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**Family and Early Childhood Literacy in New Brunswick:
A Provincial Snapshot (Spring 1999)**

Part I – Brief Review of the Literature [1]

**Study conducted by the
Centre de recherche et de développement en éducation
Faculté des sciences de l'éducation
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**in cooperation with
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PREFACE

This study, initiated by Literacy New Brunswick Inc. (LNBI), was made possible by financial support from the National Literacy Secretariat (Human Resources Development - Canada). LNBI worked closely with the *Centre de recherche et de développement en éducation* (CRDE, Research and Development Centre on Education) to develop the research design and to plan and carry out the different studies that make up this research project. The research report is made up of six documents or parts: Part I – Brief Review of the Literature; Part II – Sociodemographic profiles of New Brunswick and its seven Health Regions: Population, families with at least one child of 0 to 4 years of age, and children 0 to 4 years of age; Part III – Inventory of Family Literacy and Early Childhood Initiatives in New Brunswick; Part IV - Survey of Parents of Preschool Children; Part V – Focus Groups with Family Literacy Partners; and Part VI – Summary Report. The results of each of these parts are presented in six documents available in English and in French. LNBI and the CRDE also worked together to develop the data collection instruments (questionnaires and interview questions) and to collect the data.

As for the reports, the literature review was drafted by Diane Lord and finalized by Carole Essiembre. Réal Allard wrote the sociodemographic profiles and LNBI prepared the inventory of family literacy interventions and with the collaboration of the CRDE, the overview of the results. Carole Essiembre wrote the reports on the survey of parents and the focus groups with partners, as well as the summary report.

From the CRDE, we wish to thank the many people who worked on this research project at one stage or another: Diane Lord, CRDE research officer, for her work on the research design, data collection, focus groups, and literature review; Renée LePage, Janine Mazerolle, and Manon Cormier, for their help as CRDE research assistants; Lisa LeBlanc, for her work as CRDE secretary; Carole Essiembre, research officer, for revising the literature review, verifying and interpreting the data, and drafting the final version of the

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INTRODUCTION

The Research and Development Centre on Education has prepared a brief review of relevant literature for its research project entitled *Family and Early Childhood Literacy in New Brunswick: A Provincial Snapshot (Spring 1999)*. The research project has six parts and this document relates to the first part (see Preface for a list of parts).

The following report presents the highlights of the Centre's review of the literature on family literacy. In the first section, definitions of family literacy and related concepts are given. The second section addresses the family's role in the literacy process and manifestations of the family's influence. The third section outlines new approaches and trends in family literacy and describes Nickse's typology, which is used to categorize interventions in this field. The fourth and final section discusses future research needs.

1. DEFINITIONS OF FAMILY LITERACY AND RELATED CONCEPTS

The objective of this section is to define family literacy and a few related concepts. However, it is impossible to delimit family literacy without first touching on the ambiguity surrounding the concept. First, we will discuss the problem of defining family literacy, and we will review various definitions given to it. We will then present and define a few concepts closely related to family literacy, namely intergenerational literacy, emergent literacy, and natural literacy.

1.1 Family Literacy

Many authors agree that there is no commonly accepted definition of family literacy (Brizius and Foster, 1993; Jongsma, 1990; Ryan et al., 1991; Thomas, Skage, and Jackson, 1998; Weinstein-Shr, 1990). Literature on the subject contains numerous definitions and illustrates to the complex nature of this concept.

1.1.1   Problems Involved in Defining the Concept

The concept of family literacy is very recent (Laberge, 1994). Thomas et al. state: "The term 'family literacy' was first coined by Denny Taylor in her 1983 study which explored the social context of the home as a key factor in the literacy development of young children." (1998, p. 3, Trans.). The novelty of the concept of family literacy explains in part why this field has been largely unexplored by research and development (Nickse, 1990). This embryonic state makes it difficult to understand all the characteristics of family literacy.

Further, advances made in literacy have been more of a practical rather than a theoretical or conceptual nature (Nickse, 1993). It is also commonplace among practitioners to define the concept of family literacy in terms of their practices (Laberge, 1994) or the goal to be attained (Desjardins, 1996). The definition of the concept of family literacy has thus widened and become very controversial (Nickse, 1989; Tracey, 1995). Desjardins (1996) wonders whether the complexity of the concept is due to the complexity of the intervention or its recentness. It would appear that both factors are responsible for this complexity.

Let us also consider what Nickse (1990) has to say about the diversity of the fields or areas of study that make up the basis of research in family literacy. The concept is rooted in several areas: adult literacy, emergent literacy, cognitive science, early childhood development, and theory of the family unit. Such diversity is inevitably mirrored in practice. Of course, not only researchers but also practitioners hail from different fields and different educational backgrounds. What is more, most of them advocate a holistic approach, thereby making the concept of family literacy even more complex.

The tremendous number and diversity of definitions of family literacy become apparent on reading texts on the subject. A few of them are presented in the following section.

1.1.2   Review of Definitions

There are many definitions of family literacy. Some are general and define family literacy as a way of improving quality of life. Following are a few examples:

> ... it [family literacy] is generally defined as a community-based process designed to meet a need present from one generation to the next by acting on the extended family. (*Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français*, 1995, p. 26, Trans.)

> ... the *Fondation québécoise pour l'alphabétisation* defines family literacy as a multidisciplinary approach aimed at meeting a series of needs: support services for the family, parents, and children that can mitigate the impact of day-to-day issues of survival that interfere with concentration on learning. It may also take the form of services that contribute to the development of skills likely to increase economic self-reliance and self-confidence. (*Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français*, 1995, p. 26, Trans.)

> ... [family literacy] an extended intervention approach whose objective is to break the cycle of poverty and under-education in families. (National Center for Family Literacy, cited in Potts, 1994a, p.13, Trans.)

Besides the imprecision of these definitions, there is also a tendency to define family literacy as an intervention or even according to the objective of the intervention, rather than to define it as a concept.

However, there are other definitions that are narrower and describe it as a concept related to the acquisition of literacy skills. In this respect, these definitions seem to define the concept of family literacy better by differentiating it from intervention:

> Family literacy refers to the many ways families develop and use literacy skills to accomplish day-to-day tasks and activities... (Thomas et al., 1998, p. 3, Trans.)

> Literacy activities that create in the home an environment conducive to learning. (Family Literacy Action Group (FLAG), cited in Desjardins, 1996, p. 5, Trans.)

On examining all these definitions closely, it is surprising to note that family literacy is often defined as an outside intervention impacting on the family (first three definitions), rather than as a phenomenon or experience that occurs, both inevitably and naturally, inside the family (last two definitions). Family literacy is always present in different forms and to different degrees in the family unit. Family literacy activities impact on, guide, stimulate, enrich, and nurture that which is already present, i.e. the literacy process already taking place in the home environment.

The literature contains a few definitions of interventions (programs, projects) in family literacy without defining the concept as such. Following are a few of these definitions:

> Family literacy projects refer to a broad spectrum of initiatives that recognize the role of the family in the literacy development of family members and try to support families in literacy activity and in accessing literacy resources. (Thomas et al., 1998, p. 3, Trans.)

> ...family literacy programs focus on the educations of both [children and parents], investing in children with preventative measures and reinvesting in the education of their parents because prevention was not enough. Placing the emphasis on literacy development within the family context, the message is delivered to the parents that they are the critical teachers in the child's life. (Potts, 1994b, p. 30)

> The goal of family literacy programs is to improve the lives of both children and parents and to enhance skills, attitudes, values, and behaviours related to reading. (Nickse, cited in Desjardins, 1996, p. 5, Trans.)

