

Connecting Families through Community
An English as an Additional Language (EAL)
Family Literacy Project
FINAL REPORT

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Executive Summary

The overall purpose of this project was to create an effective English as an Additional Language (EAL) Family Literacy Program that would support newcomer families in Saskatchewan and Prince Edward Island, and be suitable for future use in other Canadian provinces. Researchers at the University of Regina and the University of Prince Edward Island developed an EAL Family Literacy Program with newcomers in Saskatchewan and Prince Edward Island and in collaboration with established partners, the Regina Open Door Society (RODS) and the PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada (PEIANC).

This EAL Family Literacy Program aims to provide participating families with the skills to enhance their literacy experiences and acquire some of the English language skills necessary to participate fully in a knowledge-based economy and society. This project is innovative because it was developed with the direct input of newcomer families, who identified areas of focus and were involved in the program development itself. The end result – a ten-module Family Literacy Program designed with newcomer families and for newcomer families – has the potential to enhance the literacy learning and essential skills of families from diverse cultural backgrounds.

There are challenges as there are diverse needs such as English language proficiency among newcomers. This was evident throughout the program and facilitators had to be flexible and innovative in the delivery of the program.

The results of the study indicate that *Connecting Families through Community: An English as an Additional Language (EAL) Family Literacy Program* is effective in supporting newcomer families and in providing information and resources to service providers. Newcomer families who participated in the EAL Family Literacy Program saw value in the program. The language and literacy skills of newcomer parents and children were developed through participation in the program. Newcomer families also expressed appreciation for the information shared regarding services and activities available in their new communities. Service providers to newcomer families were able to network and access the Family Literacy Program in a way that is responsive and supportive of newcomer families to Canada. The ten modules that were developed and revised with input from newcomer families, researchers and facilitators are a rich resource that can now be implemented across Canada.

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Introduction

This is the final report for the *Connecting Families through Community: An English as an Additional Language Family Literacy Research Project*. The purpose of this project is to create a Family Literacy Program with newcomer families in Regina, Saskatchewan and Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island.

From 2008 to 2011 there were 1,028,770 newcomers who became residents of Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011). Most of these newcomer families need support in developing their literacy and English language skills. They also seek to gain access and information about the services available in their new communities in Canada. As the numbers of newcomer families continue to increase, the demand on resources and the need for service providers also increases. This Family Literacy Program offers to provide literacy and English language skills as well as resources for service providers to effectively support newcomer families in Canada. Both by the design and the processes that took place to ensure the voices and needs of newcomers were met, this Family Literacy Program is responsive and inclusive in supporting newcomer families.

Researchers at the University of Regina and University of Prince Edward Island developed this English as an Additional Language (EAL) Family Literacy Program with newcomer families and in partnership with the Regina Open Door Society (RODS) and the PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada (PEIANC). Through continuous collaboration with all of these parties, the EAL Family Literacy Program was created. The project was carried out in three stages:

1. A needs assessment to investigate perceived needs of EAL families in terms of resources and supports that they may require in a family literacy program was conducted.
2. Based on the feedback from newcomer families and the supporting agencies, as well current research, an EAL Family Literacy Program, consisting of ten modules, was developed. The EAL Family Literacy Program was tested in a pilot project with 16 families and revisions were made to better address the needs of newcomer families.

3. Implementation of the EAL Family Literacy Program took place with 20 newcomer families. A pre and post language assessment was administered with the 20 newcomer families and feedback was sought to determine the impact of the EAL Family Literacy Program.

This report provides a framework for the program modules that were designed and implemented for the EAL Family Literacy Program and mirrors the approach used in the design of *Families Learning Together: A Literacy Needs Assessment of Rural Prince Edward Island* (Timmons, 2001) and *A Family Literacy Approach for Aboriginal Families in Atlantic Canada* (Timmons, 2007). This EAL Family Literacy Program also provides a glimpse into the lives of families before they came to Canada and highlights the challenges newcomer families face when moving to Canada.

This EAL Family Literacy Program is an innovative initiative which aims to provide participating newcomer families with the skills to enhance literacy experiences and acquire the English language skills necessary to contribute fully in a knowledge-based economy and society. This project has strengthened the capacity of service providers by developing a resource that can be used to support newcomer families who have moved to Canada.

Objectives of the *Connecting Families through Community Project*

Given the importance of immigration to Canada's socio-economic future, together with the scarcity of family literacy programs geared toward newcomer families, there is a clear need for a family literacy program in Canada focusing on newcomer families' needs. The objectives of this family literacy research project were to develop a program with parents and children to:

- meet their literacy needs;
- improve their literacy engagement;
- and foster a greater understanding of the importance of literacy, lifelong learning and the essential skills required to participate fully in a knowledge-based economy and society.

To accomplish these objectives, the project took place in several stages. After a literature review was completed and newcomer families were recruited in Regina, Saskatchewan and

Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, a needs assessment was conducted to determine what the families considered to be their primary literacy challenges and goals. The feedback from the needs assessments was then used to develop and implement an English as an Additional Language (EAL) Family Literacy Program which was piloted with the original newcomer families from Regina and Charlottetown. It was then refined based on their feedback for use with a different set of families. The ultimate goal was that by participating in the program, newcomers to Saskatchewan and Prince Edward Island would have the opportunity to develop English language and literacy skills that would help them become more actively engaged in their new communities.

Throughout the project, the following research questions were investigated:

1. What do newcomer families need in an effective EAL Family Literacy Program?
2. What are the key elements and structure of an EAL Family Literacy Program?
3. What effect does the Family Literacy Program have on the literacy levels of participants in the program?

Literature Review

Immigration

Immigration has historically been critical to Canada's growth, yet there has seldom been a time in Canada's history where immigration has been so important. In the next twenty years we stand to gain more –or lose more—depending on how we handle immigration over the next few years. (Nixon, 2006, p. 15)

It is vital that supports be provided to newcomers to Canada, so that they will stay and participate as active members of their new communities. The goal of this project was for researchers to develop a comprehensive Family Literacy Program for newcomer families in Saskatchewan and Prince Edward Island. The program aims to provide support to newcomer families through an English as an Additional Language (EAL) Family Literacy Program which will allow newcomer families to thrive in their new culture and participate in the socio-economic life of Saskatchewan and Prince Edward Island economies. Such a program, which can be used in other Canadian provinces, will empower and prepare newcomers to Canada with the

knowledge and skills to facilitate literacy acquisition. This works toward creating the capacity in Saskatchewan and Prince Edward Island – and indeed across the country – to reduce literacy difficulties, prepare newcomers for Canadian society, and create responsible, literate Canadian citizens.

Defining Literacy

In 2003, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) defined literacy as “a continuum of learning that enables individuals to develop their knowledge and potential, pursue and achieve their goals, and participate fully in society.” By doing so, UNESCO moved past the traditional definition of literacy toward a comprehensive understanding of multi-literacies (National Literacy Trust, 2006; Max Bell Foundation, 2006). Similarly, Hamilton (2002) and Ewing (2003) describe literacies in terms of: a range of knowledge and an understanding of the world which every individual has; developmental, socio-cultural and media contexts associated with reading and writing; and the importance and relationships of oral language and literacy development. For the purposes of this report, literacy is therefore considered to be broad concept which involves, among other things the “skills to read all forms of text, navigate complex documents, speak clearly and effectively, use the computer, handle mathematical tasks and to problem solve” (Max Bell Foundation, 2006, p.7).

Literacy is more than an end in itself. Yagelski (2000) says that “literacy is central to the ongoing struggle for democracy and self-determination. It is a matter of individual empowerment in the way it can enable one to negotiate the complexities of life.” He continues by examining its impact on public policy and says that it “is empowerment in a broader sense in that literate acts are always inherently social within political, cultural, and economic contexts within which we lead our individual lives.” Further, he describes being fully literate as “a kind of joy ... that comes with using language to structure your world, to give voice to your ideas to create space for yourself in an endless stream of discourse to work toward change, to reflect, to expound, to act.”

Yagelski’s words describe beautifully the rationale and motivation behind the *Connecting Families through Community* newcomer Family Literacy Program.

