

# Families Learning Together: A Family Literacy Program with Mi'kmaw Communities in Atlantic Canada

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*This article presents research related to a Mi'kmaw family literacy program designed, developed, piloted, and implemented in the Atlantic Canadian Mi'kmaw communities of Lennox Island, Prince Edward Island; Pictou Landing; Afton; and Eskasoni, Nova Scotia. Through consultation with these communities and their respected Elders, 10 comprehensive, theme-based, culturally appropriate literacy modules were developed. From 2003 to 2006, approximately 31 families participated in the development and implementation of this family literacy program. The results from the programs reveal that family literacy programs can positively affect children's reading success. Families and children evaluated the program positively.*

## *Introduction*

Literacy is no longer defined as the ability to read. Rather, the concept encompasses written communication, comprehension, the capacity to analyze text critically, and the skills needed to understand communications technologies, video, television, and new media, as well as the ability to use a wide range of information to function in daily life. Literacy skills in society today are increasingly complex and sophisticated, with implications for economic and cultural survival and access to job opportunities and the earning power necessary to support oneself, family, and community (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2005; Province of Prince Edward Island, 1999). When parents find reading and literacy activities challenging, it is difficult for their children to achieve a high level of competence in reading and writing (Timmons, 2001). Children who experience early literacy difficulties continue to struggle throughout their educational careers (McCoach, 2006). Family literacy activities can help parents to assist their children with educational difficulties. In fact Willms (2002) cites a number of studies worldwide consistently showing that family influences on student achievement outweigh the effects of either school or community. Literacies start 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 that surrounds them.

Although statistics on educational levels of Aboriginal people in Canada document literacy challenges (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2003; George, 2001; McNaughton, 1999; NWT Literacy Council, 2002), Battiste (2002) emphasizes, "as diverse as Indigenous peoples are in Canada and beyond, so also are their ways of knowing and learning" (p. 14). A range of diverse literacies embedded in Indigenous and Aboriginal contexts in Canada remain untapped when approaches fail to involve families and communities in literacy efforts that draw on the epistemologies and ontologies referred to by Battiste. Aboriginal children interact with Elders in many ways: traditional ceremonies, on-the-land experiences, oral teachings, and stories, as well as subtle communicative exchanges that serve as powerful sources for literacy acquisition and reinforce being literate (Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2001; Chambers, 1989, 2004; Balanoff & Chambers, 2005; Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2003).

It is suggested that the integration of holistic and culturally appropriate literacy education (including both Mi'kmaw and English languages) for Aboriginal students that draws on cultural practices will work toward bridging the gap between traditional Aboriginal and Western systems of education and consequently advance literacies (Curwen Doige, 2003; Antone, 2003). Family literacy programs in Atlantic Aboriginal communities have the ability to draw on the strengths of the community and day-to-day experiences in families to build meaningful learning that is shared between parents, extended families, and their children.

This article describes recent research on a family literacy program designed, developed, piloted, and evaluated in several Atlantic Canadian Mi'kmaw communities. It was then implemented in the community of Eskasoni, Nova Scotia, using local Mi'kmaw facilitators. Members of three Mi'kmaw communities partnered with university researchers to develop a family literacy program designed specifically to involve parents in nurturing literacy skills with their children. The research was funded by the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) and the Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network (CLLRNet).

This research is distinctive for a number of reasons. First, few comprehensive family literacy programs have been designed with Aboriginal families and communities using facilitators from the community. Second, the program was developed with Elders and parents through an iterative process that involved continual feedback and adjustment to meet the specific needs of Mi'kmaw families and their children. Finally, the research focuses on increasing literacy so as to reflect the strengths of participating families as well as the Indigenous context and history. We describe the research, report the results, and consider the long-term pos-

sibilities for the implementation of family literacy programs in Indigenous contexts.

### *Overview*

In keeping with decolonizing research approaches in Indigenous contexts (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999), the Mi'kmaw communities involved in this research acted as advisors, partners, facilitators, and collaborators with researchers facilitating the process. The research took place only after consultation and approvals were provided by the chiefs and council in each community, ethical approvals were provided by the Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch Committee and the University of PEI, and Indigenous advisors were appointed to guide the research process.

