to how the program had gone, what had worked well, and what should be changed the next time the program was delivered. The trainers also filled out a general information form on each participating family at the start of the program and a progress sheet at the end of each workshop. Together, these tools enabled the trainers to get a better sense of the week-to-week changes in the families, as well as to track their attendance.

**Table 1. French-language literacy centres participating in this study and geographic areas that they serve**

Centre	Service Area
ABC Communautaire	Regional Municipality of Niagara
Alpha Huronie	Simcoe County
Le Centre d'alphabétisation ALEC du Nipissing	District of Nipissing
Le Centre d'apprentissage et de formation d'Ottawa (CAFO)	City of Ottawa
Le Collège du Savoir	Regional Municipality of Peel, Regional Municipality of Halton, and Dufferin County
Centre Moi j'apprends	Russell County
La Route du Savoir	Kingston Region

**Table 2. Proportion of Francophones in areas served by participating literacy centres**

Proportion of Francophones in Services Area	Centres Serving Metropolitan Areas	Centres Serving Non-Metropolitan Areas
10 % or less	Le Collège du Savoir La Route du Savoir ABC Communautaire	Alpha Huronie
10-20 %	Le Centre d'apprentissage et de formation d'Ottawa (CAFO)	
20-30 %		Le Centre d'alphabétisation ALEC du Nipissing
30-40 %		
40-50 %		
Over 50 %		Centre Moi j'apprends



We also met with the directors of the literacy centres to gather information about their reasons for choosing the particular program models that they did, the ways that they went about setting their programs up, their strategies for recruiting families to participate and the support that they received from various quarters in the community. We also discussed with these directors the winning conditions for such programs and the challenges that they present.

At the start of the project, the Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français (FCAF) gave several of the literacy centre directors training in the foundations of francophone family literacy in a linguistic minority setting entitled *Foundational Training in Family Literacy*. This training is based on contents first developed by the Centre for Family Literacy situated in Edmonton, Alberta. Another training modeled on a French-language family literacy program developed in Calgary entitled *Grandir avec mon enfant* helped them set up their programs and train their trainers. This last training was given by a team from Éduk, an Alberta-based organisation that offers continuing education services to francophones and francophiles. The Coalition also met with the directors of the partner centres to brief them on the study and the tools that would be used for this purpose. In addition, the Coalition produced a "study participants' guide" as a reference tool for the centres. To better understand the setting in which each of the seven participating centres operates, and to better interpret the results that their programs achieved, the Coalition also profiled the social and demographic characteristics and the vitality of the Francophone communities<sup>16</sup> in each of these centres' service areas.

The trainers who delivered the family literacy programs examined in this study came from a variety of backgrounds and had a variety of

qualifications. The vast majority of them were schoolteachers. Some of them had experience in teaching literacy skills to adults, while others had been trained only to teach children and had no experience in working with adults. Two of the 14 trainers were also centre directors and hence took the two training courses mentioned earlier. The other trainers did not receive any special training in French-language family literacy training or in the program models that can be used to deliver it.

It should be noted that in our first report, which evaluated the impact of the centres' programs on the first cohort of families who participated in them, we had recommended that the centres recruit trainers who were specifically qualified to deliver French-language family literacy programs. But the centres had difficulty in implementing this recommendation, largely because of the lack of qualified personnel and the limited availability of programs that train trainers in this field.

### How this Report Is Organized

This report summarizes our analysis of the impact of the French-language family literacy programs on the second and third cohorts of families who participated in them at the seven literacy centres. Cohort 2 attended its family literacy workshops from September through December 2005, and Cohort 3 did so from January through April 2006.

The report is divided into three parts. Part 1 presents an overview of the various models of family literacy training that the seven centres chose in their programs. Part 1 also describes the families who attended these programs. Part 2 analyzes the data gathered on literacy habits and use of French among the parents and children involved in these programs, both before and after participating in them. Part 2 also presents the evaluations made of these programs by the

parents, the literacy trainers, and the literacy centre directors concerned. Lastly, Part 3 presents some recommendations on improving the programs before they are delivered to the subsequent cohorts of families.



## PART 1 French-Language Family Literacy and its Clientele

### 1.1 Program Models Adopted by Participating Literacy Centres

A wide range of models are available for French-language family literacy programs,<sup>17</sup> and any centre that plans to deliver such a program must select a model that suits its target clientele. Some models target parents of preschool-age children, while others target parents of school-age children, and models also differ as to how parents and children are involved. In program models such as *Lire et écrire à la maison*, for example, the two generations learn first separately, and then side by side. In other models, the program provides French-language daycare programs for the children while their parents attend the workshops.

Ruth Nickse classifies family literacy programs into the following four types, according to how adults and children participate in them.<sup>18</sup>

#### Type 1. Direct adults - Direct children

Both adults and children participate in the program directly. The adults attend family literacy workshops,

while the children attend either their own workshops or daycare programs.

#### Type 2. Indirect adults - Indirect children

The adults and children participate in unstructured literacy activities.

#### Type 3. Direct adults - Indirect children

Only the adults participate in the program, which is designed to give parents tools and skills that will enable them to help their children learn.

#### Type 4. Indirect adult - Direct children

Programs of this type emphasize the children's own learning. Parents can participate, but do not attend a program designed especially for them.

**Table 3** shows the program models employed by the seven literacy centres that participated in the present study, the age of the children whose parents their programs targeted, and the type of participation that they involved, according to Nickse's classification.

As we recommended in our report evaluating the programs delivered to Cohort 1, the programs delivered to Cohorts 2 and 3 were based on proven successful models, with clearly defined objectives and formal instructor's manuals. These models were: *Des livres dans mon baluchon*, *Grandir avec mon enfant*, *Lire et écrire à la maison*, and *Parler pour*

*que les enfants écoutent/Écouter pour que les enfants parlent*. The program entitled *Pour les rendre heureux* borrowed elements from both *Grandir avec mon enfant* and *Des livres dans mon baluchon*.

Four of the seven centres in this study aimed their programs at parents of preschool-age children, while the three other centres opted to target parents of school-aged children.

As recommended in the previous report, all of the centres involved both the adults and the children in their programs for Cohorts 2 and 3. At the following four centres, the children themselves attended the workshops (names of program models appear in italics): La Route du Savoir (*Des livres dans mon baluchon*); Moi j'apprends and Centre d'alphabétisation ALEC du Nipissing (*Lire et écrire à la maison*); Le Collège du Savoir (*Mon tapis raconte*, developed by the centre itself). At the other centres, the children attended a daycare while their parents attended the workshops.

There was one exception: for Cohort 3, the CAFO centre did not involve the children at all, because their program model, *Parler pour que les enfants écoutent/Écouter pour que les enfants parlent*, did not include activities for children and the centre had no access to a daycare facility.