Although there is no commonly accepted definition of family literacy or of what is meant by family literacy intervention, attempts in theory and practice seem to have the following commonalties: recognition of the importance of the family in literacy development and

the objective to break the cycle of illiteracy (Auerbach, 1989; Brizius and Foster, 1993; Bus, van Ijzendoorn, and Pellegrini, 1995; Cronan, Walen, and Cruz, 1994; Darling, 1993; Gaudet, 1994; Jongsma, 1990; Kerka, 1991; Laberge, 1994; Nickse, 1990; Potts, 1994a, 1994b; Poulton, 1993).

1.2   Intergenerational Literacy

Intergenerational literacy, like family literacy, is a recent concept used in different ways by different people (Weinstein-Shr, 1990). The confusion surrounding the meaning of 'intergenerational' and 'family' is clearly addressed by Nickse (1993):

> The theme of 'intergenerational' and 'family' literacy is a hot topic -- but there is little agreement about the meaning of these two words.   For some program designers, the term 'intergenerational' limits participation to parents and children from the same family; for others it means someone older with someone younger (teens tutoring youngsters, seniors reading to kids). 'Family' can mean parents and a child (or children), or include caretakers, extended family members, and friends. So-called 'family' programs may specifically target only mothers, others may actually serve more mothers because fathers are not present or are unavailable for other reasons i.e., they are working. Program titles can be misleading -- one cannot infer the nature of a program from the title. (p. 29)

The concepts of intergenerational literacy and family literacy are highly interrelated owing to their nature and objectives. Both acknowledge the intergenerational transfer of literacy skills and abilities and are aimed at breaking the cycle of illiteracy (Cronan et al., 1994; Nickse, 1990). The groups targeted by both types of intervention are thus children and adults, with the result that some authors attach little importance to differentiating between them: "Regardless of the names of the programs, the intent of all of them is to treat literacy as a social activity that affects both young and older learners..." (Jongsma, 1990, p. 426).

However, some authors maintain that it is necessary to differentiate between these two concepts (Nickse, 1989, 1993; Weinstein-Shr, 1990), with a distinction to be made in the group targeted by the intervention. Whereas family literacy interventions are aimed at adults and children from the same family, intergenerational literacy interventions are considered from a more comprehensive perspective in that they include adults and children from the community as a whole, regardless of their relationships with each other.

> Intergenerational literacy is used in a broader sense; besides parents and children, other adults such as grandparents, neighbours, nonparental guardians, and volunteers who will form new relationships with young people may be involved. (Weinstein-Shr, 1990, p. l2)

Thus, not all intergenerational literacy interventions come under the scope of family literacy programs (Nickse, 1990). However, the opposite is true: family literacy programs are part of the broader range of intergenerational literacy programs (Nickse, 1993).

1.3   Emergent Literacy

It was formerly thought that children learned first to listen and speak and, later, on entering school, to read and write (Bradt, 1991). Recent research in such areas as cognitive science and education has proven otherwise. These skills are not learned in that manner, i.e. sequentially, but rather concomitantly. This phenomenon in a child's development has been referred to as 'emergent literacy':

> The popular term, emergent literacy, refers to the combination of the skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening in the process of learning to be literate. Each of these skills, learned simultaneously, help in learning about the other... The philosophy of emergent literacy suggests that children do learn before entering kindergarten; learning starts immediately and is continuous. (Bradt, 1991, p. 10)

In other words, emergent literacy is based on the principle whereby an individual's literacy development begins prior to formal instruction (Bus, vanIJzendoorn, and Pellegrini, 1995; Marvin and Wright, 1997; Nickse, 1990). As described by Laberge (1994), it is "... a process that starts at birth" (p. 3, Trans.). Further, in emergent literacy, listening, speaking, and reading and writing skills develop simultaneously, with each affecting the development of the other.

1.4   Natural Literacy

Emergent literacy, as a process triggered prior to formal instruction, is related to another concept, namely natural literacy. Teale (1983) defines this phenomenon as follows: "Some children become capable readers and writers before even attending school and without exposure to formal instruction." (p. 1).

Besides acknowledging that natural literacy is an intrinsic part of a child's literacy development, Teale (1983) and Watkins and Bunce (1996) state further that the environment plays a dominant role as a matrix in the cognitive development of the child. Significant adults who are part of this environment thus play a crucial role in the child's literacy development:

> ... the child is active in the enterprise of learning to read and write before schooling, but the process in not entirely endogenous; the adult 'presents' much of the literacy environment to the child in a socialized, mediated form and thus teaching is also involved. (Teale, 1983, p. 2)

In other words, literacy develops 'naturally' in the child as long as the parents and the environment in which the child lives nurture the latter's literacy development.

2. FAMILY AND LITERACY

The definitions of family literacy and family literacy interventions presented in Section One all have in common the fact that they ascribe to families and parents a primary role in literacy development in children. Thus, the concept of family literacy cannot be examined without addressing the intergenerational transfer of literacy practices as well as the home environment in which this transfer takes place.

2. 1   Intergenerational Cycle: Poverty and Illiteracy

Numerous studies have shown in the past that children from poor socio-economic backgrounds do not succeed as well at school, especially where reading and writing are concerned, as children from better-off socio-economic backgrounds (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1981, 1985; Stein, 1971; St. John, 1970). However, other contemporary studies on this subject have shown that the socio-economic variable alone does not account for differences in language and literacy development in children (Beals and De Temple, 1993; Chaney, 1994; Freeman and Wasserman, 1986; Gaudet, 1994; Greaney, 1986; Neuman, 1996; Payne, Whitehurst, and Angell, 1994; Snow, 1991).

In a study on the influence of the home environment on the development of language skills in young children from poor socio-economic backgrounds, Payne et al. (1994) found significant differences in the quality of these environments. They also noted that these differences had a noticeable impact on the development of literacy skills in children. The authors interpreted their findings as follows:

> These results suggest that despite the economic difficulties and other stresses faced by the low-income families, many still manage to engage in interactions such as shared picture book reading that are motivated by long-term goals such as school readiness. Further, our results demonstrate that these interactions affect children's skills, no less in low-income families than in the

middle-class families that have been the subjects of previous research. (Payne et al., 1994, p. 438.)

Moreover, many researchers have established a relatively close correlation between child and parental literacy (Cronan et al., 1994; Darling, 1993; Mason and Allen, 1986; Neuman and Gallagher, 1994; Nickse, 1990; Potts, 1994b; Poulton, 1993; Teale and Sulzby, 1986). This correlation focuses on the intergenerational cycle of literacy. Potts (1994b) explains the nature of this correlation as follows: "... we know, in fact, that parents who lack basic literacy skills, themselves, cannot provide the nurturing literate culture and climate that stimulates a child's intellectual development." (p. 28). It is important here not to confuse the term 'intergenerational cycle' with 'intergenerational literacy'. Intergenerational cycle refers to interventions within the same family, whereas intergenerational literacy refers to family literacy interventions but not necessarily within the same family.