Families

In situations where literacy skills are difficult for parents, it will most likely be challenging for children in that family to achieve a high level of literacy (Timmons, 2001). In addition, children who experience early literacy difficulties continue to struggle throughout their educational careers (McCoach, et al., 2006). Families who have literacy challenges tend to face social issues which often lead to cycles of poverty in which unemployment prevails (Timmons, 2001).

Willms (2002) cites a number of studies worldwide which consistently show that family influences on student academic achievement outweigh the effects of either school or community. Literacy development starts in the home and can be encouraged and reinforced by parents or caregivers so that children are better equipped to read and decipher the cultural and intellectual capital which surrounds them at all times (Cummins, 2001; Willinksy, 2001).

Furthermore, the Canada Research Chair in Language and Literacy Development, Dr. Jim Cummins (2001), asserts that:

active engagement with literacy is fundamental to student success in school.”
Data on the reading achievement of 15-year-olds in almost 30 countries shows that “the level of reading engagement is a better predictor of literacy performance than his or her socio-economic background, indicating that cultivating interest in reading can help overcome disadvantages. A significant challenge for teachers is cultivating literacy engagement among English Language Learners who can’t access the language of the curriculum (2007, Research Monograph #5, p.1).

An approach that presents a solution to this problem is a family literacy intervention which promotes literacy engagement among parents and children (who may both struggle with English as an Additional Language) and which acknowledges and respects their prior knowledge and culture (Chou, Lee, Tseng & Deng, 2011; Harper, Platt & Pelletier, 2011). As Askov, Kassab and Weirauch (2005) point out, “the goal of family literacy...is to increase the literacy and language development of marginally literate adults so they can foster their children’s language and literacy development, as full partners in the education of their children” (p. 132).

Family literacy programs may provide a way to effectively change this cycle of poverty, low literacy rates and unemployment by helping parents nurture in their children (and in themselves) the literacy skills needed to have success in today's society.

Tao, Gamse, and Tarr (1998) found that learning English was the second most frequently cited reason given by newcomer parents for enrolling in a family literacy program. Low levels in formal education make it difficult for parents to support their children's school success beyond primary literacy levels. This EAL Family Literacy Program aims to provide parents with the skills to enhance their own and consequently their children's literacy experiences at home and develop a program which can be used across Canada to enhance literacy levels of children and families whose English is an additional language.

This current EAL Family Literacy Program, designed both with and for EAL families, is vital to the enhancement and success of family literacy in Canada. According to the 2001 census data, 14.8% of the Canadian population (native and non-native speakers) is unable to carry on a conversation in English, while 82.3% of Canadian workers use only English for communication in the workplace. These statistics suggest that one's employability and consequently one's success in today's society are related in large part to English literacy skills; therefore, it is vital to provide essential literacy skills to all Canadians. Literacy skills are becoming increasingly important because they enhance job opportunities and earning power, improving the ability to support oneself, one's family and one's community (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2005; Province of Prince Edward Island, 1999). Since individuals who are highly literate in their first languages are more likely to become literate in English as their additional language (Chiappe, Siegel & Woolley, 2002; Forrest, 2004), family literacy programs for EAL families are integral to EAL education. As well, the urgent need to learn English motivates EAL families to participate more frequently, longer and more intensely in family literacy programs than their non-EAL counterparts (Askov, Kassab & Weirach, 2005).

The term family literacy refers to "the ways family members use literacy at home and in their community" (Morrow, 2004, p.6). Families can come in different forms – they can be traditional nuclear families, single-parent families, extended families, same-gender couples, etc. – and what is considered a family varies across cultures. However, the family unit's primary purpose remains "meeting family members' needs to nurture their fullest development"

(Johnson, et al., 2004, p. 2). In terms of family literacy and EAL, it is important to recognize the context of the term “family” in the community of any given culture:

When the term family is attached to literacy, the combination creates a particular significance for the role of these cultural and social contexts in literacy learning. That is, it presupposes a relationship among family members, between family members and the larger community, and to the cultural contexts in which families are situated (Gadsden, 1998).

The family literacy approach builds on family strengths (Bird, 2005); however, a successful family literacy program must also consider the culture from which families come, and how this culture influences their literacy development.

An effective literacy program must take into consideration the possible differences between the literacy practices of the home and school environments. For example, Morrow (2003) uses the example of oral literacy traditions to argue that cultural differences must be embraced, rather than ignored: “We must learn from and respect families and children from cultures in which evidence of literacy activity such as storytelling exists, even though books are not readily available.” As Henderson and Mapp (2002) state, “parental involvement programs (including family literacy programs) that are effective in engaging diverse families recognize, respect and address cultural and class differences” (p. 48).

It is difficult to implement precise strategies for addressing cultural diversity in literacy programs since, as Hendrix (2000) points out, the cultural differences arising in literacy programs hint at a deeply-embedded cultural struggle:

‘a sense of national urgency’ surrounds current policy and research on family literacy education (Gadsden, 1994, p. 60). This sense of urgency can be seen as part of a larger ‘cultural struggle going on within the field of education,’ where family literacy is one of the ‘arenas in which [this struggle] is being played out’ (Fandel, 1997, p. 206). This cultural struggle is not only about literacy, but also about family values, gender, and poverty, as well as race, ethnicity, language and class differences. (p. 338-339)

A successful literacy program would bridge these cultural gaps through collaboration and negotiation, rather than by imposing the values and beliefs of mainstream schools and literacy practices (Nutbrown, et al., 2005). Children benefit from an education that reinforces the same values and ideas in both the home and school environment (Darling, 2005). As a result, “Different cultures, different concepts of childhood and different pedagogies may require their own [programs] and desired outcomes” (Nutbrown, et al., 2005). Family literacy programs that embrace cultural diversity have the potential to bring together cultures to improve the education and development of adults, children, families and communities. Through an extensive needs assessment, this research project recognized cultural diversity in EAL families and designed a program to integrate the literacy practices of newcomer families.

Research shows that current family literacy programs attempting to address the needs of EAL families have been for the most part ineffective:

demographic changes have resulted in family literacy programs now enrolling at least a few families with low proficiency in English, and many programs include a majority of non-English speakers. The difficulties faced by programs in adapting to these new participants’ needs have, unfortunately, not been alleviated by directly relevant contributions from program evaluation studies, and consequently, information to help design programs to serve immigrant and limited-English-proficiency groups is needed (Strucker, Snow, & Pan, 2004).

A 1995 study by Cairney, Ruge, Buchanan, Lowe and Munsie examined 261 family literacy programs and found that the majority of programs were “tokenistic” in that they focused on the needs of the school involved, rather than on the specific needs of the cultural group (Cairney, 2000). As Cairney (2000) states, “it is clear that while efforts to acknowledge family and community literacy are commendable, they have not gone far enough in recognizing the richness of literacy outside of educational institutions and the need for genuine partnerships between educators and families.” *Families Learning Together*, a previous research project designed by members of this research team, incorporated this notion with rural families in Prince Edward Island and Mi’kmaq communities in Atlantic Canada (Timmons, 2001). It was the intention of this project to do the same for newcomer families for whom English is an additional language.

There do exist, however, a small number of family literacy programs for EAL families that have been successful. Cairney (2000) describes the positive impact of the Family Initiative for English Literacy (FIEL) program:

Evaluation of the program concluded that 'because Project FIEL stresses language use in meaningful context, the students' needs, wishes and past experiences naturally become the teaching methodology, and flexibility of the curriculum is a natural result [and] ... the experience of the project indicates that when social context is attended to in a positive way and the dignity of the learner is upheld, learning occurs.' (p. 157)

The *Connecting Families through Community EAL Family Literacy Program* followed this methodology and empowered the participants by engaging them in literacy practices that are meaningful to newcomers and culturally inclusive.