**Table 3. Program models adopted by the participating literacy centres, target clientele and type of participation**

Centre	Model	Age of Children Targeted	Type of Participation
ABC Communautaire	<i>Pour les rendre heureux</i>	Preschool age	Direct: adults/children
Alpha Huronie	<i>Grandir avec mon enfant</i>	Preschool age	Direct: adults/children
Le Centre d'alphabétisation ALEC du Nipissing	<i>Lire et écrire à la maison</i>	School age	Direct: adults/children
Le Centre d'apprentissage et de formation d'Ottawa (CAFO)	<i>Grandir avec mon enfant</i>	Preschool age	Direct: adults/children
	<i>Parler pour que les enfants écoutent/Écouter pour que les enfants parlent</i>	Preschool age	Direct: adults Indirect: children
Le Collège du Savoir	<i>Grandir avec mon enfant</i> <i>Mon tapis raconte</i>	School age	Direct: adults/children
Moi j'apprends	<i>Lire et écrire à la maison</i>	School age	Direct: adults/children
La Route du Savoir	<i>Des livres dans mon baluchon</i>	Preschool age	Direct: adults/children



## Overview of program models and their objectives

### *Des livres dans mon baluchon*

*Des livres dans mon baluchon* is a program model developed by La Route du Savoir in Kingston. Designed for Franco-Ontarian families living in minority settings, this model develops the linguistic, cognitive, and affective abilities of parents and their children age 2½ to age 4. It has both a child-focused component and a parent-focused component, and both generations participate in it directly. The workshops, in this model, separates parents and children and then brings them together for the second half.<sup>19</sup>

Here are some of the model's many objectives.

#### Parent-focused objectives

- Provide parents with information and cultural activities to increase their personal knowledge.
- Strengthen parents' feeling of belonging to their language community.
- Help parents to value their culture of origin and to take ownership of their language and of their children's learning process, in their role as their children's first teachers.
- Enable parents to shape their children's environment.
- Make parents the best "guides" for their children.
- Inform parents about Francophone community resources available to them locally, regionally, and provincially.
- Give parents the opportunity to contribute to the development of their community.

#### Child-focused objectives

- Provide children with a structured environment that facilitates their socialization in French and prepares them for school.
- Open children up to the world around them through words, play, and interaction.

- Get children interested in all kinds of books and get them into the habit of reading every day.
- Help children develop literacy at an early age.<sup>20</sup>

### *Grandir avec mon enfant*

The *Grandir avec mon enfant* model works directly with parents of preschool-age and school-age children and is a French-language adaptation of a model called *Literacy and Parenting Skills* that was developed in Calgary. It is aimed at Francophones (especially those living in minority settings) who want to improve their parenting skills and their French reading and writing skills and to support their children's learning process. A Franco-Albertan organization called Éduk is in charge of the implementation of this model and the training of people who want to offer it.

This model comprises 10 modules that deal with a variety of subjects, including self-esteem, active listening, and positive discipline. It is designed to encourage parents:

- to love and value themselves;
- to become more aware of their role as parents;
- to take a positive attitude toward learning and to understand that people continue to learn throughout their lives;
- to be proud of their French language and culture;
- to do more reading and writing.<sup>21</sup>

### *Lire et écrire à la maison*

Few family literacy training models are designed for parents of children in their first year of school, yet it is precisely at this stage of children's school path that teachers seek the most support from parents as partners in helping their children to learn written language.<sup>22</sup> Studies have shown that children's success in Grade 1 is decisive for the rest of their school path and for the retention in French-language schools of those children who are entitled to attend them. Nearly half of all children who repeat Grade 1 do not complete

secondary school.<sup>23</sup> An analysis reveals that in minority language settings, the transition from Grade 1 to Grade 2 is one of the three instances when French-language schools lose the most students.<sup>24</sup> A study on perceptions of literacy among learners in New Brunswick confirms that adults with limited reading and writing skills received relatively little stimulation to become more literate.<sup>25</sup>

*Lire et écrire à la maison* was developed in Québec to address these various problems. The model encourages learning to read and write. It targets parents who have children in Grade 1 and who want to acquire practical, effective tools for supporting their children's learning efforts. This model involves direct participation by both parents and children, who attend the workshops together. Its objectives are as follows:

- to involve parents, many of whom have limited literacy skills themselves, in developing the habits necessary for learning to read, write and use numbers, so that these abilities become part of daily family life;
- to encourage parents to take simple steps to provide their children with high-quality support.

Educational activities and games help develop strategies for learning to read and write—strategies that can then be transferred into the classroom, because they address the same objectives.<sup>26</sup>

### *Parler pour que les enfants écoutent/Écouter pour que les enfants parlent*

Designed for adults who want to communicate with children more effectively, the program model *Parler pour que les enfants écoutent/Écouter pour que les enfants parlent* presents a simple method for learning communication skills.<sup>27</sup>

Through situational exercises and concrete techniques, the model encourages parents to think about the messages they convey to their children as well as to teach



them some practical, effective communication methods. The skills taught are easily learned and can be applied directly to many situations of daily life.<sup>28</sup>

By learning these skills, parents can:

- discover new ways of communicating with their children;
- avoid making blaming or shaming comments;
- recognize their own errors in communication;
- encourage their children to blossom and become more open.

*Parler pour que les enfants écoutent/ Écouter pour que les enfants parlent* teaches parents how to:

- resolve conflicts peacefully;
- respond constructively to their children's negative feelings;
- get their children to want to cooperate;
- cultivate a loving and respectful climate in the home.<sup>29</sup>

### **Pour les rendre heureux**

Developed by the co-ordinator of family literacy services at ABC Communautaire in Welland, the *Pour les rendre heureux* program draws on two existing models (*Des livres dans mon baluchon* and *Grandir avec mon enfant*) and directly involves parents and caregivers of preschool children (ages 0 to 6). The parents attend a series of nine workshops, while the children attend a daycare program.

The model has a number of objectives both for parents and for children.

### **Parent-focused objectives<sup>30</sup>**

- Give parents practical advice to enable them to play their role as their children's first teachers even more effectively.
- Suggest innovative ways to encourage learning of language, reading, and writing/ and harmonious parent-child relationships.
- Encourage parents to provide mutual support by exchanging ideas and personal experiences with one another.

### **Child-focused objectives<sup>31</sup>**

- Stimulate acquisition of French language skills.
- Get children excited about reading and writing.
- Give children the love of learning.
- Help children develop a positive self-image.
- Encourage children to show respect for others.

From this brief review of the program models and their objectives, we see that one of them, *Des livres dans mon baluchon*, was designed by and for Francophones living in minority settings, and that another, *Grandir avec mon enfant*, was expressly adapted for this same clientele.



In addition to teaching parenting skills, these models have clearly defined objectives to develop parents' cultural literacy and increase their awareness of French language and culture. In contrast, *Lire et écrire à la maison* (developed in Québec, a Francophone majority setting) and *Parler pour que les enfants écoutent/ Écouter pour que les enfants parlent* (a translation of an English program) had no such objectives. It is up to the literacy centres and their trainers to decide how to incorporate such cultural awareness features into their family literacy program.

### **Grade 1 entry profile**

The Canadian Teacher's Federation (CTF) recently published a Grade 1 entry profile for children living in Francophone minority settings.