The research is primarily qualitative. Community-based participatory action research (CBPAR) is the research method used at all stages of the work (Lindsey, 1998). CBPAR is inquiry that focuses on creating the knowledge necessary for people to take action to improve the quality of their own lives (Koch, Selim, & Kralik, 2002). This potentially democratic research process can be equitable and liberating as participants construct their own meanings through discussions and reflection. As Koch et al. suggest, the cyclical processes inherent in CBPAR can lead to the enhancement of people's lives at an individual or community level or both.

In this particular research, the CBPAR cycles involved the creation of an ethically based partnership between the researchers and the participants that led to the development of a literacy intervention to meet specific articulated needs of the community and culture. In-depth conversations with families took place to determine needs, and family members and Elders were involved in designing an appropriate and meaningful family literacy program. The participants in this research study were always considered the experts on their own families as they shared valuable information. The rich family histories and experiences of parents were honored and used in developing the literacy program (Caperelli, 1998). Quantitative measures were used only to determine pre- and post-program literacy levels of the children as this was a requirement of one of the funding agencies: the Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network (CLLRNet).

A collaborative research team was established that included two university researchers with experience working and researching in Indigenous contexts, and four research coordinators who were trained education professionals. When they joined the team, these professionals were provided with orientation and training to help them develop an awareness of Mi'kmaw culture, history, and contemporary issues. Mi'kmaw facilitators also held professional educational qualifications (Bachelor of Education degrees) and were provided with orientation to the program and trained by researchers on how to facilitate the program. A steering committee comprising members and Elders from the com-

munities, the PEI Mi'kmaq Confederacy, the Department(s) of Education, the PEI Literacy Alliance, and parents provided direction, advice, and supervision of the evolving program.

#### *Needs Assessment (2002-2003)*

The Mi'kmaw family literacy program was based on a needs assessment that was carried out by the researchers in 2003 to identify how literacy challenges affected a group of families in Afton and Pictou Landing, NS, and Lennox Island, PEI (Timmons & Walton, 2003). In order to determine the needs of the families, they were recruited for a needs assessment in these three communities through church newsletters, community notices, and by word of mouth. In order to enable families to glean strategies, advice, and stories from each other, a minimum of five families in each community were either recruited before the needs assessment or a pilot program was initiated. Discussions were held with family members and teachers who volunteered to be involved in the family literacy research. Discussions focused on the effect of literacy challenges on the lives of the individuals and their families. The analysis of the transcribed discussions provided the basis for the development of a comprehensive, 10-module family literacy program that included both a holistic and skills-based approach to literacy. Themes relevant to the community were identified and then linked to specific skills that needed to be learned. Community members, Elders, and Aboriginal education experts were involved in selecting the themes. Families involved in the needs assessment provided feedback and suggestions on the program as it evolved. In this approach the members of the community and Elders were integrally involved in shaping the Mi'kmaw Family Literacy program in a way that reflected their own needs.

#### *Program Design and Development (2003)*

Before designing the program modules, researchers met with Elders in two of the communities to gather suggestions and request input on module development. A respected Elder in Pictou Landing, NS, who works with children and has strong ties and family in the community, provided feedback. A second respected Elder from Lennox Island, PEI, who is part of the Aboriginal Women's Network and lives in the community, offered specific advice on both context and language. These Elders added valuable suggestions and input particularly in relation to the cultural aspects of the modules.

Initial development of the modules began in the families' homes. This developmental process continued throughout the needs assessment and pilot program. Incorporating families' opinions about the program increased participants' comfort levels and became an effective format for gathering information on family literacy issues (France & Hager, 1993). The module development involved a collaborative approach with ideas

coming from the families, the literature, and information gathered from the reading assessments. The needs assessment was used to define families' visions for a comprehensive family literacy program. This definition of literacy included reading, comprehension, and understanding of meaning as well as abilities to manage beyond a functional level in a literacy-based world.

The families expressed a high need for a literacy program to be offered at the community level. The chiefs and council offered researchers the use of community facilities to implement the program. The time frame suggested by the participants was one evening per week. Scheduling tied in with other activities that took place in the community and took children's extracurricular activities and parents' work schedules into consideration.