Studies have shown, in fact, that parental education affects child achievements (Nickse, 1990; Potts, 1994b). Parents who lack the basic skills cannot provide an environment or tools that will nurture the development of their children (Potts, 1994b). Thus, illiteracy becomes part of an intergenerational cycle that can be defined as follows: "a lack of basic literacy skills which not only severely limits the quality of adults ('parents') lives and roles in society, but also limits the development of literacy skills in their children" (Poulton, 1993, p. 3). According to Cronan et al. (1994), the development of literacy skills is handed down from one generation to the next.

2.2   Home Environment and Literacy

The intergenerational cycle of illiteracy is a subject of particular, wide-ranging, and growing interest among researchers seeking to understand and delimit the home environment in the context of literacy. In the following section, we will briefly examine a

few works that deal with the importance of the home environment in the literacy process and the role played by parents in this process.

2.2.1   Home Environment

The school environment is obviously suited to guiding children in the acquisition of intellectual knowledge and skills, since it was designed specifically with this objective in mind. However, we now know that the home environment also plays a leading role in this development, especially where literacy skills are concerned (Anglum, Bell, and Roubinek, 1990; Freeman and Wasserman, 1986; Greaney, 1986; Marvin and Wright, 1997; McMackin, 1993; Neuman, 1996; Neuman and Roskos, 1997; Sénéchal, LeFevre, Thomas, and Daley, 1998; Strickland and Morrow, 1989; Thompson, 1985). But, to what extent is this role played by the family? To what degree does the home environment impact on a child's literacy development?

In a 1985 study on the effects of various environments (home, school, and neighbourhood) on the educational performance of pupils aged 7 and 10, Thompson (1985), of Nova Scotia, noted the significance of the home influence: "At both age levels, on the major educational factors, the home contributes at least 70 percent towards the total environmental variance. The regression analyses confirm both the degree and significance of this home influence on educational performance." (p. 20). These findings suggest that the home environment has a greater impact on educational performance than all other environments in which children develop. The findings of this study also show that this impact is more significant from the viewpoint of the acquisition of reading skills than the acquisition of mathematical skills (Thompson, 1985).

Greaney (1986) also noted as much: "In comparison with the influence of the school, home environment appears to contribute more to reading comprehension, while school plays the more dominant role in subjects such as science, mathematics, and foreign language." (p. 814). Whitehurst et al. (1994) share this opinion, stating that the quality of

the school environment seems to play a more significant role in terms of measurement of intelligence and performance, whereas the quality of the home environment seems to have a greater impact on the development of language skills.

2.2.2   Impact of the Home on Literacy Development: Model Proposed by Snow et al.

All of the studies cited above help show the significance of the influence of the home on the development of a child's intellectual skills, especially those related to reading and writing. However, the home environment is complex. It consists of various components which, in interaction with each other, create a unique family dynamic that may be more or less suited to the development of the literacy skills of the individuals who live in it (Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, and Hemphill, 1991). The following question is therefore very relevant: How does the impact of the home environment manifest itself in the development of literacy skills?

In response to a number of earlier studies, Snow et al. (1991) developed a theoretical model of the influence of the home on literacy development. These researchers identified five categories of factors that delimit the home environment and show how its influence manifests itself in literacy development.

The first factor, <u>the literacy environment of the home</u>, is characterized by the provision of various kinds of literacy materials in the home. The influence of this factor on literacy development is manifested in the way these materials are used and in the quality of the environment in which they are used.

<u>Opportunities to learn</u> are a second factor identified by Snow et al. (1991). This factor is characterized by the organization of activities that bring children into contact with other people and provide them with new experiences in different areas. These encounters and

experiences act as models for children and stimulate their development, including their literacy skills.

<u>Parental education</u> is a third factor which, according to Snow et al. (1991), affects literacy development. These researchers believe that the children of more educated parents fare better at school, especially in language-related areas, because these parents see more the importance of education and instil this value in their children by creating a home environment based on an educational model.

<u>Parental expectations</u> are a fourth factor identified by Snow et al. (1991). The aspirations of parents and other family members regarding the children's educational performance take the form of expectations and requirements in connection with school success, support and encouragement given the children, and suggestions of possible trades or occupations. The family members' perception of the potential of the children plays a significant role in the development of their literacy skills.

The last factor is <u>parental teaching</u>. Snow et al. (1991) postulate that positive interaction between parent and child during educational or intellectually stimulating activities or homework sessions enhances literacy development in children.

The model proposed by Snow et al. (1991) highlights the many diverse aspects of the home environment that affect literacy development in children. However, it draws attention especially to the significance of the parental role in this process. The following section will therefore deal specifically with a few studies that have examined the role of parents in literacy development in children.

2.2.3   Parents' Role

Many authors state that parents, as actors, resource persons, and models, are the linchpin in the development of literacy skills in children. This finding is supported in a number of

studies (Anglum et al., 1990; Bus et al., 1995; Danielson, 1997; Freeman and Wasserman, 1986; McMackin, 1993; Payne et al., 1994; Strickland and Morrow, 1989; Thompson, 1985; Wolfendale, 1994).

For instance, the findings of the study by Thompson (1985) and those of the study by Bus et al. (1995) reveal that in the home environment, it is the parents and not the material objects in it that have the greatest impact on the development of children's literacy skills.

A study by Anglum et al. (1990) reveals that the father's educational level is the social variable that is the strongest predictor of the child's reading performance at all levels, from grades one to six.

Freeman and Wasserman (1986) aptly summarize the role played by parents, as actors, resource persons, and models, in this development:

> What is much more important, the research data indicated, is the presence of parents who spend time with their children; who read to them; who answer their questions and their requests for help; and who demonstrate in their own lives that reading is a rich source of relaxation, information, and contentment. (p. 115)

Further, other studies have found significant differences in the extent to which parents' various roles can affect literacy development in children. For example, Bus et al. (1995) and Payne et al. (1994) showed that the parent as acting model has a greater impact on the child's acquisition of reading and writing skills than the parent as reading model.

Payne et al. (1994) and Greaney (1986) found that the parent's influence as an actor and resource person was all the more effective if, during interventions, the child was invited to become an active participant.

Lastly, it should be noted that a large part of the literature advocates the need to develop in the home environment the full potential of two main components, i.e. access to materials and parental involvement (Bus et al., 1995; Freeman and Wasserman, 1986;

Marvin and Wright, 1997; Neuman and Gallagher, 1994; Neuman and Roskos, 1993; Snow et al., 1991). Marvin and Wright (1997) summarize these two aspects as follows:

> Early adult-child interactions and exposure to print can provide preschool children with the opportunity to see the various forms in which messages can be conveyed. Environments in which children are read to regularly, frequently see others reading, have easy access to reading and writing materials, and are encouraged to ask and answer questions during reading and writing activities are considered fundamental for the development of literacy skills in young children. (p. 154)

Further, according to Auerbach (1989), Potts (1994b), and Bus et al. (1995), it was the growing awareness of the significant influence of the home environment on literacy development in children that led to the establishment of family literacy programs. The third section of this review, while not a description of the many existing family literacy programs, aims to present new approaches and trends advocated by some authors and researchers.

3. NEW APPROACHES AND TRENDS IN FAMILY LITERACY

The large quantity and diversity of family literacy programs can be explained in large part by the growing realization that the home environment plays a very significant role in the literacy development of children and other family members (Auerbach, 1989; Bus et al., 1995; Potts, 1994a, 1994b). They can also be explained by the broad spectrum of research and development sectors concerned with this phenomenon and the multitude of community and government agencies involved in implementing programs designed to promote and foster literacy in the home environment (Nickse, 1990).