Addressing the Information Gap

Family literacy is generally recognized to have four integrated components as modelled in the previous research programs mentioned above: adult education (AE); early child education (ECE); parenting education and support or parent time (PES or PT); and parent and child together time (known as PACT) (<http://www.nwlincs.org/orpilotes/toc.htm>). While there exists a small number of EAL programs such as FEIL or Literacy and Parenting Skills (LAPS) (<http://www.nald.ca/laps/Summary.htm>) which have been implemented in Western Canada and internationally, there have not been any such programs developed based on the needs of families living in Saskatchewan or Prince Edward Island, or successfully made available to newcomer families in those provinces, based on the dual facilitation model. (National Center for Family Literacy, & National Center for ESL Literacy Education at the Center for Applied Linguistics (2004). *Practitioner Toolkit*. Retrieved October 27, 2007, from <http://www.nald.ca/library/research/practool/cover.htm>). The dual facilitation model operates with two facilitators; one working with parents on literacy skills and strategies and the other working with the children on those same skills and strategies. After one hour, families come together for a nutritious snack, and then parents and children spend time together practicing the literacy skills and strategies, with the support of the facilitators.

It was the goal of this research to develop such a program that works with parents and children to meet their literacy needs, improve literacy engagement, and foster a greater understanding of the importance of literacy, lifelong learning and other essential skills required to participate fully in a knowledge-based economy and society. This project is an innovative initiative because it is designed by and for families with children in grades one to four with a focus on essential skills and literacy learning.

Recruitment

Recruitment of families to participate in the needs assessment took place at the Regina Open Door Society (RODS) and the Prince Edward Island Association for Newcomers to Canada (PEIANC). Employees from both organizations took the following factors into consideration when recruiting families who were interested in participating in the needs assessment: families that included at least one child in the target age range (between the ages of six and nine); families that had a “functional” ability to read, write and speak in English; and families of a certain immigration status. Both organizations communicated that refugee clients were in the most need of English literacy support, and so this group was approached first to participate in the program.

Because both RODS and PEIANC are major social, cultural and information centres for newcomers to Regina and Charlottetown, flyers and posters with contact information were distributed throughout the offices. Newcomers were encouraged to contact the organizations’ employees to inquire about the program. To raise awareness of this program, the research coordinators held an information session for newcomers at RODS and PEIANC. Newcomer families were informed of the study and the level of commitment that was required to participate.

Needs Assessment

The researchers had determined that to develop a family literacy program that would be valuable, relevant to and effective for newcomer families, a needs assessment would be required. Once families at both sites had volunteered to participate in the needs assessment, steps were taken to make the process as easy as possible for the families. To ensure that no costs were incurred by the families, for example, they were reimbursed for taxi or bus fare for travel to and from each interview site, and a light supper was provided. With advice from RODS and PEIANC

personnel, wordiness was eliminated from the presentation that was used at the information session. Translators were also available, which ensured that families were fully aware of the content of the program. A conscious effort was made to acknowledge and include the newcomer families' previous knowledge and language skills in both English and first languages. In addition, a babysitter was employed to take care of the children at the offices while the parents attended the information sessions.

The needs assessment interviews were held at the RODS and PEIANC offices during April and May of 2009, most often in the common area or in an office. RODS and PEIANC protocol required that an employee be close by during the interview. The interviews with the children were always completed in the presence of a parent or a RODS or PEIANC employee. The interviews were scheduled at a time that was mutually convenient for the families and the researchers – usually on weekday evenings. Safe and supportive environments were maintained during the interviews to ensure ease for participants as well as rich data. Prior to the interviews, interviewing techniques and protocol were reviewed with the research coordinators.

The interview protocols (which together with the participant consent forms were written in functional language) were designed in two formats: one for the parents and one for the children. The questions were related to the themes of immigrating, reading, writing, school, homework and health. The families were encouraged to talk about how they felt about literacy and the literacy needs they perceived as necessary to help them achieve their aspirations.

After the needs assessment interviews were completed, analysis required the transcription of more than 150 pages of data, which was separated into parents' interviews and children's interviews. Upon first review of the data, the literacy concerns that families encountered were identified. After the interviews were fully coded and summarized, discussion topics were grouped according to the following: reasons to immigrate; family values; challenges experienced by EAL newcomers; friends and community activities; reading; writing; homework; health; and literacy programs. It is important to note that to obtain this data, families had to talk about their perceived lack of – and sometimes fears about literacy. Their courage in discussing such topics is indicative of their desire to attempt to address literacy concerns that impact on their families.

With this data compiled and analyzed, a needs assessment report was then produced to help guide the development of the modules, taking firmly into account the input of the families.

Development of the Modules

The following sections summarize the responses from families and are grouped by discussion topic.

Reasons to Immigrate

Parents mentioned a variety of reasons as to why they had decided to come to Canada. For many of the refugee families, life before their arrival in Canada was dangerous. The Karen families had lived in Thai refugee camps, having fled from ethnic oppression in Burma (officially known as Myanmar). Other newcomers expressed that life in their home countries was characterized by long workdays, little time to spend with their families, and pollution. Many of the newcomers saw Canada as being a country where they could begin safe, healthy and prosperous lives.

“We came from West Africa. Ah, everything was well. Very well before the war started. When the war started, we moved back from country to country, city to city.”

“Before I came to Canada I am doing business in a kindergarten. We are very busy in China. So most of the time we work. We have few time to go to another-, do another things. We are quite busy.”

Family Values

Parents indicated that education was important in their families. There was a strong connection between having an education, learning English and obtaining employment. Parents also indicated that spending time with one another through activities such as watching television or going to a place of worship was important. Other activities identified by parents and children included talking, listening to the radio, playing games, swimming, skating and camping. At night, families would read the newspaper together, search the Internet and watch movies. Families enjoyed summertime outdoor activities such as going to the beach or park. Other activities such as cooking and eating together were often enjoyed with other families. Families would also participate in activities with other families from similar religious and ethnic communities.

Some parents indicated that they would like to spend more time with their families and engage in fun activities. However, because of the costs associated with some activities, they were not able to do so. Travelling or visiting with other families was often considered too expensive. Some parents were not able to engage in recreational activities with their family because they were too busy with work, school and looking after the children.

When problems arose, family members would support each other. Spouses would help each other, while single parents carried the sole responsibility of supporting a family.

Challenges Experienced by EAL Families

Parents saw a strong connection between learning English, continuing their education, and improving their families' lives. Being unable to speak fluently in English meant that parents could not socialize with Canadians or obtain employment in the field in which they had been educated. Some of the families also indicated that adjusting to Canadian culture (education system and values, for example) caused a lot of problems.

Tasks such as shopping which contained cultural components were difficult because they involved negotiating in a new language. These tasks such as reading street signs and grocery labels, which are taken for granted by many English speakers, were very stressful for the families.

It is important to note that one parent indicated that her life would be better if she did not experience as much racism. She felt that the prejudice toward her eliminated the possibility of her finding stable employment. Feeling as though she was constantly being judged caused her a great deal of emotional pain and stress.

"Taiwan sometimes, its not very expensive. You go like bowling or something activity, you buy ticket its very cheap. But here, it is very expensive! So sometimes, my family want to go, but how can I go: too expensive!"

"Now we are so busy because in the daytime we go to school and at night we study English at home."

"Stay at home listening to the radios, watching TV to improve my English. After that sometimes we meet some friends...We gather together. And, ah, we have dinner together."

"I think first thing we should do is overcome the language and then we can get what we want, I mean the job." "...for me the way I look at it they don't like black...The way I would put it its about the colour. They look here your colour they don't look here your talent. And I-, For me, I don't want it to be bothering me, but (inaudible) they didn't change their attitude. I'm nothing? ...it is very, very difficult black to live."

Being unemployed or underemployed caused a lot of stress for parents. The parents explicitly communicated that their lives would improve if they were to find meaningful employment.

Friends and Community Activities

Parents talked about how they liked their communities and were satisfied with where they lived. They appreciated the friendliness of neighbours. However, when discussing residents, most parents indicated that they did not personally know many people. They indicated that they would like to become friends with others so that there would be more opportunity to practice speaking English. The parents expressed that they were unsure of the cultural norms regarding friendship and socializing with Canadians. One parent felt that intense racism had been shown toward her. She indicated that she was unable to meet others because they would not accept her.

Most children reported that they had friends with whom they played and participated in a variety of activities, such as going to parties and playing sports. One girl mentioned that she had three friends of the same culture who played together and helped each other. Another child mentioned that he had a friend but had trouble communicating with the friend, in English. Only two children mentioned friends from their previous country, and both indicated that there were no differences in the friendships.