During the implementation of the pilot program, it was a challenge to coordinate three days and times to offer the program in three communities. Following careful planning to accommodate everyone's needs, a night and a time were selected in each community. During implementation in Eskasoni, the schedule was structured the same way and was agreed on collaboratively by the facilitators and the participating families. Scheduling was a significant challenge as the program was implemented.

The parents asked that the curriculum stress decoding, phonics and comprehension strategies, homework, and motivational strategies to encourage their children to read more often and become better readers. In addition, parents wished to include some non-reading activities such as strategies to deal with bullying and parenting. The families also wished to be involved in the development of the modules and stressed the importance of the program reflecting culture and heritage. As a result, when topics for the modules were proposed, each of the families was asked for input and advice.

The first module was developed and taken to each of the families to gain input and ask for further suggestions for improvement. This provided an opportunity to consider the format and raise any questions or concerns. After completion of the introductory module, the topics were firmly agreed on by all involved, and module development proceeded.

Through the meetings with Aboriginal consultants it was decided that the modules should be based on Aboriginal themes. This theme-based approach was suggested to weave Aboriginal culture into each session. Each module represented one Aboriginal theme. Activities and graphics were incorporated into the theme while still employing the reading strategies and objectives of each module. The needs assessment stressed that culture was important to the families, so it was important to integrate cultural content into the sessions. However, families also wanted themes common to other Canadian communities or families and decided that cultural relevance should not be the only consideration when designing programs for this particular Aboriginal context in Atlantic Canada.

Through analysis of the preliminary interviews, some common themes related to the content emerged. Families voiced their desire that the family literacy program include particular topics in the modules, and the researchers then synthesized and incorporated each of the identified themes into the modules as they were developed. Skills were interwoven with cultural traditions and beliefs, and the modules emerged as follows.

- Reading in and Around Your Home—Ways to include reading in your child's daily routine;
- Nature—Fluency;
- Oral Traditions—Ways to include writing in the form of family stories in your child's routine;
- Valuing Cultural Diversity and Respect—Anti-bullying strategies;
- Animals—Comprehension;
- Native Pride and Culture—Guided reading and word recognition;
- Encouraging Children to Read Using the Medicine Wheel—Motivation to read;
- Homework, School and our Children;
- Respect for Elders—Decoding, phonics and sight words;
- Parenting and Discipline.

#### *Resource Packs*

During the piloting of the family literacy program it became evident that the program would benefit from additional resources. As a result, culturally appropriate resource packs were designed for the parents (in similar fashion to the modules) to complement each existing module. Magazine articles, tips, strategies, and question-and-answer-type resources were rewritten in clear language for home reference. The additional resources enhanced the program by providing supplemental support for the parents in literacy and skill development and were developed based on relevance to the parents' interests, lives, and cultures.

At the end of each week's session, the resource packs were used to review concepts and were distributed for use by parents in their homes. A debriefing was held at the start of each session the following week where parents had the opportunity to discuss the previous week's session and provide any feedback or ask questions about the resource packs.

#### *Pilot Program (2004)*

The communities involved in the pilot study in 2004 were Lennox Island, Pictou Landing, and Afton, the same three small Aboriginal communities involved in the needs assessment. We wanted this study to take place in a First Nations context where students were learning in their own community. These communities were specifically chosen for the pilot study and the needs assessment of the Family Literacy Program because their own elementary schools were situated in the community. In these schools the Mi'kmaw language and aspects of the culture are taught as part of the

curriculum. The class size in both locations is significantly smaller than in the local provincial schools.

#### *Lennox Island*

Lennox Island First Nation has 245 residents and is situated on the North Shore of PEI in Malpeque Bay. It encompasses 1,328 acres and has its own school with 37 students in grades 1-6.

Untold generations of Aboriginal people have respected and cherished these lands and waters. Archeological evidence and oral traditions indicate a native presence on the shores of the Bay dating back 10,000 years. The Mi'kmaq have a permanent settlement on Lennox Island since at least the early 19th century. Their spiritual attachment to this place endures in Malpeque Bay with a significance which all Canadians can appreciate. (First Nation: Lennox Island, 2005)

#### *Afton First Nation (Paq'tnkek) and Pictou Landing First Nation (Puksaqtéknékatik)*

Afton First Nation is 15 miles east of Antigonish, NS and is home to 396 Aboriginal people. Pictou Landing is located in a small community named Trenton, NS and has a population of approximately 547. Its vision statement reflects the community's goals: "individually and together, we are committed to healthy minds, bodies and spirit which will create lasting community well-being" (Pictou Landing First Nation, 2004). Pictou Landing's community school has 60 students in attendance from grades K-6.