There are too many family literacy programs to list and describe in this paper. However, we will discuss a few contemporary approaches and recent principles that seem to be attempts at modelling new trends in family literacy. In the following pages, we will

describe briefly some of these approaches and principles, and we will present Nickse's typology, which is used to classify family literacy interventions.

3.1   Socio-contextual Approach

The social-contextual approach to family literacy is based on the principle that the social reality of the family must be acknowledged and that its strengths have to be made known and developed in order to maximize the effectiveness of family literacy programs (Auerbach, 1989; Neuman, 1996; Neuman and Gallagher, 1994; Potts, 1994a, 1994b; Topping, 1986; Wolfendale, 1994).

This approach calls first and foremost for intervention rooted in the family's activities of daily living rather than outside intervention that would tax the family's already busy schedule (Auerbach, 1989; Neuman, 1996). Such intervention will be much more viable, owing to its inclusion in family routines and significance in the eyes of family members.

Without minimizing the impact of reading children's stories, Neuman and Gallagher (1994) explain how intervention based on a socio-contextual approach influences children's literacy development:

> ... a family's influence in children's literacy learning involves far more than the provision of books or leisure-time reading; it also involves the development through shared activities of ways to handle day-to-day print events, such as shopping for groceries or paying bills, which work concurrently to enhance children's learning about written language. (p. 383)

Furthermore, this approach advocates intervention that emphasizes the strengths (i.e. positive aspects) and values already present in the home environment rather than intervention which does not reflect family values and which requires specific skills not always present from the outset. "Family literacy programs should operate as models of family strength, recognizing that all families have strengths they bring to the learning

situation." (Potts, 1994b, p. 30). Once again, intervention becomes much more viable, because it draws upon the strengths and skills that family members already have and because it is consistent with values conveyed in the home (Auerbach, 1989; DeBaryshe, 1995; Topping, 1986).

This approach can bring about major changes in current family literacy projects that are often, according to Auerbach (1989) and Topping (1986), patterned too closely after the models found in the school system. Topping (1986) describes these changes as follows:

> Instead of working to make parents pale mechanistic shadows of teachers, operating some transplanted fragment of professional technique, modern projects focus much more on the unique contribution of parents to the development of their children enhancing the naturalistic skills of parents and taking their views and priorities very much in account. (p. 4)

Clearly, the nature of this model is such that projects deriving from it can take on as many forms as there are families. According to Auerbach (1989), it is important to ask the following question before intervening with a family or community: "How can we draw on parents' knowledge and experience to inform instruction? rather than, How can we transfer school practices into home contexts?" (p. 177). Family literacy projects must therefore take parents' knowledge and experience into account. We must stop imposing the school model on the home environment.

3.2   Natural Literacy

According to the principle of natural literacy, children play a key role in their literacy development, because the literacy process is triggered naturally and spontaneously (Teale, 1983; Watkins and Bunce, 1996). Teale (1983) explains the implications of this principle:

> The implications for literacy development in early childhood are that there is not simply a literacy environment out there which is

> presented to the child. Instead, the child is actively involved in creating the literacy environment. The initiations, temperament, questions, and other actions/qualities of the child actually affect the nature and frequency of activities mediated by literacy which occur in the child's environment. (p. 6)

This approach advocates intervention aimed at stimulating, fostering, and promoting spontaneous initiatives by children in activities that develop their literacy skills rather than intervention in the form of highly structured activities.

However, for children to become actively involved in such activities, they must be provided with an environment rich in materials that promote the acquisition of literacy skills and in which there are adults able to identify the children's literacy initiatives in order to maximize their benefits (Greaney, 1986; Payne et al., 1994; Teale, 1983; Watkins and Bunce; 1996). Watkins and Bunce (1996) discuss the theoretical principles underlying this approach and suggest several natural literacy projects for preschoolers.

3.3 Verbal Interaction: The Impact of Decontextualized Conversation

Frequent and positive verbal interaction between parent and child greatly affects language development in very young children and initiates them to reading and writing skills (Anglum et al., 1990; Danielson, 1997; Greaney, 1986; McMackin, 1993; Thompson, 1985; Wolfendale, 1994). Greaney (1986) concurs in the matter: "Parental verbal interaction with the child helps develop linguistic cognitive skills important for reading... The quality of parental verbal interaction with the child is related to reading achievement." (p. 815).

However, some studies have focussed on the impact of a specific kind of verbal interaction, namely 'decontextualized conversation' (Reese, 1995; Snow, 1991). Decontextualized conversation is defined as verbal interaction between adult and child emphasizing subjects or topics, such as past events or fictitious stories, not related to the

immediate environment (Reese, 1995; Snow, 1991). The child cannot therefore rely on tangible clues provided by objects or events in the immediate environment.

In this type of verbal interaction, children have to rely on their cognitive skills of distantiation and abstract thought, two skills closely related to language development (Reese, 1995; Snow, 1991). That explains why decontextualized conversation between adult and child plays a key role in the development of language skills (De Temple and Beals, 1991; Gearney, 1986; Reese, 1995; Snow, 1991). Snow (1991) takes it a step farther by adding: "Adults' decontextualization strategies in conversation may help prepare children for understanding the written word." (p. 8).

Reese (1995), in a study of children aged three to five and their mothers, noted the following:

> In contrast, mother-child conversation during shared past event narratives was a more powerful predictor than book reading, especially for children's print and semantics skills. These conversations, which have nothing to do with storybooks or print, nevertheless were the strongest predictor of children's print concepts, vocabulary, and story comprehension. (p. 400-401)

These findings, among other things, help make persons who work in the literacy field understand that literacy development in children does not occur solely as a result of activities and interventions relying on materials directly related to reading and writing (e.g. books, crayons, magnetic letters). Indeed, the quality and quantity of conversations between adult and child greatly affect not only the language development of the child but also the development of his or her reading and writing skills.

The role played by strategies involving verbal interaction between adult and child, and especially that of decontextualized conversation in the literacy process in children, is the subject of increasing interest among researchers such as Catherine Snow (1991) and

Elaine Reese (1995). It remains to be seen whether future projects will rely more on this type of strategy as a way of stimulating literacy development in children.

3.4   Reading to Children: An Interactive Activity

Research in the areas of language and literacy development in preschool children has contributed greatly to the identification of new approaches that may have a place in future projects. However, research has also revealed the impact that can be had with an approach that is already well known and often used, namely reading to children (Bus et al., 1995; DeBaryshe, 1995; Freeman and Wasserman, 1986; Gearney, 1986; McMackin, 1993). DeBaryshe (1995) writes:

> Reading aloud to young children may be one of the most important home learning activities that parents provide. Reading aloud appears to make a significant contribution to oral language and emergent literacy skills... Correlational research suggests that a broad exposure to book-reading throughout the preschool years is associated with stronger language skills and print awareness and with later reading comprehension. (pp. 1-2)

Freeman and Wasserman (1986) add that children who are given this opportunity early in life develop the desire and motivation to make books and reading part of their childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. "We believe that preschoolers demonstrating a spontaneous and natural interest in books come from homes where parents engage in positive reading activities." (Freeman and Wasserman, 1986, p. 114).

