

**Transfer of Children's Early Literacy Behaviours and Parent Knowledge
from Parent-Focussed Family Literacy Programs**

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The main study (Transfer of Learning Among Adult Stakeholders in a Parent-Focussed Family Literacy Program) investigated the transfer of learning across key adult participants, ending with knowledge of literacy demonstrated by children on specific tasks. However, data from the study also showed that children used their acquired literacy knowledge in many settings, from home to playground. More specifically, data indicated how children were using their knowledge of literacy in the home, the community, and in the school, for those who had begun to attend school. The data for this section come from the total sample, that is 80 children, and 80 parents. Thirty-eight of the children were attending school, and were in kindergarten to grade five at the time of the study.

Transfer of Learning: Child to Home

The children engaged in independent activities, or initiated activities that were outside the activities which the parents had arranged for them. They also exhibited a change in attitude regarding literacy activities. Parents noticed these as new behaviours or as an increase in this kind of activity since working with the child as part of the PRINTS Program. Activities and behaviours of the children reported by the parents include:

Positive Attitude Towards Reading and Writing Tasks

- More confidence in completing literacy tasks.
- More inclined to engage in literacy related activities with parent.
- More quality time together.
- More attentive when she is read to.
- Believes reading is important.
- Went from no interest in books to loving it when I read to him.
- Will pick up books on her own and look at them.
- Tells me that reading to her makes her feel warm, even though she is nine now.
- Has become more interested and wants us (parents) to help him with his letters.
- Really reacts positively to praise and recognition.
- Enjoys reading more and can recognize some words.
- More eager to read.

Developing Reading/Writing Skills

- Recognizes what items in the house have words on them (environmental print) and points to the words.
- Draws pictures, and prints.
- Chooses books, or games instead of TV.
- Notices that words occur on clothes, such as slogans or labels.
- Helps me put away groceries and notices labels, saying things like, "Soup begins with 's'."
- Chooses his own book.
- Makes notices for the fridge.
- Printing has improved.
- Writes her own stories.
- Reads (using pictures).
- Asks for story every night.
- More curious about words.
- Can tell the difference between letters, words, and sentences.
- Reads better.
- Notices letters more; makes comments about them.
- Knows front to back of the book. Makes sure he turns it in the right direction.
- Writes (pretend) letters to people she knows
- Scribbling has turned to recognizable shapes.
- If I should start reading from the back of the book, he will immediately direct me to the front.
- Often memorizes sentences or expressions from books I read to her.
- Likes to print (copy) words from books.
- Knows upper and lower case letters.
- Now expects me to read a book in a certain way, such as starting with the author and title.
- Picks up a book and knows exactly how to hold it and where she should start reading.
- Points to a question mark and says, "Mom, say that as a question".

Engaging in Tasks Related to Reading/Writing

- Homework is no longer viewed as a chore.
- Welcomes chance to play with paper, scissors, glue.
- Points out and comments on things (details) when playing with others.
- Helps with grocery list.
- Always playing school with her dolls.
- Asks more questions about things
- Tries to answer questions from his sister's grade 1 homework.
- Always doing something with pencils and paper - doodles, drawing pictures, or making letters.

- Great interest in home activities such as measuring; can tell different sizes and shapes.
- Really into constructing and making things.
- Can express himself better.
- Makes up stories on his own.
- Makes up grocery lists.
- Notices different colours and shapes.
- Engages more in using crayons and paper.
- More into board games.
- Better at describing and explaining things.
- Pretends to read to her brother.
- Groups objects.
- Very interested in his brother's grade 5 homework and can even repeat some of the questions he hears his brother read
- A noted difference in the way he is learning. He often starts something or moves it along with questions. He is just more curious and involved.

General Positive Work Habits

- Works as a team, likes doing things together.
- Has a greater sense of responsibility when engaged in activities.
- Working together takes on a richer experience. It is more than taking part in any activity. It is supporting, sharing, and caring.
- Work habits have improved
- More independent in reading and in playing games.
- More aware of taking turns when playing.

Summary

The activities/behaviours listed above provide a window on the kinds of literacy activities and behaviours in which children engage in at home. One gets the impression that the children are very involved in reading/writing and literacy related activities. Their worlds at home seem filled with learning; their priorities have changed to include reading and writing. Not only do children engage in reading and writing and related activities but they are more positive and interested in them and have developed positive and constructive behaviours in sharing in activities with others.