In the new communities, families enjoyed going to community centres, local libraries and skating rinks. Local churches were appreciated because they provided

"I think in China, every family parent's hope their children to read, to learn lots."

"Because in China we have a history, a lot of books because (we have) a long history. A lot of books is very famous. So we need a lot of time to read and the books is very important..."

"Reading is very important, especially read our religion, reading book... it's important to religion..."

"Because the Karen people we are Karen culture, right now we have to learn about everyone because we have the small community... We have to know about everywhere for the news... Yeah, ah, for the news, and when we read in the news about something... Yeah, BBC news for the Burmese."

"Um, they play with me sometimes, sometimes they don't have to play with me because I don't need them. Sometimes I go, I play with my other friends. Soccer... And I have lots of friends at school..."

"... I like them (my friends) in my country I like in Canada..."

"Yes! (I watch TV, my favourite shows are) Ninja (Turtles) Yes. And um, police man and um, (Curious) George... and Spiderman and Batman."

opportunities for the families to socialize and get to know people in the community. Families also enjoyed getting together with neighbours and people from their previous countries or cultures to cook, eat and socialize.

The children responded with a variety of activities that they did for fun. The majority stated that they liked watching cartoon television shows. One child replied that she liked to watch movies. Some children specified that they liked to watch television shows with policemen. Children also talked about how they enjoyed video gaming, such as Wii or PSP and computer gaming. Almost half of the children mentioned sports, including swimming, four-square, football, freeze tag, and soccer. Playing princess, playing with building blocks and potato heads, as well as helping their mother cook, were also mentioned.

Reading

All families reported that they had a positive perception of reading. The parents indicated that in their cultures it was considered important to know how to read so that they could learn about their country's history, practice their religion, be informed about local politics and sports, and follow the news. Some parents also stated that in their home countries, reading was exclusive to the upper classes. The Karen parents indicated that learning to read was important in their culture for two reasons: to keep informed about the conflict in Burma, and to maintain their cultural traditions that were under attack in Burma. Thus, for these families, knowing how to read was empowering.

"(writing is) necessary. Sometimes we must use it maybe no matter what level you are, sometimes you need."

"...when I was in school, the way I say it (if a person) doesn't know how to write, you are just, let me say this: useless!"

"Yes, it is important, you need to know to write (history) stories."

"...none of us like to write."

"I ask him to copy... Copy the book. So now he can write something."

"When she was in China... she wrote... Chinese. Here I ask her to write in both Chinese and English. But because she is becoming lazy when she came here so she refused to do so. So I said, 'Then you choose one.' So, ah, she chose to write in English. Whatever, she wants (to write about) ... Because I just want her to practice English. So everyday she writes something."

"...everyday I take... email. I send email for my friends. I am writing."

"I write in English. Before I hate. I hate to write. I really, really, really hate it! Because sometimes- My big problems is sometimes some words, I would pronounce it but I don't know how to spell it. And sometimes I write it down, I don't know how to pronounce it. So I very, very confused on that."

Parents believed that developing stronger reading skills would be the catalyst to ensuring that they and their children would lead prosperous lives.

After moving to Canada, the parents continued to read in their first languages. Most parents indicated that they enjoyed reading the news in addition to participating in cultural activities such as singing songs in their first languages. One parent stated that she did not read in her first language because she was unable to do so.

The parents communicated that they enjoyed reading books about Canadian history and culture, books that would help them improve their English, and books that applied to their professions. It was important to the families that they read books about Canada so that they could better adapt to Canadian culture.

Most of the children said they liked to read. Of those who did not like to read, one said she liked to watch television more than read and several others indicated that they were just learning how to read. The children stated that they liked to read cartoons, picture books and comic books, especially *Spiderman*, *Batman* and *Ironman*. A few children specified a book or series of books including *Bugs Bunny*, *Dr. Seuss*, *Are You My Mom?*, *Franklin* and *Max*. The location and amount of reading reported by the children varied from all of the time to reading only either at school or home. One child mentioned that he read at home with his brothers. Another child stated that sometimes his mother or father helped him read.

There were a few cases where parents said that their children did not like to read or that they did not read a lot

because they did not know how to read. Most parents confirmed what their children had reported

"I just listen because my writing is not good, I just listen to radio, to tape and watch TV."

"We read a lot of books in Chinese. In our country, most of the time we spend reading. Because reading is quite important... We spend a lot of time reading. Especially the Chinese history. We can spend all of our time in reading because there is a lot of things we can learn from the Buddhists."

"I have to concentrate. Take my time to read my professional book. Because this year, October, I will take part in a national professional practice exam."

"...my kids, every evening they reading. But me, also I read if my teachers give me homework."

"She loves reading. She- Now she's bringing some novel."

"... sometimes my older son: he don't like too much reading."

"For my son, he can read some, for my son maybe just a little bit he can read."

"My family for the reading it is a little bit difficult. Pronunciation."

– that their children enjoyed reading. Parents indicated that their children liked to read stories with pictures, novels and short stories on the Internet.

Some parents said that they had problems understanding written English and therefore did not enjoy reading. For the families that read together, the language in which they chose to read varied. Some parents enjoyed reading books with their families in their first languages while others preferred to read in English.

Parents also discussed what they did when they or someone in their family were having problems with reading. In many cases, the parents were unsure of how to help their children. And sometimes, the children would help their parents with reading. Parents sought help with reading from the Internet, from English friends or teachers.

When the interviewers asked the children what they did when they had problems reading, some children reported that they would try to sound it out first and then seek the help of either their teacher, if they were in school, or a family member at home. A couple of children reported that they simply skipped the unfamiliar word and carried on with the reading. When asked what would help them become better readers, one child said a dictionary in their first language, while the other children indicated that they did not know.

Participating parents did not explicitly mention the library as being a place for developing reading skills. Yet the majority of the families responded that they went to the library together regularly, or at least one member went to the library regularly to borrow CDs, DVDs, or books, or to study and meet with a tutor. There were instances where parents said they were too busy with chores and other duties to visit the library regularly.

“Before, (name of child), don’t want to go to school. He said he can not speak very good English... I think sometimes maybe the teacher give little pressure so (he) scared. Afraid don’t want to go to school. After its fine, because the teacher encourages him...”

“Yeah he feels its easy. He thinks its easy and fun.”

“Unfortunately the teachers just worked with him play. For example, ah, care children. No, no teach English!”

“He teach her everyday half an hours for the ESL language. Her teacher is very good. Quite kind.”

“... he is very, very good teacher.”

“My daughter likes teacher.”

“My son’s teacher, I think she is good. She is good. If she finds some problems, she will tell me. So I will communicate very often.”

The majority of children reported that they had access to the library either at their school or in their community. The activities in which they liked to engage while at the library included selecting and borrowing books, listening to the librarian read, using the computer, studying, and reading. One child stated that she wished there were a greater selection of books. Only one child stated that she did not go to the library.

Writing

Like reading, writing was perceived as being important in home countries and cultures. Knowing how to write in home countries was connected to socioeconomic status; if one could not write, he or she would be judged poorly by other classes in society. Writing was important because it was viewed as being necessary to enjoy life. For the parents, writing was closely linked to remembering and preserving culture in history books.

There were varied responses when parents described the way they felt about writing in English. Some said that they liked to write, while others said they did not like to do so. Those parents who said they liked to write commented that they enjoyed writing emails to family members, and for enjoyment would write stories because of the challenge writing presented. Parents who did not like to write said they had problems with pronunciation, spelling, and forming sentences and paragraphs. These factors made writing overwhelming and thus some parents chose to avoid it.

The parents unanimously stated that although their children read for enjoyment, they did not write for enjoyment. The children wrote when they were required to do so for homework, or because their parents asked them to. A few parents expected that their children would practice writing everyday in order to strengthen their writing skills. Parents

“In pronunciation she is gooder than use. So we just tell her about the words, the meaning. And we can not speak to her. Our pronunciation is not good.”

“Sometimes we don’t know (the answers) either! We check the dictionary.”

“The teacher asks her to read a book to improve her pronunciation.”

“Not... (a lot of homework)... compared to before.”

“There is no problem (when she is doing homework) because she can ask her classmate and she can ask another Canadian student... And if there is some homework a problem, she can ask the tutor.”