At first blush, reading to children would appear to be an activity in which only the parent takes on an active role (the reader), with the child playing a rather passive part (listener). Many authors believe, however, that this activity can be one in which the children themselves become active participants (Bus et al., 1995; DeBaryshe, 1995; Gearney, 1986; Neuman, 1996).

These authors cite numerous ways of making children more active participants in the reading activity. Following are a few examples: letting the child choose the book; letting the child hold the book and turn the pages; asking the child questions; letting the child ask questions or react; letting the child finish passages in the story; inviting the child to make up a different ending to the story than the one in the book; and getting the child to relate the story to his or her life (Bus et al., 1995; DeBaryshe, 1995; Gearney, 1986; Neuman, 1996).

Neuman (1996) speaks of the benefits of reading to young children when it allows them to interact with adults: "As an intensely social activity, book reading provides an interactive context for children to acquire and practice developing verbal and conceptual skills... advancing their capabilities for language development, independent thinking, and problem solving." (p. 496).

Book reading in which children are given the opportunity to be active participants makes them want to read and develops their language, problem-solving, and reading comprehension skills (DeBaryshe, 1995; Neuman, 1996).

The four preceding sections dealt with a few new approaches and trends in family literacy which are responsible for the development of a number of programs. In the following, we will discuss Nickse's typology, which is used to classify various programs in this field.

3.5   Nickse's Typology

Ruth Nickse presents in several of her works a typology she developed for classifying intergenerational and family literacy programs (Nickse, 1989, 1990, 1993). Many authors refer to this typology (Gaudet, 1994; Kerka, 1991; Laberge, 1994; Poulton, 1993), which Nickse uses to classify intergenerational and family literacy programs according to two criteria:

-degree of intervention: direct or indirect

-type of target participant: adult or child

This typology yields four categories that can be used to classify the different types of intergenerational and family literacy programs.

Type 1: Direct adult/direct child participation

This type of highly structured program provides formal, intensive instruction to both adults and their children. Parents can take part in parental training, vocational training, etc. They are taught how to interact with their children, how to play with them, and how to read with them and to them. Participation is supervised by adult education professionals and early childhood educators.

Type 2: Indirect adult/indirect child participation

In these programs, the two types of participants, adults and children, are invited to play an active role. Literacy development is limited to support for and encouragement of reading as a pleasurable activity, a knowledge tool, and an opportunity for discussion. There is no, or little, direct teaching to parents and children. Literacy-type events incorporate a variety of activities.

Type 3: Direct adult/indirect child participation

This category includes initiatives offering literacy courses to adults as well as training in the art of being a parent. Instruction is structured and didactic or participatory. The parents become more literate and aware of facts relating to the development of literacy skills in their children.

<u>Type 4</u>: Indirect adult/direct child participation

The development of literacy skills in children is the main component of this intervention type. The adult program may include informative workshops on how to influence their children's development of these skills.

As already mentioned, this typology is used to group together and classify the many family literacy programs. In the preceding sections, we examined a few research studies on family literacy, including the many concepts related to family literacy, the importance of the family in this regard, and new approaches and trends in this field. In the following section, we will identify research and development needs in terms of family literacy.

4. FAMILY LITERACY NEEDS

Family literacy is a very recent and largely unexplored research field, resulting in numerous research and development needs. In the following pages, we will discuss some of these needs. First, we will address the development of future programs; second, stakeholder training; third, research on language development factors and the literacy process; and fourth, the evaluation of family literacy programs.

4.1   Development of Family Literacy Programs

According to Laberge (1994), all family literacy programs that are developed must take into account the following three elements. First, programs must reflect new approaches and developments related to family literacy. Second, they should be developed based on the specific needs of the target groups. Third, family literacy programs should be founded on solid partnerships with the community. Let us examine these three elements in more detail.

The first element, i.e. to ensure that programs reflect new approaches to family literacy, is a reminder of the importance of taking into account new developments in connection with family literacy programs. Sections 2 and 3 of this review of the literature highlighted several of these developments and new trends. We will recall a few of them in the following.

Many studies have underlined the importance of the family in the development of family literacy programs. It would seem that the quality of the home environment is the variable that affects the literacy process the most. Further, Snow et al. (1991) attach importance to, among other things, access to or the provision in the home of various kinds of literacy materials, the way these materials are used, and the climate in which they are used. A number of studies have identified a need to develop programs in which parents play an important and active role and in which children are invited to participate actively.

Adherents to the socio-contextual approach advocate the development of family literacy programs that take into account family realities and family value systems and beliefs and which are a part of family activities as a whole. The socio-contextual approach draws on the strengths of families rather than on the contribution of interventions coming from outside of the family.

Nickse (1990) addresses the importance of developing programs that encourage participation. Such programs should be based on the participation and involvement of both parents and children. In this kind of program, parents and children could make decisions, plan, choose activities, and make their ideas and concerns known to the persons in charge of the program.

In the natural literacy approach, programs must encourage spontaneous initiatives by children in activities that develop their literacy skills, instead of highly structured activities.

Other studies have shown the importance of developing programs that enable verbal interaction between parent and child. The reader will recall that literacy does not come about solely through activities and programs based on materials directly related to reading and writing. Decontextualized conversation (Reese, 1995; Snow, 1991) is also a very powerful technique in the development of language skills (see Section 3.3 in this paper).

The second element identified by Laberge (1994) has to do with the specific needs of the target group. The most successful programs are those which take into account the needs, values, and practices of families.

> …it will be necessary for anyone who is setting up a family or intergenerational literacy program to identify the issues that are of concern to members of their own communities, and to adapt or create materials that will address those particular concerns (Weinstein-Shr, 1990, p. 4).

According to Freeman and Wasserman (1986) and Hannon (1993), since parental actions are closely connected with their beliefs, literacy programs have to be consistent with the beliefs of parents for them to be beneficial for their children. Fingeret (1991), in Kerka (1991), ponders the nature of existing family and intergenerational literacy programs. According to him, culture and language are at the heart of literacy. He points out that if literacy programs taught the beliefs and values of the school system to parents, they would be forced to adhere to the beliefs of the majority of people in society and forget their own beliefs and values. Nickse (1990) pondered the question of whether it is necessary to modify behaviours learned by children in their cultural environments in order to satisfy the needs of schools or rather if we should change schools and have them adapt to the behaviours learned by children in their cultural backgrounds.

Besides taking into account families' beliefs and values, programs should reflect the needs of families arising from their socio-economic status and educational attainment.

Programs should be geared to the needs of all families, be they rich, poor, undereducated, or overeducated.

The third element identified by Laberge (1994) stipulates that family literacy programs should be based on solid partnerships with the community. Programs are founded on partnerships between parents and school and between parents and community agencies and governments. For example, there are family and intergenerational literacy programs in elementary schools, kindergartens, at home, and in various community agencies, such as libraries, daycares, resource centres, and adult education programs (Darling, 1993 and Nickse, 1990).

According to DeBarysche (1995), it is important to take a holistic approach to literacy in order to consider all the environments at stake and not just one. It is thus necessary when developing literacy programs to consider a child's home, social, and school environment, as well as the various actors present. Kerka (1991) maintains that a holistic approach should be based on cooperation between various organizations and on a multidisciplinary team.

Let us now examine training needs for family literacy interveners.

4.2 Training for Family Literacy Interveners

Two commonalties were noted in the review of the literature when it came to describing training needs for family literacy interveners: training that meets their needs and training that takes into account the interveners' new roles made necessary by new knowledge, trends, and approaches in family literacy.