As noted above, the families participating in the needs assessment were also asked to pilot the program; however, a number of families declined to participate in this phase of the research due to previous commitments. Volunteers included two families in Pictou Landing, two in Afton, and two in Lennox Island. In total six families participated in the pilot program. These families consisted of single-parent families, two-parent families, and step-families. Most families had one parent present for the literacy sessions with the exception of one where both parents attended. The parents ranged in age from late 20s to late 30s. Over half had left school early, and several made references to their own literacy challenges.

Eleven children enrolled in the pilot program. Their ages ranged from 5 to 12 years, and all were attending school in grades 1-6. There were four girls and seven boys. In this pilot program most of the children had reading challenges and were to some degree classified as below reading level based on their grade expectations. Some parents believed that their children needed some extra encouragement and assistance to increase their reading skills, and others believed that specific strategies were needed to encourage their children to read more.

For the purpose of this study, only basic reading, reading comprehension, listening comprehension, and oral expression were assessed. The WIAT(mr) assessment is not normed on an Aboriginal population (Salvia

& Ysseldyke, 2004): it was used to satisfy the CLLRNet funding agency. Caution is necessary in the interpretation of the results of this assessment test with any Aboriginal population. The assessment was used solely as a reference point (pre and post) in the measurement of children's reading levels; the results were not used for placement of any kind.

Following the 10-week pilot, the results of the assessment were positive, and the children experienced significant gains in their literacy levels (see Figure 1).

#### *Revision of the Mi'kmaq Family Literacy Program (2005)*

In summer 2005, two researchers revised and critically edited the original modules in order to clarify activities, provide uniformity, update and add references, and make the modules accessible for future use. Both the modules and facilitator's guides were reformatted with the ultimate goal of enabling any facilitator or organization to implement the program easily. The revised format of the facilitator's guide includes detailed objectives, a complete set of required materials, step-by-step instructions on facilitating activities, detailed prompts to initiate and direct activities, and all applicable references. The participants' guides were modified to clarify the objectives of each activity. In order to make learning clear and concise, suggestions for activities that can be implemented at home are included. The graphics and photos were updated, and care was taken to include pictures that represented contemporary Aboriginal culture and society.

Following revision of the program, recruitment was conducted in the larger community of Eskasoni, NS, which had been chosen for the pro-

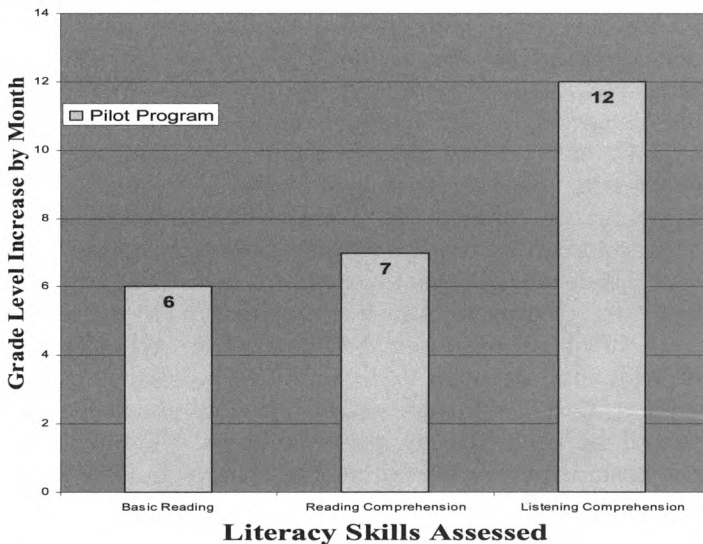


Figure 1. Reading results after 10-week Mi'kmaq family literacy program 2004.



gram, and the research team hired and trained two local facilitators. The revised family literacy program was then implemented and evaluated on two occasions with community members and families who volunteered to be involved.