“Anything that I don’t understand sometimes I write a note, sometimes I call and speak to the teacher, and I say she did this one but I didn’t understand it. So when she go back to school the teacher help her with that.”

reported that although their children may have spoken English well, their writing skills were much weaker. One parent stated that when the family moved to Canada, one daughter became lazy and therefore stopped writing for fun as much as she did in their previous country.

However, most of the children said that they like writing. Several of the children did not express how they felt about writing, but simply stated that they could write. Writing included diaries, homework and story writing. One child said she had problems when writing, but did not elaborate on exactly what those problems were.

School

Some parents stated that their children enjoyed going to school, while others believed that their children did not like to go to school. Parents said that some of their children were shy and weren't comfortable participating in class and becoming friends with other children. Other parents said that school was easy and fun for their child. Some parents expressed concern that their children were not learning enough at school, because it was too recreational.

For most of the children interviewed, school was a positive experience. Most self-reported that they were doing well in school and enjoyed subjects such as English, math, reading, computer time and making crafts. Others reported that they liked the social aspect of school, had many friends and enjoyed playing with other children. Several children stated that language was still a barrier and if they could learn more English, school would not be quite as challenging for them. One child said that her educational experience in China had been far more difficult than the content and curriculum in Canada.

"I think for my little son, ah, learning English is very, very important."

"Before it like this: not usually see my husband. Every Saturday we meet and go to church together. Special day for my family..."

"I like to sit with them and talk with them about life, how life is ... To be together (is very important)...we all love each other. And that is part of special thing. I really care for my daughter..."

"I think education is very important... I want to continue my education. Practice my diploma here. And I... all the time, talk with my kids. They need to study and continue their education."

"We have Muslim community on PEI and every month we have a program, all families together... In all Muslim community we are cooking food... And our Muslim, we are going to their home and they are coming our home."

The parents communicated that they were satisfied with their children's teachers. When the interviewer asked the parents to talk about their children's teachers, they usually said that the

teacher was very nice, that they liked him or her, or that their children liked the teacher. The parents recognized teachers who went out of their way to assist their children through initiatives such as adapting lesson plans for language learning. However, some believed that the teacher was putting too much pressure on their children and therefore the parents mentioned that the children did not feel comfortable in class.

Maintaining communication with their children's teachers was mentioned as being very important for the parents. Some parents spoke to their children's teachers every day when they dropped their child off at school, but in most cases, the parents communicated with the teachers during parent-teacher interviews, over the phone or through email. Some parents found it easier to communicate over the phone as opposed to email. The use of a translator was not mentioned as being necessary. It is important to note that parents generally wished they had more communication with their children's teachers. The cultural etiquette of how to approach a teacher, when to do so and what to talk about, was confusing for some parents.

Homework

Most parents stated that their children had homework every night, and that their children completed their homework without their assistance. The parents perceived that their children's English skills were stronger than their own, and therefore believed that the children were capable of completing their homework without the parent's help. When their children did need help with homework, they would seek assistance from classmates, tutors, or older siblings.

Some parents said that they did not have the time to help their children with their homework because they were also studying. Yet parents would actively seek ways to find other people who could help their children, such as employees from RODS or PEIANC, or neighbours. Some parents were not directly involved in helping their children complete homework, however they would have liked to take a more active role.

"Yeah, we are good in health. We don't have any diseases or any sicknesses or any allergies. So we are really pretty good."

"(My wife's) toes and fingers very, very cold. Like water! ... Always cold. Sometimes for the winter time, really, really cold. She didn't go to school... Ah, my son I don't know about that. People come to Canada, children, they came to Canada, everyday the look good. But my children no change. Before we live in the refugee camp, when I came to the Canada we are different. But my children not different! Problems eats or I don't know. Sometimes they sick... I look at some children, (their) body is good... but not my children: no."

Parents also mentioned that children did more homework in their previous countries than they did in Canada. In general, the parents felt that in Canada, the education system was not as rigorous for their children as it was in their previous countries.

The children identified that they read stories, read and wrote problems and had math as homework. Some of the children said that they liked homework, while a small number of children stated that they sometimes had problems completing homework because they did not recognize the words.

Children reported that they completed homework at various times of day – after school, after supper or at night. It is interesting to note that while parents felt they did not have a direct role in helping their children complete homework, the children identified the parents as a source of homework help. One child mentioned asking the teacher for help with homework. One child specifically mentioned that she did additional homework that was more challenging and that her mother checked her homework every night.

Health

The majority of parents communicated that their family was generally healthy. To become healthy was a reason that some families immigrated to Canada. Pollution in previous countries caused problems such as asthma, and learning of Canada's clean environment encouraged many to immigrate. For the refugee families, health was an issue in Canada. Circulation, weight and skin problems were affecting their health. These families were not certain of how to resolve these issues or improve their health.

"I never give them medicine, I give them like what I know, like tea... more natural. Then after I see it's not better, I go to doctor."

"If (son's name) (has a) fever, I prepare it: the medicine at home."

"...I have a pain in my back and I go to Friendly Clinic but I don't speak with doctor for my problem. After that he wrote for me the blood check. I had the blood check but nobody call me, I don't know."

"I have not a family doctor yet."

When the interviewer asked each parent what he or she did when someone in their family was sick, some responded that they would first make homemade medicines. If the sickness continued, they would then purchase over-the-counter medications. Finally, if the ailment persisted, they would seek professional attention. Complications arose when families did not have family doctors, and would then be required to visit walk-in clinics or the out-patient unit of

the hospital. Communicating with healthcare providers also presented a challenge. It was difficult for the parents to understand the vocabulary that doctors and pharmacists use. In many cases, the families used the Internet to prepare for visits to the doctor or before picking up medication; they would search the Internet for words that described their ailments. In other cases, translators would be used, or the parents would write down what the doctor had said and translate it after the appointment. Interacting with healthcare providers appeared to be a confusing and often overwhelming experience for these newcomer families.

Literacy Programs

Strengthening pronunciation skills was identified by the families as being an area that they wanted to improve. Parents indicated that they could improve their pronunciation skills if they were to practice more, become friends with English speakers, speak more English at home or find a job that required them to speak English. Improving reading and writing skills was seen as another way to improve pronunciation.

The parents also expressed a desire for their children to improve their pronunciation, reading and writing skills. They believed this could be accomplished by using picture books to match words to illustrations, becoming friends with English speakers, and by studying and practising English more. It was important to parents that what they and their children studied was interesting to them. The parents also mentioned that having a tutor to provide personalized lessons would greatly assist them in improving their English skills.

The parents were interested in completing a literacy

"The problem is pronunciation. It is not easy."

"... one time I opened the kid book, like (my children) can see the picture and then same time the name."

"I would say maybe twice a week. Because I will be working I have to go to school."

"Maybe sometimes the activity with the family together sometime in the summer... Group activity."

"I think like this conversation and sometimes reading help but talking with people. I think is a good way to learn better English."

"... just education because here you know for education you have to pay money. That is big problem for us now. We are refugee and we have five children. For five of them we have to pay money for their education. This seem very big problem for me."

"We are all like this, like me and my wife, we're homesick."

"I hope him will be a doctor... I hope them become a useful person!"

program in order to improve their English skills. Due to other commitments and busy work schedules families indicated they would only be able to attend the program twice a week. However, some parents who were already attending English as an Additional Language classes indicated that they were satisfied with the proposed program and would stop attending their other EAL classes so that they could attend the program every day. When asked what types of activities they would like to complete in a literacy program, parents referred to group and family-based activities. Parents wanted lessons to be practical, focusing on activities such as grocery shopping, going to the drugstore and going to the hospital. The use of the Internet was mentioned as being a helpful tool for families to enjoy learning. Parents found that when reading and writing, these activities should also be developed in a group context. It was believed that families could improve their pronunciation skills while improving their reading and writing comprehension skills if activities were completed in a group setting.

Aspirations for the Future

The desire among parents to live in a safe, peaceful community was evident when the parents were asked to talk to the interviewer about the future and their family. Parents hoped that their English skills would improve, and believed that if this were to take place, they would then be able to find better jobs. If their children's English were to improve, they could then complete post-secondary education and later obtain professional careers. Other comments included parents hoping that they would become more accustomed to Canadian culture and that they would be able to have more children.