There are several different interveners in family literacy programs. According to most studies in this field, teachers and especially parents play a key role in children's learning (Freeman and Wasserman, 1986).

According to Topping (1993), parents, and not teachers, are the best educators for their children:

> …compared to teacher input, parental modelling is more powerful, parental reinforcement is more valuable and can be more frequent, parental feedback is more immediate, and practice is more regular (Topping, 1993, p. 22).

Further, even if parents are considered learners in literacy programs, they also intervene with their children. According to Hannon (1993), it is parents, in partnership with schools and the community, who assist their children in the literacy process.

Training programs should equip parents with the various skills needed to help their children learn how to speak, read, and write. This training includes parenting skills and literacy-related skills (strategies for learning how to read, write, and speak). The programs also provide information about the learning process in children as well as suggestions for literacy activities that can be done at home. Training for parents means that they take on the role of teachers with their children. Literacy programs encourage parents to show that reading and writing are pleasant and relaxing experiences. They also consist of sessions in the form of support groups for parents of preschoolers.

Several authors also discuss the importance of the role of schools and teachers in conjunction with parents in the family literacy process. Topping (1993) points out that the school environment must include not only the parent, but also a number of interveners to foster the students' literacy development. These interveners are as follows: families from different races and cultures; families from different socio-economic backgrounds; families from different language groups; grandparents; siblings; other family members; and friends and/or neighbours.

According to previous studies, family literacy programs provide teachers with no or very little instruction. However, some researchers point out that teaching staff should provide

instruction to and hold sessions with parents to familiarize them with specific school practices so that they can implement them at home with their children (Brizius and Foster, 1993). Other researchers maintain that the culture and practices of each family must be taken into consideration. They also state that families should not be obliged to do the same activities as schools (Auerbach, 1989).

According to Strickland and Morrow (1989), teachers play a dual role: they have to provide instruction and support to parents, and they have to intervene with children in order to foster the literacy process. Some authors, such as Taylor (1981), note that teachers should learn as much from the parents as the latter learn from the teachers. Parents have skills that they can pass on to teachers. According to Wolfendale (1994), each can offer suggestions to the other.

Other researchers, such as Kerka (1991) and Potts (1994a), note that literacy program actors form an interdisciplinary team, i.e. they come from various areas. For example, there are case managers, early childhood development specialists, language specialists, social workers, volunteers, and various community organizations, such as libraries and daycares. Training programs should reflect this diversity.

4.3.   Language Development and Literacy in the Home

Research needs in terms of the factors that promote language development and the family literacy process fall under three main categories: the familial context (home and parents), social context (community), and academic context (school and teachers).

First, studies on the familial context have explored more the role of parents as resource persons in their child's learning, the impact of the parents' educational level, and the influence of the family's socio-economic status on children's literacy. As already mentioned in this paper, parents are their children's primary educators. Parental involvement is a crucial factor in a child's literacy. Parents have to take part in activities

with their children at home and at school. They have to read to their children, talk to them, tell them stories, and attend school meetings. Parents have to give feedback to their children, ask them questions, plan trips to the library, and make materials available to their children. The above activities help foster the development of reading and writing skills in preschool children. Human Resources Development Canada (1997) states that the more parents are involved in literacy activities at home, the easier it will be for their children to learn how to read and write. Many researchers maintain that interaction between parent and child is of the utmost importance, and in particular, interaction with the mother. Nickse (1989) notes that advice, attitudes, aspirations, and conversations in the home are significant family characteristics in terms of child literacy. Parents serve as models for their children.

Other studies have shown that the educational level of parents also affects the literacy process of their preschool children. Willms (1997) notes that the better educated parents are, the more readily their children will be able to read and write. According to Human Resources Development Canada (1997), the better educated parents are, the more likely their children will attain high literacy levels. Nickse (1990) also maintains:

> …researchers have found that parent's education affects how well their children achieve. If the parents are not well educated, the intergenerational cycle begins and often maintains a cycle of low literacy (p.16).

The socio-economic status of parents can also affect their children's language and literacy development. However, not everyone agrees on the impact of the family's socio-economic status on literacy. Some authors observe that middle- and upper-class families foster literacy in preschool children. These families might have access to more materials (e.g. books, crayons, movies), services (libraries), and resources (activities outside the home) for their children. Other researchers maintain that a family's socio-economic status has no effect on the development of literacy skills. Durkin, in Freeman and Wasserman (1986), notes that research has been unable to establish a clear connection

between a child's learning to read at an early age and a family's socio-economic status. He adds that other factors are more significant, such as parents who spend time with their children, who read to their children, who answer their children's questions, and who show their children that reading is a source of information and relaxation.

According to Auerbach (1989), several studies have shown that in families from poor socio-economic backgrounds, a type of literacy is indeed practised in the home environment every day:

> …significant correlations would suggest that an environment of poverty with its attendant stresses still allows many parents to engage in behaviour that fosters long-term goals for children such as language growth and literacy. (Payne et al., 1994, p. 429).

Further research is required in order to better understand and grasp the entire significance of the impact of the family on the literacy process. We have to learn more about the role of parents in their children's language and literacy development. Similarly, we also have to explore the true impact of the parents' educational level on literacy development in preschool children. It is also necessary to further clarify the impact of socio-economic status on child literacy, on which all researchers have not been able to agree at present.

The second factor that promotes children's language and literacy development is the social context. The latter consists of several elements, such as the community, church, work, libraries, daycares, etc. (Nickse, 1990). "A community is a group of people who share responsibility for the education and care of their children." (Willms, in press). According to Eldering and Leseman (1993), social interactions between children, parents, professionals, guardians, and friends are the primary source for the development of cultural literacy skills. Some authors maintain that the social context plays a crucial role in the literacy process (Nickse, 1990). It is therefore necessary to study further the true impact of the social context.

The third primary factor that promotes a child's language and literacy development is school. This institution is a learning environment in which children continue to learn how to read and write. Entry into school and school experiences are two significant aspects in a child's learning process. The quality of the school is also important in a child's literacy development. According to Whitehurst et al. (1994), the education context alone does not foster the development of language skills; it has to be allied with the social and familial contexts. Of the three factors mentioned above that promote the development of language and literacy skills, the home environment is the most important one (Thompson 1985).

Lastly, many authors point to another factor affecting literacy development, namely the child's age. The younger a child is when literacy activities are begun, the more readily he or she will acquire reading, writing, and language skills. The first years in a child's life are crucial to literacy development (Willms, in press). According to Freeman and Wasserman (1986), we must not wait until children are in school to teach them how to read and write. According to Willms and Sloat (1998), research shows that family literacy programs should begin when the child is young and continue to adulthood. Research on the impact of age on children's literacy processes has to be continued. The findings of these studies will have a definite impact in terms of ensuring the success of the literacy process beginning in the first years of life.

4.4   Evaluation of Family Literacy Programs

Kerka (1991) measures the effects of literacy programs in two ways: an evaluation of measurable or quantifiable skills and the observation of past experiences. In general, the findings are positive. Laberge (1994), on his part, groups together the effects of family literacy programs into five categories: effects on children, effects on parents, effects on interaction between parents and their children, effects on the community, and effects on schools.