The profile describes children who are ready to start school in a French-language Grade 1 classroom thanks to efforts made to such an end since their early childhood.<sup>32</sup> It also describes the language and cultural learning that children must have achieved before starting Grade 1 if they are to develop to their full potential and have the same chances of success as children in majority-language communities.<sup>33</sup>

In developing this Grade 1 entry profile from a language and cultural perspective, the CTF notes that the opportunity to consolidate the learning done in the family setting is yet another means of promoting learning and social integration.<sup>34</sup> The CTF adds that it is essential that the family act in accordance with the linguistic and cultural values of the preschool and school settings in which the children's learning will take place.<sup>35</sup> The program models used in the present study are expressly designed to attain these objectives.

## **1.2 Recruitment and Participation of Families**

As **Table 4** shows, and as recommended in our report on Cohort 1, the literacy centres that participated in this study recruited most of the families for Cohorts 2 and 3 (63.8%) in French-language schools and daycares. Only 13% of the families were recruited through advertisements in the community (on bulletin boards, in local newspapers, and at libraries). As with Cohort 1, word-of-mouth had very little impact on recruitment for Cohorts 2 and 3.

**Table 5** shows the number of families who participated in the series of family literacy workshops offered in Fall 2005 (Cohort 2) and Winter 2006 (Cohort 3). The total, 177, is fairly substantial, but it should be noted that two centres were forced to cancel one of their workshop series because of problems in recruiting families.

The Collège du Savoir cancelled the workshop series that it had scheduled



for Winter 2006 because it could not recruit enough participants. The Route du Savoir centre had to cancel its Fall 2005 series, and instead spent the time conducting an analysis of Francophone families' needs by means of survey questionnaires.

Two centres (Centre d'alphabétisation ALEC du Nipissing and Centre Moi j'apprends) adopted the program model *Lire et écrire à la maison*, which targets parents of school-age children. These two centres alone accounted for more than half (105 out of 177, or 59.3%) of the families in Cohorts 2 and 3. This finding indicates that this model filled a previously unsuspected need among this clientele. As previously noted, children's academic success in Grade 1 has a decisive effect on their success in the rest of their school path, but there are few services designed exclusively for

parents whose children are just starting Grade 1. For some parents, this transition from preschool to school can be agonizing. They worry whether their children will be able to keep up with their classmates and whether they, as parents, will be able to support their children's learning process. The *Lire et écrire à la maison* program model seems to address these concerns directly.

The number of families participating in the programs at the ABC Communautaire centre was very substantial, thanks largely to the introduction of a new recruitment strategy for Cohort 3. To increase the number of families participating, the centre promoted its program at private companies in the area. This approach enabled it to attract a Francophone clientele not being reached by traditional methods.

In total, as **Table 6** shows, 192 parents and 207 children enrolled in the family literacy programs. Just as with Cohort 1, only about 1/5 as many fathers as mothers enrolled in these programs: 31 fathers, compared with 161 mothers. Of these 31 fathers, 24 (77%) attended programs at the Centre d'alphabétisation ALEC du Nipissing or the Centre Moi j'apprends, both of which followed the *Lire et écrire à la maison* model, which targets parents of school-age rather than preschool-age children. There are many possible reasons that more fathers might participate in programs that follow such a model. Some fathers may feel more involved in their children's education once they have started school. Other fathers may find the kinds of things taught and the kinds of resources offered in such programs more intrinsically interesting. Still others may be more concerned about their

**Table 4. How families were recruited for Cohorts 2 and 3**

Method	Number	%
By someone who had already participated in the program	5	2.8
By a friend	14	7.9
Through an advertisement	23	13.0
At the school or daycare that their child attends	113	63.8
Other	22	12.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 6. Number of parents and children participating in programs, by centre**

Centre	Number of parents enrolled			Number of children enrolled
	Women	Men	Total	
ABC Communautaire	24	6	30	43
Alpha Huronie	14	-	14	21
Centre d'alphabétisation ALEC du Nipissing	18	3	21	21
CAFO	16	-	16	8
Le Collège du Savoir	6	-	6	9
Moi j'apprends	73	21	94	92
La Route du Savoir	10	1	11	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>207</b>

**Table 5. Number of families participating in Cohort 2 and 3 programs, by literacy centre**

Centre	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Total
ABC Communautaire	8	18	26
Alpha Huronie	6	8	14
Centre d'alphabétisation ALEC du Nipissing	15	6	21
CAFO	7	9	16
Le Collège du Savoir	6	-	6
Moi j'apprends	60 <sup>36</sup>	24	84
La Route du Savoir	-	10	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>177</b>

**Table 7. Number of families participating in the programs and in this study**

Centre	Total families in programs	Families participating in study	
		Number	%
ABC Communautaire	26	18	69.2
Alpha Huronie	14	12	85.7
Centre d'alphabétisation ALEC du Nipissing	21	16	76.2
CAFO	16	7	43.8
Le Collège du Savoir	6	4	66.7
Moi j'apprends	84	67	79.8
La Route du Savoir	10	8	80.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>74.6</b>



children's success in school than about their preschool development. Or perhaps some fathers think that taking care of preschool children is women's work. Yet another possible reason, reported by a few of the fathers interviewed in this study, was that their spouses were strongly encouraging them to participate in activities with their children at this stage of their development. Whatever the reasons, the data clearly show that more fathers are interested in program models, such as *Lire et écrire à la maison*, that target parents whose children are starting school, rather than preschool-age.

The percentage of enrolled families who completed their programs and participated in the associated research surveys and interviews was very high: almost 75% (see **Table 7**). None of the families refused to participate in these research activities, but to make the results more valid, we excluded families who had missed three or more workshops. Also, the majority of the families in Cohort 3 at the CAFO centre quit their program because of a situation beyond its control.

### 1.3 Parents' Reasons for Participating

***I want to learn some good strategies for not losing patience with my kids. (A parent)***

### ***I want my children to be in a Francophone environment. (A parent)***

To understand parents' reasons for participating in family literacy programs and to determine which, of all the things they learned, they consider a priority, we asked them to assign importance ratings to the statements listed in **Table 8**.

As this table shows, parents rated as very important their learning things that would help them to stimulate their children's development and improve their children's prospects for the future.

Because these parents chose to attend these workshops for their children first and foremost, it is not surprising that they accorded less importance to ways that they themselves could benefit, such as improving their own French reading and writing skills, improving their self-confidence, learning to use the library, and getting to discuss things with other parents.

Parents were also given the opportunity to mention other things they learned that they considered very important but that did not appear in the list we had asked them to rate. The parents included: "To learn how to play with my child", "To learn how to smooth the transition

between school and home", and "To learn how to discipline my children".

Though the reasons that the parents identified as most important in our surveys related to their children first, the parent interviews conducted at the end of each program provided a very different picture. Many parents confided in these interviews that they had participated in the workshops to become better parents and to share their experiences with their peers.

## 1.4 Characteristics of Participating Families

The first main section of the questionnaire that the families completed when they enrolled in the family literacy programs was designed to draw up a detailed profile of the families involved. In total, 177 families<sup>38</sup> completed this questionnaire. The following sections describe the characteristics of these families based on this survey.