Finding a good job and having financial security were important in achieving higher level education. In families with many children, parents were worried about how they would manage concerns for parents. They were especially worried that they would not be able to find adequate employment to pay for their children's post-secondary education and to provide for their children in the future.

"I hope... my husband and I found a good job and my English will be fluently."

"I think, ah, future is bright for us. And ah, we can ah, we can learn English first, after that we can find a job no problem. We can, ah, have a better life here, ah, I hope it will be better. And, ah, we are happy stay here no problem because it is a very good city and kind people."

"... in the future, all my kids will get a good education..."

Adapting to Canadian culture was an issue for the parents as well. Parents expressed their concern that they would never fully adjust to Canadian life and would continue to feel homesick.

When asked what they wanted to do when they grow up, half of the children said that they did not know or were unsure. Other answers included doctor, dentist, teacher, hairdresser (like her mother) and firefighter. One boy also commented that he wanted to be a doctor when he grew up so he could have a lot of money.

Using the information gathered from the needs assessment interviews, themes were identified for developing the EAL Family Literacy Program modules. The following themes were used to build the modules:

- Canada
- Identity
- Recreation and Leisure
- Schools
- Homework
- Friendship
- Community
- Food and Nutrition
- Health and Wellness

With these themes, specific language and literacy skills were targeted in each module.

Pilot Project and Revision of Modules

After the needs assessment had been completed and the modules were written, a pilot program was implemented to determine the effectiveness of the modules and provide input for later revisions. A total of 16 families in Regina, Saskatchewan and Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island participated in the pilot program in the summer of 2010. The pilot project took place in centrally located places that newcomer families were familiar with. Transportation costs, childcare and snacks were provided for the families to ensure the ease of participation. The ten modules were delivered over eight weeks. In two of the weeks, two modules were presented. The initial sessions involved parents working with one facilitator and children working with another facilitator. After approximately one hour, the parents and children came together to share snacks

and then attend a session together that reviewed and reinforced the themes, and language and literacy skills that were taught earlier in the module.

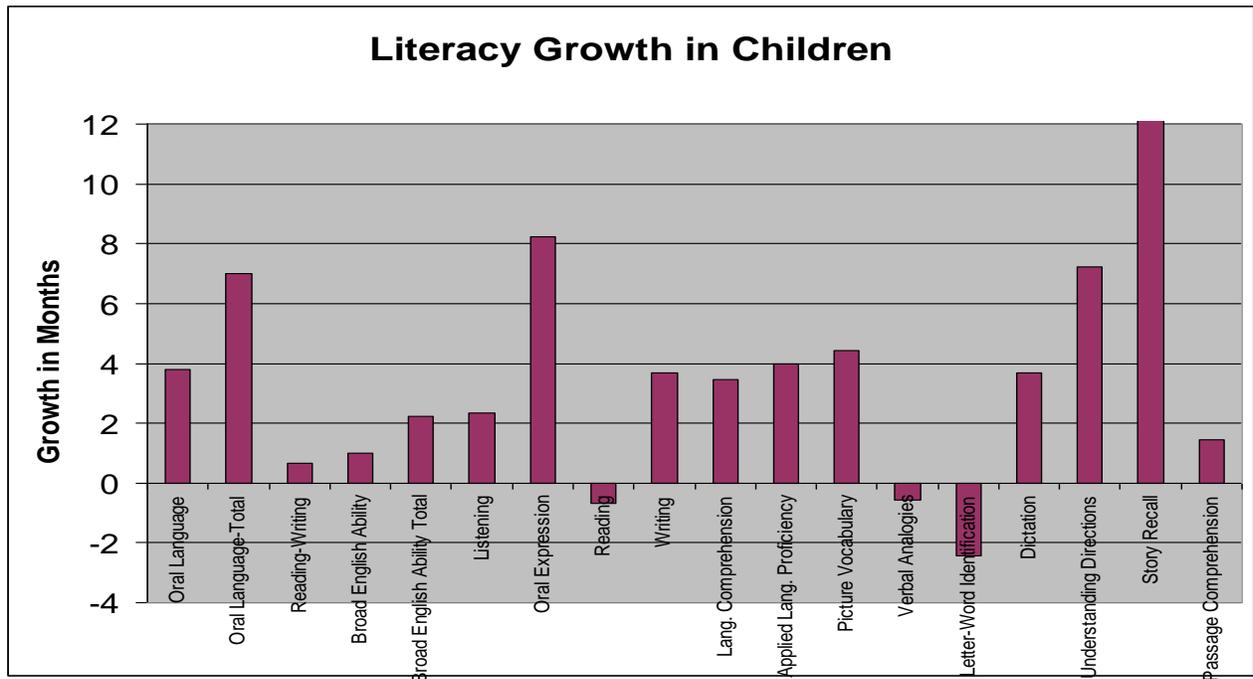
The facilitators who participated in the pilot program and the program implementation had extensive knowledge and experience in working with EAL families. Three of the facilitators were employed as EAL teachers in the public education system while the fourth was a resource teacher who also supports EAL students. Two of the facilitators have Masters degrees in education while the third was in graduate studies. Two of the facilitators have spent extensive time abroad in EAL employment experiences. The combined experience of the facilitators allowed for both an effective delivery of the EAL Family Literacy Program, as well as a critical analysis of the modules.

A pre-pilot program and a post-pilot program language assessment were administered to the families using the Woodcock-Munoz Language Survey- Revised. The WMLS-R provides a broad sampling of proficiency in oral language, language comprehension, reading and writing. Normative data for the English forms were gained from 8,818 subjects ranging in age from 24 months to over 90 years. The WMLS-R contains seven tests: Picture Vocabulary, Verbal Analogies, Letter-Word Identification, Dictation, Understanding Directions, Story Recall, and Passage Comprehension. Combinations of the tests form clusters. The clusters are: Oral Language, Reading-Writing, Broad English Ability, Listening, Oral Expression, Reading, Writing, Language Comprehension, Applied Language Proficiency, Oral Language- Total and Broad English Ability-Total.

The assessments were completed with the participants to determine what language and literacy skills had been enhanced by participation in the pilot project and where there were gaps that needed to be addressed in the revision of the modules. Post-interviews were also conducted to provide an opportunity for families to voice their impressions of the EAL Family Literacy Program and share what had been beneficial to families who participated in the pilot project.

The results from the language assessments (see Figure 1) and the post-interviews were used to revise the modules over the next year in preparation for the program implementation.