Transfer of Learning: Child to Community

Family literacy has tended to be used synonymously with home literacy activities. This is the nature of family literacy that is often promoted by schools when

reading/writing tasks are sent home to be completed under the direction of the parents. However, family literacy should pervade all aspects of a child's life. This is the focus of the PRINTS Program where the five STEPS reflect different areas of a child's world. Below are activities and behaviours reported by parents which indicate that the children were using their new learnings about literacy beyond the home. These were observed mainly at community centres, on the playground, or on walks in the community.

Collaborative Learning with Others

- Child takes on parent role with other children - engages them in different activities.
- Helps younger children with letters and words.
- Points out letters to her playmates.
- Tries to get others to play (educational) games.
- Engages more in turn taking. Knows it is expected.
- Learning how to play games with parent has made her a better player when playing with her friends.
- Introduces games to his playmates, like "I Spy".
- More adjusted socially.
- Enjoys helping younger children.
- Has learned an important part of playing is sharing.
- More responsible for his actions; more cooperative.
- Enters into games more easily. Knows there are rules.
- I heard him point out signs to his friends.
- In games with words or letters on cards, he makes a point of saying these.
- Engages in drawing activities with his friend.

Engages in Reading/Writing and Related Tasks

- Notes signs.
- Uses more words; better able to describe things.
- More inclined to listen to stories and to choose stories over play.
- Has become really interested in signs.
- Grocery shopping has become a literacy experience as she looks for labels.
- More aware of role of print in community, that print is as much a part of the community as are houses and trees.
- Seems to recognize that print is part of eating in a restaurant - from "Wait Here to Be Seated" to the menu, to the bill. She can't read them but she knows they are print and are part of a restaurant visit.
- Wants to know what print says, for example, "What does ___ say"? pointing to words on a vehicle.

- Driving has become a literacy experience. We tell stories, count cars, notice signs, etc.

Positive Attitude/Self Confidence

- More confidence.
- More willing to learn or try new things.
- More outgoing.

Transfer of Learning: Child to School

Teachers were asked about the literacy behaviours of the children when they entered school. Their observations can be grouped under two headings: More prepared to engage in reading and writing tasks, and positive attitude towards school.

More Prepared to Engage in Reading and Writing Tasks

- Better prepared to engage in reading and writing.
- More independent in doing his work.
- Can tell a story using the story structure cues.
- Better in understanding what she reads.
- Better prepared to do school type activities.
- Asks questions about what he reads.
- More outgoing and answers questions more often during story time.
- Stories are not just to be listened to, by they are to be talked about.

Positive Attitude Towards School

- More interest in school work.
- More eager to read books.
- More confident in reading to the class.
- Looks forward to library day.
- Tries harder to do things; doesn't give up easily.
- More socially independent; feels confident in what he knows.
- Enjoys doing activities.
- Can pay attention better.
- Confident, willing to try.
- Better prepared to handle routine.

Transfer of Learning: Parents at Home

In addition to engaging the children in literacy type tasks which they learned during the PRINTS Program, the parents also adopted other behaviours or perspectives which supported literacy learning. These are as follows:

- More conscious of becoming a better role model for the child.
- Sees flyers from a whole different angle. Sees them as educational tools.
- Realized that learning can be so much fun.
- Better able to compare progress of child against older children when they were the child's age.
- Has become more focussed in terms of engaging child in literacy activities.
- Knows roles, routines, and opportunities.

Transfer of Learning: Parents to School

- PRINTS often provided a time for parents to meet teachers, etc., before children attended school.
- Made parents more aware of what schools expected of beginning children.
- Parents realized that PRINTS philosophy applicable to children in school.
- Parents want to help their children.
- Became aware that there are not enough books available for children.
- Developed a different kind of relationship in working with child. Instead of noticing mistakes and correcting them, look for positive things to say and build from there.

Transfer of Learning: Parents to Others

Parents, usually the mother, enroll in family literacy programs. This is often interpreted as a disadvantage, that both parents do not attend, or that fathers do not attend. However, this study showed that while mothers usually attended the PRINTS training sessions, the impact of the learning was felt far beyond the attendees. Parents were part of adult networks: family, neighbours, and friends. They often shared their learning and at times, asked if they could have copies of handouts to give to others. In calculating the value of family literacy programs, evaluators must factor in the spread of knowledge of literacy development far beyond those participating in the actual training. Below are listed the various people with whom the participants shared information.