First, changes in the child are noticed. The child's language development and cognitive skills improve. The child concentrates better and is more independent. The child's problem-solving skills and reading comprehension develop. Family literacy programs facilitate school entry for children (Laberge, 1994). Children are found to be better behaved and have higher self-esteem after having participated in these programs. In Human Resources Development Canada (1997), it is stated that certain programs for parents have a positive impact on their children's language development, health, and well-being. Danielson (1997) notes that preschool children who had taken part in a family literacy program were more advanced in terms of language, social development, problem-solving ability, and other cognitive skills than children who had not taken part in the program. According to Darling (1993), family literacy programs increase children's motivation to learn.

Second, there are changes in the family, especially in parents. The family has access to better job opportunities, and there are more activities and positive interaction within the family. Greater family stability and a reduction in family stress are noted. Parents become more involved and demonstrate greater interest in incorporating literacy-related activities into games with their children. Parents show more interest in school and in community agencies that promote reading, for example, libraries. They want to become models for their children in the literacy process, and they feel more confident about it. Further, family literacy programs enable parents to enhance their educational attainment (Auerbach, 1989).

Third, literacy programs promote interaction between parent and child. Parents and children learn how to interact together on a regular basis. Programs result in children and parents spending more time together reading and writing at home. According to Tracey (1995), research has found a connection between participation in literacy programs and improvement in literacy-related interaction between parents and their children.

Fourth, literacy programs bring about changes in the community. There is greater participation in groups and community activities. Family literacy programs promote strong and cohesive communities and boost the economy (Laberge, 1994). According to Potts (1994b), society is the ultimate beneficiary of such programs. Citizens who take part in family literacy programs are more productive. They take responsibility for the education of their children and for the community.

Lastly, a positive impact on school services is noted. Teachers become more involved in the literacy of their students. Student performance improves at school (Laberge, 1994).

Laberge (1994) and Nickse (1990) make a distinction between the long- and short-term effects of family literacy programs. First, these programs improve the children's and parents' reading, writing, and language skills over the short term. Both children and parents thus acquire specific skills. Second, the authors note that over the long term, children and parents learn how to maintain the behaviours and attitudes they have acquired. Children are more likely to succeed if their parents are literate. Further, family literacy programs break the cycle of family illiteracy that is handed down from generation to generation.

Lastly, Nickse (1989) maintains that even though research on family and intergenerational literacy is still sparse, existing family and intergenerational literacy programs have yielded promising results. Nickse (1989) proposes that evaluators of these programs develop new evaluation methods taking into account cultural differences and the different kinds of family relationships that exist. He maintains that evaluators could thus obtain more meaningful information on the impact of the programs.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This review of the literature makes no pretence to be exhaustive. The primary objective rather was to report on a few of the main points raised in studies on family literacy, new

approaches and trends, and needs. The following pages contain an overview of the major highlights of this brief review of the literature. Box 1 summarizes these highlights.

1.   Definitions of family literacy and related concepts

1.1   Family Literacy. There is no universally accepted definition of the concept of family literacy. Definitions are diversified and are the subject of numerous debates. The concept of family literacy is very recent. The expression "family literacy" was used in 1983 for the first time by Denny Taylor in his study on the social context of the home as an essential factor in the literacy of young children. Diverse fields of research are interested in family literacy: adult literacy, emergent literacy, cognitive science, early childhood development, and the theory of the family system.

There are several definitions of family literacy. Some are very general. Others specify that this concept is related to the development of reading and writing skills :

- "Family literacy refers to the many ways families develop and use literacy skills to accomplish day-to-day tasks and activities." (Thomas and al., 1998, p. 3, Trans.)

- "Interactions in reading and writing that develop, at home, an environment conducive to learning." (Family Literacy Action Group (FLAG) in Desjardins,1996, p. 5, Trans.).

In spite of the different conceptions of family literacy, many researchers agree to recognize the importance of the family in the development of literacy.

1.2   Intergenerational Literacy. Family literacy includes adults and children within the same family while intergenerational literacy includes adults and children in the community as a whole, regardless of their relationship.

I. Summary of Highlights Raised in Part I – Brief Review of the Literature
(Part 1 of 2)

Definitions of Family Literacy

- There is no commonly accepted definition of family literacy. It is a recent concept of interest to researchers from various fields of study.

- Intergenerational Literacy, emergent literacy and natural literacy are concepts related to family literacy.

- Advances made in literacy have been more of a practical rather than a theoretical or conceptual nature.

- Despite the different definitions of family literacy, many researchers agree on the importance of and the key role played by families and parents in the development of literacy.

Families and Literacy

- The socio-economic variable alone does not explain all the differences in the development of language and literacy in children. A definitive link between learning to read at a young age and family socioeconomic status has yet to be proven through research.

- Several researchers have established a relatively close relationship between child and parent literacy levels.

- Researchers have determined that parental involvement and/or commitment plays a key role in the development of literacy in children.

- A study revealed that of all environments, the home has the greatest impact on academic performance.

- The parent as an intervener has a greater impact on his or her child's acquisition of reading and writing skills than the reading-model parent.

- There is a need to develop, in the family environment, the accessibility to material and the commitment of parents.

- Finally, according to a theoretical model, there are five categories of factors that are related to the influence of the home on literacy development: 1) the literacy environment of the home; 2) opportunities to learn; 3) parental level of education; 4) parental expectations for theit children; and 5) parental teaching.

**I. Summary of Highlights Raised in Part I – Brief Review of the Literature
(Part 2 of 2)**

New Approaches and Trends in Family Literacy

- The sociocontextual approach acknowledges the social reality of families and emphasizes their strengths in order to maximize the effectiveness of family literacy programs.

- According to the principle of natural literacy, children play a key role in their own literacy development, because their literacy process is triggered naturally and spontaneously. Intervention is aimed at stimulating, fostering, and promoting spontaneous initiatives by children in activities that develop their literacy skills.

- Rich and positive verbal interaction between parent and child significantly affects language development in very young children and their introduction to reading and writing. "Decontextualized" conversation is defined as verbal interaction between adult and child involving subjects or topics not related to the immediate environment.

- As a family literacy activity, book reading must provide an interactive context for children.

- A typology classifies intergenerational and family literacy programs according to the degree of intervention (direct or indirect) and the target participant (adult or child). This typology yields four categories of interventions.

Family Literacy Needs

- Family literacy initiatives that are developed should take into account new approaches and the specific needs of target groups, be based on solid partnerships with the community, and reflect holistic practices based on cooperation between various organizations and on a multidisciplinary team.

- Training should meet interveners needs and take into account their new roles as dictated by emerging knowledge, trends, and approaches in the field of family literacy.

- Training programs should teach parents the various skills they need to help their children learn how to speak, read, and write.

- Research shows that family literacy activities should begin when children are young and continue to adulthood. The first years in a child's life are crucial to literacy development.

- Some researchers recommend the use of new evaluation techniques that take into account cultural differences and the different kinds of relationships found in families.

1.3 **Emergent Literacy.** Emergent literacy derives from the principle that the literacy process of an individual begins before formal instruction. Emergent literacy also advocates that listening, speaking, and reading and writing skills develop simultaneously.

1.4 **Natural Literacy.** Natural literacy reflects an intrinsic, natural dimension of the child's process of learning to read and write. However, the environment occupies a predominant position in this learning process. Adults significant to the child, who are part of this environment, therefore play an important role in the child's literacy process.