Figure 1: Pilot Project



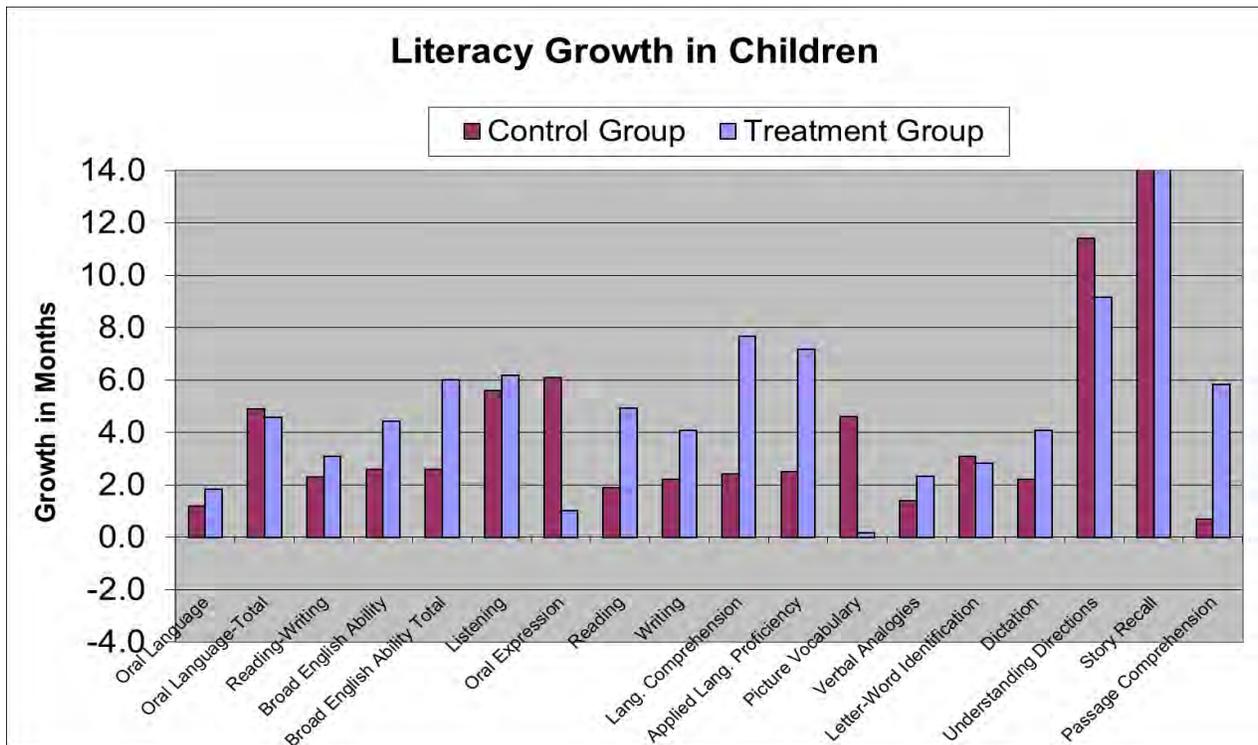
Program Implementation

After the revision of the modules, 20 families were recruited to participate in the implementation of the program. Language assessments using the WMLS-R: Form A was administered to all 20 families prior to the implementation of the program. The families were then divided into two groups: a control group and a treatment group. The treatment group participated in the EAL Family Literacy Program for the subsequent ten weeks. The implementation took place in a school that was centrally located to the community of the newcomer families. Transportation costs, childcare and snacks were provided for the families to ensure the ease of participation. Each week a module was presented separately to the parents and the children, by the facilitators. After approximately one hour, the parents and children came together for snacks and a combined session. In the combined session the themes as well as language and literacy skills, from the module, were reviewed and reinforced.

After the ten weeks of implementation, feedback forums were conducted with the ten participating families to understand their opinions about what had been effective and where improvements could be made in the implementation of the EAL Family Literacy Program in the future. Post program language assessments using the WMLS-R: Form B was then administered

to all 20 families from both the treatment and control groups. This was done to demonstrate the difference between the language and literacy skills developed over the ten weeks for both groups (see Figure 2: Implementation) The control group saw a language and literacy average growth of 69 months while the treatment group realized a language and literacy average growth of 89 months. Clearly, participating in the EAL Family Literacy Program was beneficial in providing support to newcomer families.

Figure 2: Implementation



Assessments

Assessment for the project involved three levels: the needs assessment interviews that were discussed earlier, post-implementation feedback forums, and pre- and post-implementation language assessments using the Woodcock-Munoz Language Survey- Revised.

Post implementation feedback forums took place with the participants to determine the strengths and areas for improvement in the pilot project along with the participants overall satisfaction or lack thereof. The feedback forums took place with the participants in separate rooms (i.e. parents, children and facilitators each in a different room). The following questions

were used in the feedback forums:

1. What did you want to learn in this class?
2. Did you learn what you wanted to learn?
3. What did you like most about the class?
4. What did you like a little about the class? What would you change?
5. Which module did you find the most helpful? Why?
6. Which module did you find a little helpful? How could we change it?
7. Did you have any problems coming to the class each week? If yes, how could we help you?
8. What was the most important thing your children learned in the class?
9. What were some new ways you learned to interact with your children?
10. Would you tell other families it was good? Why or why not?
11. How would you talk about this class?
12. What are some of the problems you have with reading?
13. What are some of the problems your children have with reading?
14. Do you think the class helped these problems? How?
15. What was the biggest problem you had in the class?
16. Do you think the class helped these problems? How?
17. Can you list things that would help?
18. Do you know of any other class, survey, or studies of ways to help your literacy?
19. Is there anything more you would like to talk about?

As mentioned earlier, the Woodcock-Munoz Language Survey- Revised (WMLS-R) English form was used for the pre- and post-language assessments. The WMLS-R provides quantitative data but also allows for qualitative information. The examiner is able to record the first languages and the number of years of exposure or immersion to English. The subject's behaviour during the testing may also be recorded.

The WMLS-R English Form A was used to assess all of the children before the pilot project and before the final implementation. The WMLS-R English Form B was used to assess all of the children after the pilot project and the final implementation was completed.

Results

The results of the WMLS-R language assessments administered before and after both the pilot project and the implementation are represented in Figure 1: Pilot Project Results and Figure 2: Implementation Results. The average language growth was calculated and represented in months, on the bar graph.

The results from the pilot project indicate a total average language growth of 62 months. More than 12 months of growth occurred in story recall, eight months of growth in oral expression, and seven months of growth in oral language-total and in understanding directions. These results demonstrated a significant language growth among the participants of the EAL Family Literacy Program. These particular areas of greatest growth demonstrate a baseline for further supporting language and literacy development. In language classrooms, where communicative practices are strongly encouraged, it is considered preliminary, but necessary for EAL students to develop oral expression skills so that they can move forward with other language and literacy skills. Researchers also considered the areas that did not demonstrate growth, such as reading, and considered ways of strengthening the modules to provide better support for participants in these areas. With this understanding and the results from the language assessments, researchers revised the modules to build on the strengths of oral expression that were already in place. The modules were further developed to enhance other language and literacy skills, particularly ensuring that comprehension and understanding were supported.

The results from the implementation are separated into the control group and the treatment group. The control group demonstrated an average of 69 months of growth while the treatment group demonstrated an average of 89 months of growth. The results from the treatment group indicate that while oral language continued to be supported in the modules, language comprehension and understanding were also realized for the participants. By helping ensure that newcomer families have not only oral language skills, but also strong comprehension and understanding, the program helped the families better develop their language and literacy skills – skills that are fundamental for newcomers to Canada.

The control group did show average growth (69 months), but passage comprehension (.5 months) and language comprehension (2 months) were low compared to the treatment group: passage comprehension (6 months) and language comprehension (8 months).

Post-Program Participant Feedback

Participant feedback forums, using the questions listed on page 28, were conducted by the researchers after both the pilot project and the implementation. This information, as well as the information from the WMLS-R language assessment, was then used in the revisions of the modules to improve their effectiveness in addressing the needs of the families.

Parents' Feedback

The parents indicated that the modules helped them learn more English. They also thought the modules were supportive for themselves as well as their children in preparing for university. The interactive nature of the program, particularly in talking with others, as well as having a teacher whose first language was English, to help with learning, was an important part of the project and something that the parents felt was often lacking in their daily lives.

Parents wanted to learn more about certain medicines and specific ailments such as headaches, stomachaches and colds. Many parents indicated that the labeling on medicine bottles was confusing and left them uncertain of what medicine to use and when to use it. The parents wanted more detailed information about going to the doctor's office and the pharmacy, such as what questions to ask and what was appropriate to discuss with a doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

In the feedback forums, parents stated that they wanted to continue learning more about studying English, attending school and acquiring post-secondary education. All of the parents indicated that they would participate in the program again if there were an opportunity.

Children's Feedback

Most of the feedback from the children focused around the themes of relationships and schooling. The information that children remembered from the modules included treating others with respect, how to be a friend and how to handle bullying or fighting. Several children drew

connections from their own lives that related to the information learned about in the program. Schooling also generated a lot of discussion in relation to studying English, reading books and doing homework. The issues around schooling were seen as important and once again, the children pulled examples from their daily lives at home and school, with a connection to the module information.

Many of the children stated that they enjoyed making and eating the trail mix recipe which had been part of one of the modules. Two children also mentioned the importance of rules such as no smoking and no killing. The children indicated that the project was fun.

Facilitators' Feedback

In the feedback that facilitators provided, a lot of direction was given regarding how to effectively implement the project, based on reflections of the pilot project, the revising of the modules, and the eventual implementation. The environment in which the modules were implemented was important. In one of the pilot programs, the modules were facilitated in a church that was centrally located near the Regina Open Door Society. This location was conducive for the familiarity to the families and ease of transportation. However, the rooms where the modules were taught did not have a lot of literature or environmental print on the walls, nor were they conducive to such support. The second location, where the implementation of the final program occurred, was in a school classroom and a school library. Both of these locations were considered to be more supportive of language and literacy learning because books and environmental print were already in place and readily accessible.