#### *Implementation of the Program (2005-2006)*

At the NS Mi'kmaw Education Directors' Meeting in Halifax in August 2005, initial contact was made to offer the Mi'kmaw family literacy program. A presentation on the program was made by the principal investigator. Numerous communities expressed interest in the program. Researchers were unable to accommodate every community that came forward because of limited funding, so they offered the program to the first community that came forward: Eskasoni, NS.

#### *Eskasoni First Nation (Eskisoqnik)*

Eskasoni is the largest Mi'kmaw First Nation in the world with a population of 3,671 as of February 3, 2005. It is positioned approximately half an hour away from Sydney, NS, near the northeast tip of Cape Breton (Eskasoni Indian Registry, 2005). The community has three schools: Eskasoni Elementary and Middle School (870 students), Eskasoni High School (160 students), and Unanma'ki Training and Education Centre (119 students, personal communication, Carolyn MacSween, Eskasoni School Board, May 16, 2006).

Community leaders in Eskasoni supported the program, initiated activities, and made plans for their community to host the family literacy program. The principal of the elementary school was particularly helpful in providing information to families so that they could self-select for the program. Local facilitators were hired to facilitate the program in their community. The principal, Phil Moore, took the lead in recruiting and hiring the facilitators, two recent education graduates Amber Paul and Mag Gould. Phil acted as a contact for continual communication between the researchers and facilitators. He also volunteered various resources for the facilitators when needed. Researchers kept in continual contact with the facilitators and the principal by telephone and e-mail and provided face-to-face support on the first, fourth, and last evening of each program offered over the ensuing six months. Researchers e-mailed facilitators at the beginning of each week to check in and answered any questions about process and content of the program. Facilitators followed up at the end of each week with another e-mail to discuss how the session had been received by the families and to address any questions or concerns that had arisen through the week. This process of continual communication built strong relationships between research coordinators and the facilitators, and they continue to keep in touch.

The first of the two programs facilitated in Eskasoni, NS began in September 2005. The response from the community was positive, as 20

families (with 31 children) had voluntarily signed up within two weeks of seeing flyers and advertising for the program. Ten families participated in the fall program (15 children aged 7-11), with excellent attendance rates. An average of 80% of participants attended all the sessions in the fall cohort.

The subsequent 10 families were identified as a delayed-treatment group and participated in a second program from January to March 2006. Delayed treatment enabled the research to be completed ethically by using the second group as a control group. This provides comparison, and families still receive the program. In addition, delayed treatment also reduced the possibility of the Hawthorne effect (Reynolds & Nicholson, 2006), as participants from the fall program were assessed four months post-program completion to see whether the increases in literacy levels were sustained, and follow-up interviews were also conducted with parents six months post-program.

Attendance was low and sporadic during the second program, despite the relentless efforts of local facilitators to keep families interested and attending. Researchers have observed this same behavior of attendance in other rural family literacy programming in PEI. Families tend to develop habits in September, so by the time January arrives, many routines are already established and families have forgotten or become uninterested in a program they may have signed up for in September.

For both programs, in order to encourage retention of families in the family literacy program, researchers/facilitators provided a babysitting service for families with young children; they provided food and snacks for families during each session; they called families each week (the night before the program); and if families missed a session they called to let them know that they had been missed. One parent described how they reinforced and supported each other in attending the program and said that if a parent or family missed a night, when she saw him or her at the market she would say, "Where were you last night? We missed you. You gotta come next time, it's fun, ah. It's like, nice."

In addition, many of the families (especially the mothers and grandmothers who attended the weekly gatherings) communicated with each other in Mi'kmaq; the facilitator and the parents used English and Mi'kmaq interchangeably. They used both languages proudly as a form of versatile communication, and the family literacy program acted as a medium through which they could connect and support each other. The Eskisoqnik community is successfully committed to reestablishing the Mi'kmaq language, and this is evident to a guest in the schools and community halls.

Facilitators awarded certificates of participation at the end of the 10-week sessions and gave families a book as a celebratory gift for participating. The overall community support combined with the dedication of the

facilitators enhanced the implementation of the program and provided a rich template for possibilities for future programming in Eskasoni and other Indigenous communities.