2. **Family and Literacy**

2.1 **Intergenerational Cycle: Poverty and Illiteracy.** In the past, numerous studies showed that children from lower level socio-economic backgrounds were generally less successful in school, particularly in reading and writing, than children in higher level socio-economic backgrounds. Today, other studies in this field are finding that the socio-economic variable alone does not explain all the differences in the development of language and literacy in children. Certain studies show that low-income families who create a positive learning environment for the development of language skills and who actively participate in family literacy activities with their children do foster the development of literacy skills of their children. There is a relatively close relationship between the literacy level of children and that of their parents. This link reveals the intergenerational cycle of literacy.

2.2 **Family Environment and Literacy.** The family environment plays a leading role in the development of reading and writing skills in children. A study of students aged 7 and 10 showed that the family environment had a greater influence on their performance

in school than any other environment (school, neighbourhood). It also showed that this influence was more important in relation to reading skills than mathematical skills.

Snow and al. (1991) developed a theoretical model of the influence of the family on learning how to read and write. They identified five categories of factors:

1- Educational environment in the home

2- Creation of other learning opportunities

3- Parents' level of education

4- Parents' aspirations for their children

5- Direct instruction by parents

Parents are role models, resource persons, and participants in the development of reading and writing skills of their children. Two studies show that within the family environment, it is the parents, not the material in that environment, that have the most influence on the children's reading and writing skills. There are differences in the degree of influence of the different roles parents can play in their children's literacy process. Two studies show that parents as participants have more influence on the development of their children's reading and writing skills than as reading models. There is a need to develop, in the family environment, the full potential of the two main components: accessibility to material and commitment of parents.

3.   NEW APPROACHES AND TRENDS IN FAMILY LITERACY

3.1   Socio-contextual Approach. The socio-contextual approach recognizes the social reality of the family and emphasizes its strengths in order to maximize the effectiveness of family literacy programs. Neuman and Gallagher (1994) explain that:

- […]a family's influence in children's literacy learning involves the development through shared activities of ways to handle day-to-day print events, such as shopping for groceries or paying bills, which work concurrently to enhance children's learning about written language (p. 383).

This approach can be integrated to family literacy interventions in the following matter. According to Potts (1994b) "Family literacy programs should operate as models of family strength, recognizing that all families have strengths they bring to the learning situation." (p. 30).

3.2   Natural Literacy. Children play a key role in the development of their reading and writing skills, because the literacy process is triggered naturally and spontaneously. This principle can be incorporated to family literacy initiatives through interventions designed to stimulate, promote, and encourage the child's spontaneous initiatives in activities that develop reading and writing skills, rather than interventions designed in the form of activities developed ahead of time and presented to the child. Children must be provided with an environment rich in materials that promote the acquisition of literacy skills and in which there are adults able to identify the children's literacy initiatives in order to maximize their benefits.

3.3   Verbal Interaction: The Impact of Decontextualized Conversation. If verbal interaction between parent and child is rich and positive, it will have a tremendous influence on language development in very young children and their introduction to reading and writing skills. "Decontextualized" conversation is defined as verbal interaction between adult and child emphasizing subjects or topics, such as past or future events or fictitious stories, not related to the immediate environment. Children have to rely on their cognitive skills of distantiation and abstract thought, two skills closely related to language development and the understanding of the written word. A study of children aged 3 to 5 showed that "decontextualized" conversation between the child and

the mother seemed to have more influence on the child's literacy process than simply reading children's books.

3.4   Reading to Children: An Interactive Activity. Research has shown time and time again the beneficial effects that reading books to children has on their language development and their reading and writing skills. Reading to children seems, at first glance, to be an activity in which only the parent plays an active role (the person reading), whereas the child adopts a more passive role (the person listening). However, this activity may be one in which the children themselves become active participants.

Family literacy interventions must make reading books to children "interactive". This consist of, for example, letting children choose the book, hold the book and turn the pages, asking them questions, giving them the opportunity to ask questions or make a comment, letting them finish some parts of the story, asking them to tell a different ending than the one in the book, getting them to make connections between the story and their reality, etc. In addition to allowing children to be in contact with the material related to reading and writing, "interactive" reading of books becomes an intensive social activity during which parent and child share their experiences, emotions, and values.

3.5   Nickse's Typology. This typology, developed by Ruth Nickse, classifies intergenerational and family literacy programs according to two axis: the degree of participation (direct or indirect) and the type of target participant (adult or child). This typology yields four categories of programs:

Type 1: Direct adult/direct child. This category includes structured programs that offer to both adults and their children formal literacy training. It also includes interaction between the two groups.

Type 2: Indirect adult/indirect child. This category includes programs where literacy development is limited to support for and encouragement of reading as a pleasurable

activity, a knowledge tool, and an opportunity for discussion. There is no, or little, direct teaching to parents and children.

Type 3: direct adult/indirect child. This category includes programs where adults receive literacy courses and training in ways of positively influencing the learning of reading and writing skills by their children.

Type 4: indirect adult/direct child. The development of reading and writing skills of children is the main component of this type of program. Adults are made aware of the means of influencing this development in their children.

4.   Family Literacy Needs

4.1   Development of Family Literacy Programs. All family literacy programs that are developed must reflect new approaches and developments related to family literacy. They should also be developed based on the specific needs of the target groups. Finally, family literacy programs should be founded on solid partnerships with the community.

4.2   Training for Family Literacy Interveners. Two commonalties were noted in the review of the literature when it came to describing training needs for family literacy stakeholders: training that meets their needs and training that takes into account the stakeholders' new roles made necessary by new knowledge, trends, and approaches in family literacy.

Training needs were also noted for parents and teachers. Regarding parents, training programs should enable them to acquire the skills necessary to help their children learn how to speak, read and write. Regarding teachers, it seems that they receive very little training in family literacy.

4.3   Language Development and Literacy in the Home. Research needs in terms of the factors that promote language development and the family literacy process fall under

the familial context (home and parents), social context (community), and academic context (school and teachers). The age of the child is another important factor. The first years in a child's life are crucial to literacy development.

Let us recall that many studies of the familial context recognize that parents involvement is a crucial factor in a child's literacy development. Furthermore, as noted by Nickse (1990), many researchers have found that the educational level of parents has an effect on the achievements of their children. Finally, Durkin, in Freeman and Wasserman (1986), notes that research has been unable to establish a clear connection between a child's learning to read at an early age and a family's socio-economic status. He adds that other factors are more significant, such as parents involvement.

4.4   Evaluation of Family Literacy Programs. Impacts of family literacy programs are found in children, in parents, in the interaction between parents and their children, in the community and in schools. Evaluation of short- and long-term effects of family literacy programs show that over the short term these programs improve the children's and parents' reading, writing, and language skills. Over the long term, children and parents learn how to maintain the behaviours and attitudes they have acquired. Researchers recommend the use of new evaluation methods that take into account cultural differences and different kinds of family relationships.

Finally, as evidenced in the preceding sections, much more research is necessary if we are to better understand family literacy, a very recent field experiencing a boom in terms of practice but which is lacking when it comes to theory and research. Everyone acknowledges the importance of family literacy in literacy development in children. The multitude and diversity of programs being developed in various communities testify to this. However, more has to be done if we are to better understand family literacy and broaden our theoretical knowledge of the literacy process with a view to developing programs that meet the true needs of families and have a definite impact.

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APPENDIX A - BIBLIOGRAPHY

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