Spouse/Partner. In many of the cases reported, the spouse/partner became involved in an incidental manner. As the children initiated activities, they very often engaged the dad/caregiver. As the study participants reported: "His dad now reads to him at home". "Her dad now joins in the activities." In a few instances, when the mother had to be absent during the time stories would be normally read with the child, she would teach the father how to effectively interact with the child when reading stories.

Grandparents. The involvement of grandparents usually seemed to happen on an incidental basis, usually when the grandparents visited the home of the child.

Comments regarding the involvement of grandparents include:

- Grandparents were curious as to what I was doing. Grandparents read to the child more often now.
- Grandpa now reads to my son.
- Grandparents tell more stories, especially about when they were young.

Siblings of Parents. In the cases of sharing information with siblings, it seemed that the mother who participated in the PRINTS Program usually talked to her sisters or brothers about the education of children. In that context, the parent shared information on the program with them. Some comments supporting this kind of transfer are:

- My sister couldn't enroll in the program so I had to share the activities with her. I had to model for her how to read with her child.
- I shared some of the games with my sister who has a two year old and a five year old.
- My brother-in-law does not like reading. I talked to him about the effect this could have on my child (his nephew) and explained to him the importance of modelling behaviours. Now he no longer makes comments that are negative about reading. In fact, he sits and reads along with my child.
- I made games for all the preschoolers in my sisters' and brothers' families.

- I encouraged my daughter who has a preschool child to enroll in the PRINTS program, and she did (spoken by a parent/grandparent).

Siblings of Children. Parents realized that other children in the family may be affected by their learning and practice about literacy development. This entailed different forms of involvement as indicated below.

- Older child has adapted to my style of reading to his younger brother.
- Spills over to my littlest one.
- I work also with my older child who has difficulties in school. I am now more relaxed when I help him at his homework. I am more inclined to give him praise for his work and his effort.

Friends and Others. The above categories of sharing usually involved others beyond the parent trained directly supporting the child's literacy development. In the case of friends and others, parents usually played a sharing (communication) or advocacy role.

- Told friends and others about the program.
- Loaned my Parent Handbook to a good friend.
- Promoted the program wholeheartedly to anyone who has a small child.
- Talked to parents in my child's preschool class.
- Shared knowledge of program to colleagues at work.
- Told my hairdresser.
- Helped a parent of a grade 1 child by showing her some of the things I learned that she could use to help him.
- Informed school board members.
- Discussed with local libraries the lack of a variety of interesting children's books.

Impact of Program on Parents as Individuals

Participating in the training sessions of the PRINTS Program and engaging in literacy activities with their children seemed to engender in parents a greater interest in their own lives. Just as they understood that literacy development is not confined to home or school, they too, began to understand that their lives extend beyond home also. They were more curious about what was available to them and were very interested in "keeping in touch" with their children's learning as they entered school. Some of the ways parents expressed their interest in events beyond their immediate environment included:

- Becoming volunteers at school
- Acting as bus monitors
- Volunteering at the Community Centre for children's programs
- Taking part in structured programs supporting children's learning such as Homework Havens
- Enrolling in GED program
- Becoming involved in their community through participating on Tenants or other community boards
- Availed of opportunities to attend the public library
- Enrolled in computer programs
- Enrolled in personal development programs
 - Became active in Parents Teachers' Associations or School Councils

Summary

Family literacy extends beyond the home. Children and parents are key stakeholders in fostering the transfer of literacy knowledge and support both inside and outside the home. The data in this section cast doubt on evaluating the success of a family literacy program by assessing children's knowledge of literacy on various literacy tasks. The effects of a family literacy program can only be assessed in a much broader context in which children and parents have a key role in impacting others. Participation in a family literacy program seems to have a ripple effect, with children and parents at the centre.

Factors other than literacy knowledge may affect how children perform in school. There is some indication that rather than considering the level of literacy knowledge which children possess, their teachers may be comparing them to other

children in the classroom. If their peers are from homes of similar economic background, the children who participated in the family literacy program may have an advantage; however, if the peers are from higher income homes, the children may be perceived as performing less well than they on literacy tasks. One wonders if absolute knowledge or expectation is a key factor in this ranking?