*Summary of Results*

The results from the program offered in Eskasoni reveal literacy successes and are encouraging. Children of families participating in the 10-week program (in the fall) advanced on average the equivalent of more than seven months in their basic reading skills compared with an advancement of two months in the delayed treatment; and realized a gain of more than eight months in reading comprehension compared with slightly more than one month for the delayed-treatment group. Listening comprehension soared in the first group: nearly two years' growth over the 10 weeks compared with close to two and a half months for the delayed treatment group (see Figure 2).

These successful results are demonstrated by both groups of children who participated in the program. Both groups experienced overall significant reading gains, proving that the program was effective in enhancing literacy in these Mi'kmaq children's lives.

*Interviews*

Parents from the family literacy programs involved in the research were interviewed to determine their satisfaction with the program. Feedback was positive and revealed that parents were continuing to use the

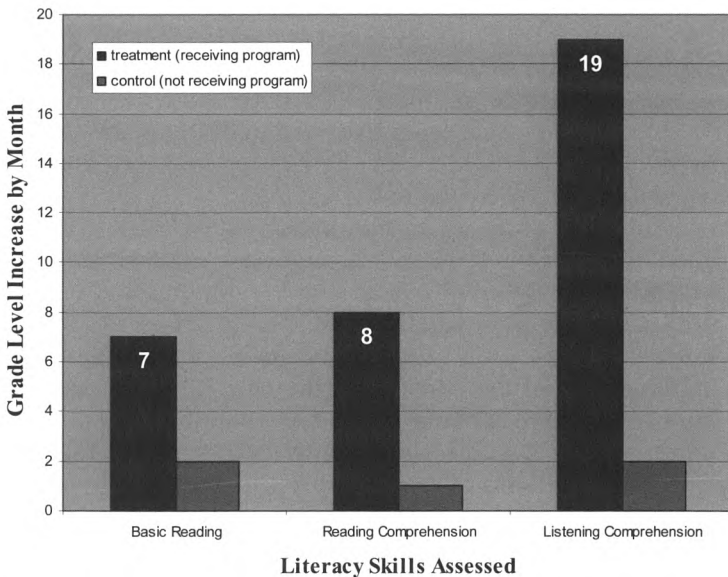


Figure 2. Reading results after 10-week Mi'kmaq family literacy program Eskasoni 2005-2006.

strategies with their children and also with other family members. Parents commented that their children were taking more pride in their reading and enjoyed reading more since the program, and that they had noticed significant improvements in their children's overall success. Parents made comments such as: "She can read really on her own now and that's what I have been telling people. At first when we started she couldn't do that. I had to mostly read to her. But the strategies and all of that, we did that"; "Before it would be OK, let's read the book, then it's time for bed. So you read the book, then went to bed. Now you read a book and talk about it a little bit more and kind of ... there's a little bit more conversation there between us"; and "He does read better, and his grade levels are better. Yeah, they are, I've seen that in him"; "She does that [reads] now, she wouldn't do that [read] before"; "She reads all the time now"; "He reads better, his grades are better now"; "You'll see changes in your child."

Additional themes that emerged included the importance of literacy and its effect on family bonding, how parents want help with how to teach their child(ren), families' genuine love and enjoyment of reading, and the importance of culture to the families. The following quotes are included and discussed to illustrate these themes.

#### *Literacy*

"Well, to do a lot of stuff you have to know how to read." Whenever literacy is mentioned, education is generally closely connected. Without exception every family involved wanted their children's literacy skills to improve and said that literacy was a high priority for their family. Reading was viewed as the door to opportunity for some parents. Individual opinions expressed by parents indicated that reading gave their children an opportunity to learn more. Being a better reader meant many things to these families. Reading not only meant more opportunity in terms of jobs, but a chance at a better life. The importance of becoming better readers was an unmistakable theme in parents' discourse.

#### *Familial Bonding*

"I thought it was a really good initiative. It actually gave us, we don't have much time to read so it actually gave us a chance to spend some time together and to actually, you know because I work all day and, she's outside playing all day or whatever, and it kind of gave us the time together." Parents often commented on how nice it was to spend time one-on-one with their child and said that part of the reason they liked coming to the program was because it was a special time for them to have together.