The feedback given by parents, children and facilitators was important in helping to revise the modules. After the revisions were complete, facilitators indicated that the modules were easier to follow because of the formatting and the reduction in the amount of information included in the modules. A researcher and a parent suggested that a vocabulary focus be provided in each module. This revision to the modules was helpful in program facilitation, and parents indicated that it was valuable in learning English.

The facilitators were teaching colleagues and as such, were familiar with each other. This helped with the sharing of information and in making adjustments with ease. The facilitators were also familiar with many of the families who participated in the project. This familiarity

helped in part to support a community environment amongst the participating families and encouraged regular attendance, as in many cases the facilitators saw the children during the day the program would be run and were able to check if families were planning to attend the project that evening. One of the facilitators provided the transportation for one of the families during the implementation. This proved to be a valuable opportunity to connect and receive feedback on what was working during the implementation.

It was noted by the facilitators that it appeared that families from similar cultural groups helped foster a sense of community and regular attendance in the project. At the pilot project and the implementation, in cultural groups where there were two or more families participating, the families congregated during the fifteen minute breaks and attended regularly until the end of the facilitation. There were two families that did not have other families attending from their cultural groups, one in the pilot project and one in the implementation. In both of these cases, the families stopped attending the project after two or three sessions.

Along with the perceived lack of community, there were other factors that facilitators suggested influenced the decision of these two families to stop participating in the program. Both of the families were immigrants, whereas the other families who regularly attended the projects were refugees. While immigrants see the value of developing their families' language and literacy skills, they may have already accessed the marketplace in Canada through jobs and education. On the other hand, refugees are developing their language and literacy skills to gain access to the marketplace in Canada. The parents in immigrant families had jobs that they sometimes had to attend when the program took place, and were not able to commit to participating for the full duration.

The information gleaned from the feedback forums and the informal discussions with parents, children and facilitators helped to create a community environment that aided in the facilitation of the English as an Additional Language Family Literacy Project. By being responsive to the language and literacy needs of newcomer families, the modules, the facilitation and this final report were greatly enhanced.

Completion of the Research

After the family literacy program had been implemented, the data was analyzed and compiled into this final report to provide information and resources for service providers and the funders. In addition to this final report, pilot project and needs assessment reports had been completed during the research process and program development. The data from the language assessments as well as the post-interviews and feedback forums were used in writing all of the reports. It was determined that the *Connecting Families through Community: An English as an Additional Language (EAL) Family Literacy Program* was successful in providing support for newcomer families and in strengthening capacity of service providers who are facilitating this support. Work is currently underway to publish findings in academic journals to further share the impact and results of this work, and the complete literacy program is available for use in other communities.

Conclusions

Based on the results of the WMLS-R language assessments and the feedback received from participants in the family literacy program, *Connecting Families through Community: An English as an Additional Language (EAL) Family Literacy Program* has achieved many of the objectives set by researchers.

Initially, the project was envisioned to provide support to newcomer families through the development, piloting and implementation of an EAL family literacy program. The researchers began the process of creating an inclusive and responsive program that was relevant to newcomer families by doing a needs assessment. This needs assessment allowed an open forum where newcomer families could explicitly express both their language and literacy needs, as well as their practical day-to-day living needs in Canada. Using the information gleaned from the needs assessment, ten modules were developed to create the *Connecting Families through Community: An English as an Additional Language (EAL) Family Literacy Program*. Each of these ten modules focused on specific literacy skills and strategies as well as life skills to foster language learning. The results from the language assessments indicate that significant growth was seen in participants of the pilot program and the final program. The feedback from the families also indicated that the family literacy program was useful in helping newcomers learn

English. The families also appreciated the practical information provided through the modules, and its facilitation of the families' interest in obtaining deeper knowledge and understanding of services in Canada, particularly related to health care.

The pilot program was a key part of the development of the EAL Family Literacy Program. By piloting the modules while continuing to seek participant feedback and administering the language assessments, researchers were able to revise the modules to create an even more responsive and supportive family literacy program that addresses many of the needs of newcomer families. Also, by piloting the family literacy program, facilitators were able to consider what would be most effective in the final product.

The implementation of the final EAL family literacy program was the third part of the initial objective in providing support to newcomer families. This provided opportunity to deliver the modules to newcomer families after extensive research and revisions had occurred. The language assessment results and the feedback of families who participated in the implementation demonstrated that newcomer families found the EAL family literacy program to be effective, relevant and supportive. The implementation confirmed that the *Connecting Families through Community: An English as an Additional Language (EAL) Family Literacy Program* can be used to provide valuable support to newcomer families.

The second objective was to strengthen the capacity of service providers through the provision of information, training and resources in addressing the needs of newcomer families. The research conducted throughout the project has provided an abundance of information. Some of the information has been recorded in the needs assessment report and the pilot project report. The information in these reports helps to identify the specific needs of newcomer families and examines how best to provide support to newcomer families through the EAL Family Literacy Program.

The training of five facilitators to implement the EAL Family Literacy Program took place in Regina, Saskatchewan and Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. Several other service providers including teachers, administrators, researchers and community members observed the implementation and continue to express interest in learning how to implement the EAL Family Literacy Program.

Numerous resources were accessed and extensive networking was undertaken in the process of developing and implementing the EAL Family Literacy Program. The two newcomer support agencies, Regina Open Door Society (RODS) and Prince Edward Island Association for Newcomers to Canada (PEIANC), continue to provide support for and generate interest in the EAL Family Literacy Program. Weekly visits to the local libraries to obtain resources for the pilot program and the implementation of the final program created professional relationships between service providers. These interactions also created an awareness of some of the literature and services available at the libraries for both service providers and newcomer families. Three articles were written and circulated within the Regina public school system to promote the EAL Family Literacy Program. There have also been contacts made between the facilitators and personnel in the public, Catholic and francophone school divisions. Ongoing discussions about the program take place between a researcher and other educators, researchers and service providers throughout Canada. At a Saskatchewan provincial conference for service providers, discussion and evaluation of the EAL family literacy program occurred. All of these activities have helped to strengthen the capacity of service providers in addressing the needs of newcomer families through the *Connecting Families through Community: An English as an Additional Language (EAL) Family Literacy Program*.

Limitations

While every effort was made to adapt and make the research and the implementation of the EAL Family Literacy Program effective and responsive, there were some limitations. These limitations include:

- The number of families that participated varied. In the pilot program, in Prince Edward Island, the initial contact with families took place well before the pilot program was facilitated. Some of the families chose not to participate because of the lag in time. With the implementation in Regina, the initial contact with families took place long before the control group was offered the program. Families in the control group had gained jobs and committed their time to other endeavours that did not allow them time to participate in the implementation.

- After the pilot project, continued research in Prince Edward Island was no longer viable. Therefore all research was centralized to Regina, Saskatchewan and the research in Prince Edward Island ended.
- The diverse levels of literacy and language skills within the various families presented some limitations. The facilitators worked to accommodate and support the diverse language and literacy levels. However, some families thought that participating alongside families with lesser language and literacy levels was not advantageous to them and chose to discontinue participation.

Recommendations

The *Connecting Families through Community: An English as an Additional Language (EAL) Family Literacy Program* met with a great deal of success in both Regina and Charlottetown. The data demonstrated a marked increase in literacy skills among the participants, and the feedback from the parents, children and facilitators indicated that the EAL family literacy program was an effective and much-needed support for newcomer families. It is significant that in their feedback, the families expressed both the need and the desire for the program to continue.

The feedback also revealed suggestions for enhancements to be considered in future implementations of the EAL Family Literacy Program. These recommendations are as follows:

- Facilitate some of the modules at on-site locations such as pharmacies and hospitals where families can experience immersive situations to gain a stronger understanding of the services provided and more concrete language exposure.
- Facilitate use of the modules in schools or libraries where literature and environmental print are readily available to enhance language and literacy learning.
- To create effective community support, implement the EAL Family Literacy Program within the community in which newcomer families live. This will help newcomer families learn more about the services that exist within their community and foster more community support.

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