### 1.4.1 Personal Information

**Table 9** shows the number of parents in each of nine age categories. The two categories that accounted for the largest proportion of parents were 31-35 (38.4%) and 36-40 (31.1%). This pattern is not surprising, since

**Table 8. Parents' main reasons for participating in the family literacy programs<sup>37</sup> (%)**

	Not important	Important	Very important
To help my children's development	0.6	4.5	94.9
To give my children better prospects for the future	-	5.6	93.8
To learn how to give my children a love of learning	-	6.2	92.7
To learn how to get my children interested in reading	0.6	14.7	84.2
To get my child well prepared for school	1.1	9.6	83.6
To learn how to help my children do their homework	0.6	11.9	80.8
To learn how to read stories to my children	5.1	27.1	63.8
To improve my own reading and writing skills	7.9	20.9	54.2
To improve my self-confidence	7.3	26.6	53.1
To learn how to use the library	9.6	32.2	41.8
To discuss with other parents	9.0	50.3	40.1
<b>Number of families: 177</b>			



nearly half of these parents had at least one child in Grade 1. There was also one grandparent who participated in the program with her granddaughter.

As **Table 10** shows, all of the children participating in the programs were age 8 or younger. Slightly more than a third of them (36.2%) were age 4 or younger, and slightly more than half (55.2%) were between 5 or 6 years old.

**Table 11** shows that the vast majority of the participating parents (76.9%) were married. The next largest group (nearly 10% of the total) were living with a common-law partner. The other parents were separated (5.6%), single (5.1%), divorced (1.1%), or widowed (1.1%). One mother reported that her husband had disappeared in the genocide in the Congo; **Table 11** shows her response in a separate category, "Other", because none of the proposed

responses fit her situation. The figures on marital status thus show that a total of 24 of the participating parents (13.5%, including one father), were heads of single-parent families, had no partner, and were raising their children alone.

We also asked the participating parents the highest level of schooling they had completed. As can be seen in **Table 12**, 9.1% of these parents had not completed secondary school, 13% had obtained their secondary school diploma, 43.5% had studied at the college level, and 34.5% had studied at the university level. Thus 78% of the parents had continued their studies beyond secondary school. As with Cohort 1, the educational attainment of the parents in Cohorts 2 and 3 was quite high.

According to the definition of family literacy that we have adopted, parents are supposed to help children develop their cultural, academic,

and community literacy;<sup>39</sup> three forms of literacy that are not directly determined by the parent's level of education. A given parent may have studied at university but still not have the skills needed to support his or her children's learning process or to pass on to them Francophone culture.

We also surveyed the parents about their labour market activity. The vast majority of them were working, mainly in administration, education, construction, the armed forces, and services. Slightly less than 20% of the parents (33 mothers) were at home, while 10 (5.6%) were in school (mostly to obtain the equivalent of a secondary school diploma).

#### 1.4.2 Place of Birth and Number of Years in the Community

**Table 13** classifies the participating parents according to where they were born. Over 90% of the parents

**Table 9. Age distribution of participating parents**

Age	Number	%
Less than 20		
20-25	3	1.7
26-30	32	18.1
31-35	68	38.4
36-40	55	31.1
41-45	14	7.9
46-50	4	2.3
51-55	-	-
Over 55	1	0.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 11. Marital status of participating parents**

Marital status	Number	%
Married	136	76.9
Separated	10	5.6
Single	9	5.1
Divorced	2	1.1
Common law	17	9.6
Widowed	2	1.1
Other	1	0.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 10. Age distribution of participating children**

Age	Number	%
Less than 1	12	5.7
1-2	33	15.7
3-4	31	14.8
5-6	116	55.2
7-8	18	8.6
9-10	-	-
Over 10	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 12. Educational level of participating parents**

Last Year Completed	Number	%
Less than Grade 9	7	4.0
Grade 9 to 12 (no diploma)	9	5.1
Secondary school diploma	23	13.0
College studies	77	43.5
University studies	61	34.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>100.0</b>





were born in Canada: 118 of them (66.7%) in Ontario and 43 (24.3%) in other Canadian provinces (in 37 of these 43 cases, Québec). Only 9% of the parents were born outside of Canada.

**Table 14** shows that overall, the participating parents had deep roots in their community: 66.7% of them had been living there for 6 years or longer.

At the other end of the scale, 17.5% of the parents had been living in their community for 2 years or less. For this group, participating in the programs was a good strategy for facilitating their integration into a Francophone community network.

Among the immigrant families, those from Canada's traditional countries of immigration, such as Portugal, Switzerland, and France, had been in Canada for many years and had high levels of education. But those who came from newer countries of immigration, such as Djibouti, the Congo, Haiti, and Colombia, had been living in Canada for a

shorter time and had received little schooling in their countries of origin.

### 1.4.3 Language Characteristics

Given that the families' use of language is central to this study, we also asked the parents to tell us what their own mother tongue was and that of their partner, if they had one. We also asked what language was spoken most often in their home and what language they spoke most often with their children.

As **Table 15** shows, 72.9% of the parents who were participating in the family literacy workshops had French as their mother tongue, whereas among their partners, the percentage was 49.7%. The percentage of parents who had English as their mother tongue was also higher among the non-participating partners than among the workshop participants (29.4% compared with 11.3%). There is nothing surprising in these figures; they reflect the high incidence of exogamy among Francophones.

French was most often used at home in 58.2% of the families, according to the parent who responded to the questionnaire. The language spoken most often with the children in the family was French in 75.1% of the cases. English was the primary language for 25 of the 177 families; 16 parents indicated that they often spoke to their children in this language. Women were five times more numerous than men in the programs. The predominance of French as the mother tongue of the majority of these women and especially as the primary language that parents used to communicate with their children reflects the critical role that Francophone mothers play in transmitting their language to their children.

To find out more about the parents' written and oral language skills, we asked the literacy trainers to evaluate them on the basis of the questionnaire that the parents had completed at the start of the program and the trainers' own observations and expertise.

**Table 13. Place of birth of participating parents**

Place of Birth	Number	%
Ontario	118	66.7
Other Canadian province	43	24.3
Outside of Canada	16	9.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 14. Number of years that participating parents had lived in their communities**

Years	Number	%
Less than 1	14	7.9
1-2	17	9.6
3-5	28	15.8
6-8	20	11.3
9-11	21	11.9
Over 11	77	43.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 15. Language characteristics of participating parents**

	Mother Tongue		Partner's Mother Tongue		Language Spoken Most Often at Home		Language Spoken Most Often with Children	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
French	129	72.9	88	49.7	103	58.2	133	75.1
English	20	11.3	52	29.4	25	14.1	16	9.0
Both	16	9.0	3	1.7	41	23.2	20	11.3
Other	12	6.8	15	8.5	8	4.5	7	4.0
N/A	-	-	19	10.7	-	-	1	0.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>100.0</b>



**Table 16** shows the results of this evaluation. Slightly more than 92% of the parents had good or adequate French reading and writing skills while 5.1% had limited French reading and writing skills, and 2.8% had great difficulty in reading and writing French. The vast majority of the parents had a good level of spoken French and always spoke French at the workshops, while three of the parents had difficulty in expressing themselves in this language.