#### *Helped Parents Help Their Child(ren)*

"It helped me a lot. It helped her a lot too"; "Some of the strategies with reading. Probably that it helped me help her a lot more ... learning new

things that helped me help her"; "I guess that first of all I would say that it helped me and [my child] by listening to you fellas and getting ideas from you fellas and I would say too, you know, what they did and what worked for them." Parents were able to learn and practice new strategies to help their children's literacy, and this was clearly extremely important to them. They voiced concerns and questions among the group, and this created a support network for parents and caregivers.

### *Education*

"I hope that they all finish school at least grade 12. They all have to. They don't have any choice but to finish." The families expressed great concern and interest in having their children finish grade 12. They felt it was important to give their children the support and encouragement needed to finish high school and in some cases receive a postsecondary education. Parents wanted college or university to be an option for their children so that they could have more choices in their lives, as 53% of the parents interviewed had left school early themselves.

### *Worries and Hopes for Their Children*

"I don't want my kids to get stuck. I just look at my friends now and some of them can't even read, and it scares me. So I try my best to make any effort to read to my kids." The parents' will to improve the literacy of their family was evident. Reading for them was a means by which their children could have a wider range of choices, make decisions, and have a future. Feeling stuck because of low educational levels was a common frustration expressed by the parents.

### *Relationship with the Schools*

"This school is excellent, I love them there. Not only do they teach my kids, but they watch them grow up from primary on." The parents expressed strong feelings of gratitude and appreciation for the teachers. The teachers reciprocated, mentioning positive feelings about the parents. Parents and teachers expressed concern about the children and mentioned that they could easily approach one another to address any issues.

### *Parenting*

Both parents and teachers talked about the social and educational pressures faced by these children. The issues were categorized into family stresses, behavior, bullying, and culture.

These families faced numerous stresses. "My husband can't read so he can't help our children." In interviews parents commented on the limitations they faced because of low literacy levels. The most predominant concern for families was to do what was best for their children. Other concerns voiced by parents in the interviews included issues of discipline, child custody, and alcoholism.

### *Bullying*

Bullying was identified by both children and adults as an issue of concern. "She is having problems with the kids in her class being mean to her. She's picked on by almost everyone in the class." Most did not state why bullying happened, but simply mentioned that it was an issue.

### *Culture*

Culture was a source of pride in these families. "I am proud to be Mi'kmaw." When asked about their culture and heritage, parents were extremely proud to say that they were Mi'kmaw. The parents stated they would like their children to grow up being proud of being Mi'kmaw and would like them to learn more about their culture.

### *Conclusion*

The results of this research are encouraging. Children's rich experiences with written literacy through family, culture, and community interactions, and the strategies that families learned together, will continue to reinforce and celebrate literacy and learning in Aboriginal communities beyond this program. Feedback from parents also indicates that children are experiencing increased success in school. One parent noted, "Everywhere he goes he has a book," and another said "Her reading has come a long way too since then, oh yeah, that's why she is going into grade 5, she is doing well in reading still!" The long-term effect of improved literacy levels for these children can help to foster the growth of dynamic Indigenous communities in Canada.

The versatility of the program was further supported by the fact that local facilitators hosted the program and children's literacy levels improved. This demonstrates its potential accessibility to Aboriginal communities that may wish to implement it in the future. The findings are of significant value for other Indigenous contexts in Atlantic Canada, and adaptations of the program have the potential to affect positively the literacy levels of other Indigenous communities.

### *Next Steps*

One of the goals of the Aboriginal Family Literacy program was to enable the communities involved to benefit from the program and implement literacy practices that would extend beyond the study itself. The next step in this research is to provide training for additional facilitators to conduct programs in their own Indigenous communities in Atlantic Canada: specifically in NS, New Brunswick, and PEI. By hiring and training Aboriginal facilitators to implement the program in their own communities, the proposed future research works toward building capacity in Aboriginal communities. Parents continue to acquire skills related to literacy development, which will improve their ability to support their children in all educational experiences. It can also strengthen family bonds and

the ability of parents to continue supporting academic growth with their children. Furthermore, it will positively affect these communities as they support and embrace Aboriginal heritage and culture through language and literacy programming.

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