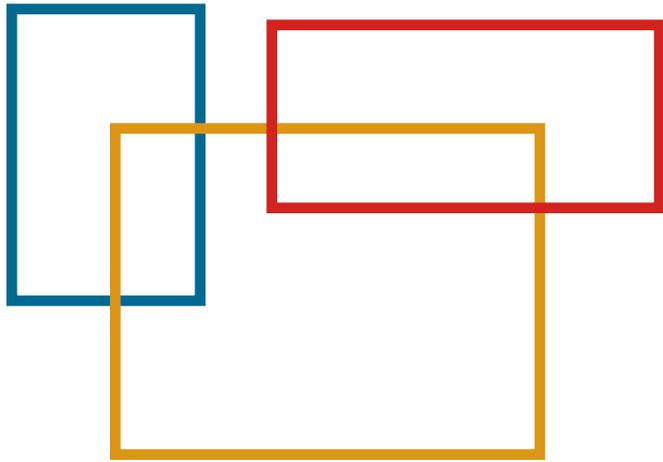
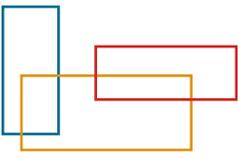


# What Really Matters in Family Literacy?

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A Saskatchewan-based,  
Interorganizational  
Research Project



# Frequently Asked Questions

## 1. Why is research being conducted on family literacy?

Literacy includes skills, knowledge and attitudes that develop over time. From birth to death, we are all increasing our literacy in areas such as reading, writing, oracy, mathematics, the arts and technology. Literacy development is a lifelong process that needs support at different times in different ways, depending on the age, needs and circumstances of the learner.

In the process of becoming more and more literate, most of us have one constant support – our family. It is family members who guide us in daily life and in all our life transitions from early childhood to elementary and high school, post-secondary education, the work place, job training and retraining, community leadership, retirement, volunteer activities and old age. To become a literate society, we need to understand that families are at the centre of literacy and strengthen the family in its support of literacy.

## 2. How will the research be used?

The objectives of the research are:

- To clarify how family literacy is currently understood in Saskatchewan,
- To identify how family literacy programs are developed, delivered and evaluated in our province,
- To assess the impact of current family literacy programs, and
- To draw conclusions about possible directions for future family literacy programs.

The research is intended to inform provincial policies and programs on family literacy, assist in the development of a network connecting those involved in family literacy, identify valuable practices and programs for family literacy facilitators, and build understanding and support for family literacy Saskatchewan.

## 3. How will the research benefit you?

In spite of the importance of literacy and the importance of family literacy in developing the literacy of individuals, family literacy programs have tended to be isolated, short-term and project-based. This research promises to create a larger picture of family literacy in Saskatchewan and work towards a more integrated approach to meeting family literacy needs in our province. It will facilitate the development of sound strategies for enhancing family literacy, the sharing of experiences, and the development of vibrant partnerships between family literacy stakeholders.

For literacy facilitators working in schools, colleges, libraries, First Nations, community organizations and many other contexts, the big picture painted by this research is a solid foundation on which to construct family literacy policies and initiatives with a higher degree of coordination, coherence and sustainability.

For the province's K-12 school system, the research assists school divisions in addressing two critical priorities in the Continuous Improvement Framework: higher levels of literacy among elementary and secondary school students and the provision of smooth transitions for students.

#### 4. What is meant by family literacy?

In this research project family literacy is understood very broadly. Family literacy is:

- Generic. Although many people think of literacy as the ability to read and write, it also includes knowledge and skills related to mathematics, technology or the arts. There are multiple literacies within family literacy.
- Developmental. Literacy grows as people develop and learn. You begin to become literate as a baby when you acquire the ability to express yourself and understand others. You continue to develop your literacy right into old age.
- Family-based. The family is a community that educates its members. Within every family there are people with different levels and kinds of learning. Family members share their knowledge and skills with each other.
- Reciprocal and Intergenerational. In the family people of all ages teach each other and learn from each other. Everyone is both a teacher and a learner.
- Part of Everyday Life. Family literacy events and activities occur as family members go about their daily routines and cultural practices. Learning does not take place in a school or at a specific time. Family literacy may complement formal schooling, or it may challenge it.
- Socially and Culturally Diverse. The family is a social and cultural institution that varies widely. Family literacy activities may look different in an extended family, non-traditional family or one of many possible cultural variations of the family. For example, in some families oral language (as in storytelling) may be more important than the printed word. Cultural diversity needs to be recognized and honoured.
- Dynamic. Family literacy changes as society changes. It is continually shifting to meet new needs and priorities.

#### 5. Who will be participating in the research?

The goal in the first phase of the project, to be implemented in 2008, is to build a broad picture of family literacy in Saskatchewan. An effort will be made to contact someone involved with as many family literacy programs and activities in Saskatchewan as possible. Included in the long list of known family literacy providers are K-12 teachers, preschools, regional colleges, public libraries, post-secondary education institutions, advocacy and support groups, community organizations, health regions, and literacy agencies.

Contacts with family literacy stakeholders will be made by mail, the Internet, telephone and personal visits. Participants will be asked a series of questions intended to do one or more of the following:

- clarify the nature of the program or activity,
- show how family literacy is understood or framed within the program,
- describe how family literacy programs have been developed, delivered and evaluated, and
- provide insight into the impact of particular programs and practices.

#### 6. Who is sponsoring the research?

In 2007 the Saskatchewan Literacy Commission provided the McDowell Foundation with \$10,000 to explore the need for family literacy research in Saskatchewan. The Foundation invited a wide range of stakeholders to an Early and Family Literacy Forum who confirmed the value of collaborative research into what is happening and what really matters in family literacy in Saskatchewan. K-12 teachers, school administrators, school division consultants, literacy facilitators, librarians, regional college literacy coordinators, community and provincial literacy agency representatives who attended the forum, an interorganizational research panel was put together to submit a research proposal to the Literacy Commission for a two-phase project.

The Commission has now provided a further \$30,000 to carry out the first phase of the project in 2008. The interorganizational Family Literacy Research Panel has remained in place to provide guidance in each part of the research process. Coordinating the project on behalf of the interorganizational group is the Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation for Research into Teaching, a charitable organization established by the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation to support research into teaching and learning.

#### 7. Who will be carrying out the research?

The McDowell Foundation has contracted with Dr. Linda Wason-Ellam, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, to design and implement the research with guidance from an interorganizational Family Literacy Research Panel. Dr. Wason-Ellam has an impressive record of research in the areas of reading and literacy. She has received numerous grants and authored scholarly and community publications, bringing immigrant, inner-city, Aboriginal and global perspectives to develop greater understanding of the social worlds of children.

Working with Dr. Wason-Ellam on the research project are graduate students from the University of Saskatchewan.

8. Who is represented on the interorganizational Family Literacy Research Panel?

The panel is composed of:

Patti Byers, Principal, Central Park Elementary School, Nipawin

Hilary Dahnke, Executive Director, Regina Family Literacy Network

Lisa Erickson, Executive Director, Saskatchewan Literacy Network

Cheryl Erlandson, Director, Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit

Verna Gallén, Research Coordinator, McDowell Foundation

Sheryl Harrow, Director, READ Saskatoon

Sheila Pocha, Principal, W. P. Bate Community School, Saskatoon

Charlotte Schindelka, Fort Qu'Appelle

Cathy Sieben, Program Facilitator, Family Support Centres, Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools

Dr. Linda Wason-Ellam, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan

9. What are the timelines for the research?

Phase one of the project will be carried out in 2008. Researchers will be contacting literacy stakeholders for information throughout the month of May. The information will be analyzed and reviewed by the interorganizational Research Panel in the fall. It is expected that a final report on phase one will be submitted to the Saskatchewan Literacy Commission in December, 2008, along with an application for further funding to carry out phase two of the research.