**Table 16. Literacy trainers' evaluations of French oral and written language skills of participating parents**

	Number	%
<b>French reading and writing skills</b>		
Good	105	59.3
Adequate	58	32.8
Limited	9	5.1
Great difficulty	5	2.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Level and use of spoken French</b>		
Very good; they always speak French with me and among themselves.	157	88.7
Good; they almost always speak French with me and among themselves.	17	9.6
Fairly good; they speak to me in French, but sometimes speak English among themselves.	-	-
Not very good; they have difficulty in expressing themselves in French.	2	1.1
Very limited; they cannot manage in French.	1	0.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>100.0</b>



## PART 2 Program Impacts and Program Evaluations

### 2.1 Parents' Plans for Enrolling Children in French-Language Schools

Our research has shown that French-language family literacy programs not only provide Francophone parents with opportunities to learn and to exchange ideas, but also serve as a way of making them more aware of the importance of French-language education for their children.

Parents of preschool-age children were asked what type of school they planned to enrol them in when the

time came. (Parents who attended programs based on the *Lire et écrire à la maison* model had children already in school and so were not asked this question.) **Table 17** shows the results. The vast majority of these 72 parents (86.2%) said that they planned to enrol their children in French-language schools. Only 2 parents planned to enrol their children in English-language schools, while 4 planned to enrol their children in French-immersion programs. The remaining 4 parents had not yet decided what school their children would attend, because they were still very young. That so many of the parents said they planned to enrol their children in French-language schools demonstrates the importance accorded to French in these families, especially since many of the couples involved are exogamous. Our research thus shows that French-language literacy programs not only provide a Francophone

environment, but also make parents aware of the importance of French-language education.

### 2.2 Changes Within Families

The purpose of this study was to assess the impact that participating in the French-language family literacy programs had on Francophone families living in minority settings in Ontario. To assess this impact, we asked the parents 18 questions when they first enrolled to determine how often they currently engaged in literacy-related activities (both on their own and with their children), and in what language or languages they did so. Then, once the programs were over, we asked the 132 parents who had completed them the same questions again, to see whether they had altered their habits with regard to literacy-related activities and use of French. We also interviewed these parents to get their own descriptions of the changes that had occurred in their habits and those of their children.

**Table 17. Types of schools in which participating parents plan to enrol their children<sup>40</sup>**

	Number	%
French	62	86.2
English	2	2.8
French immersion	4	5.5
Other language	-	-
No decision yet	4	5.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>100.0</b>

#### 2.2.1 Literacy-Related Activities and Use of French and English

Parents and children can engage in many activities that foster various forms of literacy in both generations.

**Table 18** shows that many of the parents were already pursuing such

**Table 18. Percentages of parents who engaged in literacy-related activities often, and languages in which they did so, before and after participating in the family literacy programs**

	Before the Programs (%)				After the Programs (%)			
	Often <sup>41</sup>	In French <sup>42</sup>	In French and English	In English <sup>43</sup>	Often	In French	In French and English	In English
Watching television	44.7	22.0	20.5	54.5	37.9	17.4	25.8	53.8
Listening to the radio	60.6	22.0	18.9	48.5	64.4	28.8	12.9	48.5
Watching films, videotapes, or DVDs	18.2	19.7	15.2	42.4	42.4	36.4	26.5	30.3
Looking at/reading newspapers, magazines, or comic strips	39.4	20.5	21.2	31.1	49.2	31.1	24.2	28.8
Writing short messages or grocery lists	60.6	42.4	25.8	21.2	75.8	47.7	25.8	22.0
Looking at or reading books	53.8	36.4	22.0	18.2	62.1	36.4	19.7	31.1
Reading instructions/recipes	20.5	33.3	11.4	9.1	53.0	40.9	24.2	12.9
<b>Number of parents: 132</b>								



literacy-related activities frequently even before they participated in the family literacy programs. But the parents' responses to the same questions after they had completed these programs showed that a higher percentage of them now pursued such activities, and that a higher percentage of those who pursued these activities now did so in French.

Regarding the proportion of parents who engaged in these activities often, **Table 18** shows that after the parents had completed the programs:

- the percentage who watched films, videotapes, or DVDs rose to 42.4% from 18.2%;
- the percentage who read newspapers, magazines, or comic strips rose to 49.2% from 39.4%;

- the percentage who wrote short messages or grocery lists rose to 75.8% from 60.6%;
- the percentage who read books rose to 62.1% from 53.8%;
- the percentage who read instructions or recipes rose to 53% from 20.5%.

Among those parents who engaged in these activities often, the proportion who did so in French had also increased by the end of the programs:

- for listening to the radio in French, the percentage rose to 28.8% from 22%;
- for watching films, videotapes, and DVDs in French, it rose to 36.4% from 19.7%;

- for reading newspapers, magazines, and comic strips in French, it rose to 31.1% from 20.5%.

**Table 19** shows that by the time the programs were completed, the percentages of parents who engaged in literacy-related activities often with their children increased, as did the percentages who did so in French.

The percentage of parents who engaged in literacy-related activities often with their children was up in every category:

- for reading, up from 82.6% before to 92.4% after;
- for talking while practicing sports, up from 60.6% before to 81.1% after;

**Table 19. Percentages of parents who engaged in literacy-related activities with their children often, and languages in which they did so, before and after participating in the family literacy programs**

	Before the Programs (%)				After the Programs (%)			
	Often	In French	In French and English	In English	Often	In French	In French and English	In English
Watching television with my child	47.0	37.9	23.5	33.3	50.0	44.7	22.0	29.5
Reading or looking at books with my child	82.6	76.5	14.4	6.8	92.4	82.6	14.4	1.5
Talking with my child while practicing sports	60.6	54.5	16.7	10.6	81.1	76.5	13.6	3.8
Doing craft projects with my child	37.1	55.3	7.6	6.8	73.5	76.5	11.4	6.1
Talking with my child about the things that interest him or her	87.9	73.5	12.9	9.8	95.5	84.8	10.6	3.8
Helping my child to do his or her homework	78.0	78.0	4.5	0.8	81.8	81.1	3.0	1.5
<b>Number of parents: 132</b>								

**Table 20. Percentages of parents who had engaged in certain activities with and without their children during the past 3 months, and languages in which they did so, before and after participating in the family literacy programs**

	Before the Programs (%)					After the Programs (%)				
	1 or 2 times	3 or more times	In French	In French and English	In English	1 or 2 times	3 or more times	In French	In French and English	In English
Choosing books at the library	20.5	23.5	27.3	8.3	8.3	18.9	32.6	31.8	11.4	8.3
Choosing books with my children at the library	24.2	23.5	40.9	4.5	2.3	19.7	36.4	49.2	4.5	1.5
Participating in activities at my children's school or daycare	41.7	18.2	56.8	0.8	2.3	19.7	29.5	47.0	0.8	1.5
Talking about my children's progress with their teacher or early childhood educator	50.8	28.8	73.5	1.5	4.5	26.5	58.3	80.3	-	4.5
<b>Number of parents: 132</b>										



- for craft activities, up from 37.1% before to 73.5% after.

Among those parents who engaged in these activities with their children often, the proportion who did so in French also increased in every category:

- for reading in French, up from 76.5% before the programs to 82.6% after;
- for talking in French while practicing sports, up from 54.5% before to 76.5% after;
- for helping children with their homework, up from 78% before to 81.1% after did so in French.

We also asked the parents about other activities that reflect their involvement in their children's learning and education. **Table 20** shows that the frequency of these activities had also increased by the end of the programs:

- 51.5% of the parents and 56.1% of the children had gone to the library at least once during the past three months;
- 58.3% had spoken about their children's progress with their children's teacher or early childhood educator at least 3 times during the past three months.

The percentages of parents who engaged in these activities in French had also increased slightly after the programs:

- for choosing French library books with their children, up from 40.9% before to 49.2% after;
- for discussing children's progress with teachers or early childhood educators in French, up from 73.5% before to 80.3% after.

## 2.2.2 Impacts of Programs on Learning

***I'm a little embarrassed to say that as a parent, I learned a lot from these workshops. You always think you're a good parent, but the program shows you better ways to handle things so that there's more harmony in the home and less quarrelling. (A parent)***

***Even though my child is very young, there are lots of activities that I can do with him to help him develop. (A parent)***

***Now I understand that my child won't have any problems in learning English, so I'm focussing on helping her learn French. (A parent)***

The interviews at the end of the programs showed that the programs had had a major impact on learning both by the parents and by their children.



As with Cohort 1, regardless of which program they had participated in, all of the parents said that they had learned strategies that they had applied in their daily lives:

- They felt more confident in their role as parents.
- They had a better understanding of the importance of taking time every day to engage in literacy activities with their children.
- They were more aware of the fact that children are always learning.
- They tried to be better role models for their children.
- They had a better understanding of the various ways to discipline children, and especially of the need to think before reacting. As one parent put it: Before, I didn't know if I was too strict with my kids or not strict enough. The discipline workshop taught me that the punishment must be related to what the child did that was wrong. Children need to understand that their actions have consequences.

One mother reported that she had completely changed her way of dealing with her children: I communicate with them differently now. I make sure that I'm in the same

room, and I get down to their level to look them in the eye. Another mother said that she found the training in how to communicate with "I" statements very useful: It's a good way not to attack someone, but instead to get them to understand your feelings and improve the situation. It's great, because I can apply this method with my child just as much as I can with adults.

Other parents reported that they criticize their children less when they make mistakes while reading out loud, make sure that their children are following when they read stories to them, and make more of an effort to go to the library.

As regards their use of French, the parents interviewed said that now they:

- make more of an effort to do activities in French both alone and with their children;
- have a better understanding of the importance of using French at home;
- have a better knowledge of the language, which makes them more confident in their skills;
- are better informed about the French-language resources in their communities;
- have expanded their Francophone networks by meeting parents who share the same interests as them.

Our research strongly indicates that these changes in attitudes and behaviours were not limited to the parents but also occurred in those children who had either attended family literacy workshops or attended French-language daycare programs while their parents attended such workshops. Parents and literacy trainers made the following observations.

- The children were more confident. (My child was very shy and never spoke up in class. Now he raises his hand and tells everybody what's on his mind!)
- The children increased their French vocabulary and recognized many more words.
- The children were more likely to comply with a routine and follow instructions.



- The children developed a feeling of belonging with the French language and associated it with pleasant activities.

The children also used French more often to communicate and to do activities. For instance, one mother reported: Since the program, my daughter chooses French shows now when she watches TV.

## 2.3. Program Evaluations

To evaluate the family literacy training programs delivered by the seven Ontario French-language literacy centres that participated in this study, we interviewed all of the adults involved—the parents, the literacy trainers, and the directors of the centres. They were able to express themselves freely on all aspects of the various programs.

### 2.3.1. Parents' Evaluations

**What a great experience! I only wish it could have lasted longer! (A parent)**

**I took all the workshop handouts on parenting methods and put them up on my fridge so that I can look at them every day. (A parent)**

**Grade 1 is hard for kids. They have a very heavy workload. So I really appreciated the things I learned about helping them to succeed. (A parent)**

The individual interviews with the parents after they had completed their family literacy programs showed that they evaluated the programs positively. Like the parents in Cohort 1, all of the parents in Cohorts 2 and 3 said that they were delighted with the group discussions, the things they learned and the resources that were made available to them. The aspect of the programs that they enjoyed the most was being able to exchange ideas with other parents: I think that being able to compare our problems makes us feel less alone; I have just moved to this area, and I'm happy to have met other Francophones through this program!; We were able to share

about subjects that concern all of us as parents and as Francophones.

As these statements show, the parents liked meeting and discussing their concerns with other parents who were often in the same situation. These discussion sessions broke down the feelings of isolation that some parents experience. Interestingly, though, getting to discuss things with other parents ranked next-to-last among the reasons that the parents had cited for enrolling in the workshops when they first did so. Only once the workshops had begun did this component become important to them.

In addition to enjoying the group discussions, the parents were happy to have learned so much in the workshops.

Parents who attended programs based on the *Grandir avec mon enfant* model said that they had learned the following things:

- disciplinary strategies and how to do positive discipline;
- methods for making their children take responsibility for their own actions;
- ways of encouraging their children to take a greater interest in reading and writing.

Parents who attended a program based on the *Des livres dans mon baluchon* model said they enjoyed learning the following things:

- the importance of leading their lives in French and using French in activities both on their own and with their children;
- the importance of consuming French-language cultural products;
- the importance of using the Francophone resources in their communities.

Parents who attended programs based on the *Lire et écrire à la maison* model said they liked learning the following things:

- the steps that children must go through to learn to read;
- how to encourage their children to read;
- how all kinds of activities can be learning opportunities for children.

Lastly, parents who attended a program based on the model *Parler pour que les enfants écoutent/ Écouter pour que les enfants parlent* said that they were happy to have learned the following things:

- how to avoid making unfavourable or belittling comments;
- how to recognize their own communication errors;
- how to resolve conflicts peacefully.

These comments show that the things that the parents most enjoyed learning were precisely those that had been set as learning objectives in their respective programs' models.

Apart from what the parents learned themselves, they also greatly appreciated their children's participation in the programs. As with Cohort 1, involving the entire family had a positive impact on the attendance of parents in Cohorts 2 and 3. When the children participate, it encourages their parents to attend the workshops. As one mother told us: Even if there had still been another 10 weeks of workshops and they had lasted all summer, my son would still have wanted to come!

Another feature that some programs offered was just as popular with the parents in Cohorts 2 and 3 as with those in Cohort 1: kits and resources that the parents could take home for a week. The kits contained games, books, and ideas for crafts projects, so that the parents could pursue literacy-related activities with their children in French at home. The kits were greatly appreciated by low-income families and by families living in areas where Francophones are a very small minority and French-language resources are scarce.

Some centres also sent resources to participating parents by e-mail, and the parents really appreciated it: I liked receiving all the information by e-mail, as well as the electronic links to French-language resources. These messages bridged the gap between the workshops and let us seek out more information on the subjects that interested us.



According to the parents, a few of the programs did, however, get off to a rough start, with changes in the workshop locations or starting dates. Some of the programs had to be held in facilities that were not very suitable for the parents or their children. Some other parents said that the workshops lacked structure, even though we had made a recommendation on this subject in our evaluation of the Cohort 1 workshops.

Most of the parents said that they would have liked the programs to have lasted longer, in order to be able to continue to learn and to use the resources the programs provided, as well as to continue to benefit from the opportunity to spend time doing meaningful things in French. It is therefore no surprise that many parents said that they would happily sign up for another family literacy program in the future.

### 2.3.2 Literacy Trainers and Literacy Centre Directors' Evaluations

***The mothers were very satisfied. How do I know? They told me all through the program! (A trainer)***

***Several parents told me that they had followed my suggestions and that they had worked well with their children. It's always gratifying when you hear that. (A trainer)***

Like the parents, the literacy trainers reported that they were satisfied with this experience in family literacy training. The comments that they had received from the parents were very positive. As one trainer said: The mothers asked me whether we could continue the program, because they liked it so much. All of the trainers observed major changes in the parents and the children. According to the trainers, the parents came out of these programs better equipped to play their role as their children's first teachers and more confident about their ability to do so. They had become more aware of how their own behaviour, actions, and self-esteem affect their children. They also seemed to have grasped the importance of stimulating their

children, giving them a love of learning, and supporting them in their learning efforts so that they can succeed in school. Some of the parents greatly improved their own French-language skills. As one parent explained: If we could always be in an environment like the one here at the centre, my children and I would speak excellent French.

Establishing partnerships, recruiting qualified trainers, and, at some centres, recruiting parents, was more successful with Cohorts 2 and 3 than with Cohort 1.

Unfortunately, other centres had to cancel the workshops for either Fall 2005 (Cohort 2) or Winter 2006 (Cohort 3) because too few families signed up, and all again had to deal with poor attendance on the part of the families. In this regard, one centre director said that the only thing that disappointed her was that from one week to the next, she did not know how many people there were going to be around the table.

The centres also stressed that they would like to have been able to recruit more fathers. As with Cohort 1, the groups in Cohorts 2 and 3 were composed almost entirely of women. One director explained that the groups got along well, but that they were composed mainly of moms and that she would have liked to see more dads.

As regards partnerships, the centres that decided to deliver their programs in partnership with other organizations (mainly French-language schools and daycares) were on the whole very satisfied with this experience: We received excellent co-operation from the schools, exclaimed one director. I couldn't have asked for more!

### 2.3.3 Undeniable Benefits

As with Cohort 1, our study on the impact of the family literacy programs on these Francophone families in Cohorts 2 and 3 who live in linguistic minority settings in Ontario showed that these programs produced major changes

in two respects: first, on the parents' parenting skills, and second, on their learning and their use of French. More specifically, the parents who participated in these programs now:

- apply the parenting strategies that they have learned, especially as regards disciplining their children and encouraging their interest in reading and writing;
- say that they are better equipped to play their role as parents;
- have become aware that any activity can be a learning activity;
- better grasp the importance of using French in the home;
- engage in more activities with their children, especially in French.

For the children in Cohorts 2 and 3, the programs also had several benefits. These children:

- were more confident;
- were better able to follow a routine;
- developed their French vocabulary and their French reading and writing skills;
- tended to use French more often.

For those children who had never participated in any activities with other children before, the effects were especially significant. Many studies have confirmed the importance of the first few years of life for the development of children's abilities as well as for their health and well-being. In addition, for Francophone children living in minority-language settings, programs like these have an even greater significance: they help these children master the French language, develop their cultural identity, and get a successful start when they enter French-language schools<sup>44</sup>. All of these factors contribute to the vitality and survival of Francophone communities in Canada outside of Québec.



## PART 3 Findings and Recommendations

This section presents the main findings from our study of the impact of the French-language family literacy programs on Cohorts 2 and 3. It describes factors for the success of such programs and recommends winning conditions that should be put in place for the subsequent cohorts.

### 3.1 Adults with Low Literacy Skills

#### Finding

Few adults with low literacy skills participated in these family literacy programs.

Our research revealed that very few parents with low literacy skills are reached by existing family literacy programs. The data that we gathered on the backgrounds of the parents who participated in our study confirms this. Most of these parents have a high level of education. This finding should clearly be taken into account in designing client recruitment strategies.

#### Recommendation

We recommend that the literacy centres work more closely with the agencies that provide community and social services to this target population. We also encourage the literacy centres to consider new recruitment strategies, since the traditional methods do not seem to be reaching this clientele.

### 3.2 Participation by Fathers

#### Finding

Only a small number of fathers participated in the family literacy programs.

Out of the 192 parents who participated, only 31 were fathers,

and only 7 of these fathers participated in programs for parents of preschool-age children. Given the importance of involving all family members in children's learning processes, and to counter the literacy problems that some boys may experience when they start school, participation by fathers must be increased.

#### Recommendation

We recommend that the literacy centres think about ways that they can make their programs more attractive to men. It might be useful to conduct a needs analysis.

### 3.3 Structure of Workshops

#### Finding

Some workshop programs got off to a rough start (changes in location, starting date, and starting time) and lacked structure.

As stated in our report on Cohort 1, in programs delivered at the community level, such as these family literacy workshops, openness and flexibility are highly desirable qualities. But to ensure the quality and sustainability of these programs and the satisfaction of the families involved in them, they need to have solid structural foundations.

#### Recommendation

We recommend that the literacy centres continue their efforts to improve the structure of these programs. In this regard, as much as possible, it is important to guarantee the location where the workshops will be held, to start and end each series of workshops on the scheduled dates, to start and end each workshop at the scheduled times, and to stick to the topics planned.

### 3.4 Training of Trainers

#### Finding

Of the 14 trainers who delivered these programs, 12 had no formal

training in family literacy or in the specific program models involved. The two other trainers (who were also centre directors) took The Foundational Training in Family Literacy, as well as training on the *Grandir avec mon enfant* program model. In our report on Cohort 1, we had recommended that all trainers receive such training, but as the above finding indicates, the centres experienced difficulty in implementing this recommendation, largely because of the lack of qualified personnel and the limited training available on these subjects.

#### Recommendation

We recommend that the centres join forces to request more training programs for their family literacy trainers.

### 3.5 Kits and Resources

#### Finding

Many centres failed to make lending out kits to parents an integral part of their programs.

Comments received from parents confirmed that, like the families in Cohort 1, the families in Cohorts 2 and 3 greatly appreciated the kits and teaching resources. But some of the centres did not incorporate such kits into their programs. True, these kits can be expensive, and managing the lending process can sometimes be very difficult. But these kits yield some highly positive benefits: they bridge the gap between workshops and ensure that the families have access to French-language resources while they are attending these programs. These kits also give the children at home who are not attending these programs a chance to benefit from them as well, while encouraging the families to do activities together.

#### Recommendation

We recommend that the centres incorporate loans of kits into their family literacy programs.





### 3.6 Partnerships

#### Finding

It is important for the centres to form partnerships with other community organizations to strengthen the sense of belonging to the Francophone community, to facilitate recruitment of families for the literacy programs, and to reap the benefits of sharing expertise and resources (such as space and staff).

In any Francophone community, the French-language schools have an indisputable legal and social status. These institutions constitute a Francophone space where the families who attend family literacy programs can also consolidate their learning of the French language, enhance their involvement in Francophone culture, build their identity as Francophones, and develop a sense of belonging. Preschool age children who come to these schools to attend family literacy workshops or associated daycare programs become familiar with this environment, which will make it easier for them to begin school when the time comes.<sup>45</sup> The partnerships that have been developed to date among French-language literacy centres, school boards, and daycares have proven very positive. Francophone community agencies such as health centres and early childhood centres can also become excellent partners, by allowing resources and expertise to be shared while also facilitating access to clients with low literacy skills, who are hard to reach by traditional recruitment methods.

#### Recommendation

We recommend that the literacy centres pursue new partnerships while maintaining and strengthening existing ones with French-language school boards and daycare centres, as well as with Francophone health centres and early childhood centres and any other Francophone community organizations.

### 3.7 Workshop Facilities

#### Finding

Literacy centres experience difficulty in finding appropriate premises to accommodate parents and children for their family literacy programs.

Having appropriate physical space is essential for the success of family literacy programs. The centres that run these programs are responsible for ensuring that the families who attend them are safe and comfortable and that the physical facilities comply with all regulations. For example, adults will not be very comfortable if they are made to sit for hours on chairs designed for 6-year-olds. For this reason, as was stressed by certain parents, an unsuitable physical facility will often result in dropouts. Centres that cannot accommodate the parents and children on their own premises find themselves at the mercy of whatever the community has to offer. In Cohorts 2 and 3, some parents had to change locations after the programs had begun and found themselves being bounced from one place to another as the program made do with whatever temporarily vacant spaces their school or community partners could offer.

#### Recommendation

When a centre establishes a new partnership that will involve using borrowed space, it is important to verify that this space will be appropriate for the adults or children before the program begins.

### 3.8 Age of Children

#### Finding

There was a lack of restrictions on the age of the children in the programs.

To encourage as many families as possible to participate in their programs, some of the centres decided not to place too many restrictions on the age of the children attending. For example, one centre offered a program for parents of children age 0 to 6. But this did

not work for all the parents. As one mother recounted: I have just had a baby, and I would like to have learned more about infants' health. Instead, we were shown how to get children more interested in reading and writing. That did not really meet my needs. Being too flexible about the age of the children who participated directly in workshops also created problems. Both the parents and the trainers commented that when the age range was too wide, the oldest children got bored while the youngest ones could not understand what was going on.

#### Recommendation

The problems just described could be avoided if the age range were more sharply defined, so as to better meet the parents' needs and ensure that they are satisfied.

### 3.9 Welcoming Children and Offering Them Services

#### Finding

There were no provisions for dealing with children during the workshops.

The centres that decided to include children had to face several challenges. How could these centres ensure that the parents could participate in their workshops in peace without being interrupted by their children? What should be done about children who didn't want to be separated from their parents? What should be done when parents insisted on keeping their children with them during a workshop? And what should be done with children who were unable to follow along with the rest of their group?

#### Recommendation

Rather than leaving it to the trainers to manage these situations as they see fit, why not establish a clear, specific protocol that sets out the steps to be taken in every situation? Presenting this protocol to the parents at the first workshop and asking for their full co-operation would then make it possible to provide better services for their children.



### 3.10 Enhancing Francophone Identity

#### Finding

Family literacy programs play an important role in the growth and development of the Francophone community.

Our research has confirmed the positive impact that the family literacy programs have had on the parents and children as regards their mastering and using the French language and attending French-language schools. However, how much emphasis is placed on Francophone identity in the workshops depends greatly on the priorities set by the centres, as well as on the commitment and skills of the workshop trainers. It should be recalled that only two of the program models used—*Grandir avec mon enfant* and *Des livres dans mon baluchon*—are specifically designed for Francophones living in minority settings.

By placing French at the heart of their priorities, the family literacy programs become far more than a support for parents in their role as their children's first teachers. They also directly contribute to the vitality of their communities and the survival of Francophone life in Canada.

#### Recommendation

We recommend that centres that choose other family literacy training models make a concerted effort to incorporate a Francophone identity theme into their programs, in particular by adding special activities dealing with Francophone life in Canada and by placing far more emphasis, in workshop discussions, on the importance of leading one's life in French.



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## END NOTES

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- 2 Government of Canada, 2003, p. 45.
- 3 S. LeTouzé, 2005.
- 4 A review of the French-language literature on family literacy indicates that the words *alphabétisme* and *alphabétisation* are now regarded as having a somewhat more restrictive meaning than the English term "literacy", and the tendency seems to be to use the term *littératie* instead because it is more encompassing.
- 5 Adapted from the definition by D. Masny, 2000.
- 6 The concept of literacy incorporates all the activities that lead to learning to read and write, including those that take place outside of school and that are neglected in traditional approaches to literacy training. (FCAF, 2005b)
- 7 Y. Laberge and S. Roy, 2004.
- 8 A census agglomeration is regarded as a census metropolitan area if it has a total population of at least 100 000 and an urban core with a population of at least 50 000. (Statistics Canada, 2003)
- 9 S. LeTouzé, 2004, p. 4.
- 10 F. Bertrand, 2004f, p. 3.
- 11 F. Bertrand, 2004b, p. 3.
- 12 F. Bertrand, 2004a, p. 3.
- 13 F. Bertrand, 2004d, p. 3.
- 14 F. Bertrand, 2004e, p. 3.
- 15 F. Bertrand, 2004c, p. 3.
- 16 Profiles of the vitality of the Francophone community in each of the service areas were also prepared in the course of the study. See Brunet Sherwood Consultants, 2004a-h.
- 17 See in particular R.-M. Duguay, 2004.
- 18 R. Nickse, 1991.
- 19 La Route du Savoir, 2005, p. 7.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 2005, p. 8.
- 21 R.-M. Duguay, 2004, p. 50.
- 22 M. Drolet, 2003, p. 33-34.
- 23 L. Saint-Laurent and J. Giasson, 2000.
- 24 See A. Martel, 2001.
- 25 M.-A. Dionne *et al.*, 2004, p. 148.
- 26 L. Saint-Laurent *et al.*, 2001.
- 27 Le coin de la famille, 2006.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 2006.
- 29 A. Faber and E. Mazlish, 2002.
- 30 I. Bernard, 2005.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 2005.
- 32 M. Champagne and A. Champagne, 2005b, p. 13.
- 33 M. Champagne and A. Champagne, 2005a, p. 87.
- 34 M. Champagne and A. Champagne, 2005a, p. 16.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 2005, p. 19.
- 36 The Centre Moi j'apprends literacy centre received many requests from French-language schools to offer the *Lire et écrire à la maison* program at the start of the school year in Fall 2005, when the Cohort 2 workshops began. Far fewer schools were interested in the winter semester, which is why the number of enrolments at this centre was so much lower for Cohort 3 than for Cohort 2.
- 37 The rows do not always add up to 100%, because the parents could also indicate that their children were too young or that none of the proposed responses applied.
- 38 One parent in each family completed the questionnaire.
- 39 See the definition on page 2 of this report.
- 40 The total is only 72, because only the participants who attended programs for parents of preschool-age children answered this question.
- 41 The figures in the "Often" column also include the responses "Very often".
- 42 The category "In French" includes the responses "Mainly in French" and "Only in French".
- 43 The category "In English" includes the responses "Mainly in English" and "Only in English".
- 44 A. Gilbert, 2003.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 2003.



