

Family Literacies – Going Online with Babies & Families

Related Literature Review

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for the



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Table of contents

Introduction	1
Section I: Family literacies and literacy learning in the home	3
Many Families, Many Literacies	3
Family Literacies Research	4
Family Literacies in Canada	6
Family Literacies in New Brunswick.....	8
Family Literacies Today – closing remarks to Denny Taylor	9
Section II: Home Literacy/Learning Environment (HLE)	11
The deficit myth	11
Children’s interests, parents’ beliefs and shared reading	12
It is what parents do that matters, not who parents are	13
Section III: Jointly constructing meaning with books and digital devices	15
Jointly constructing meaning through shared books	15
<i>Adult-child dyads and interactions with books</i>	15
<i>Books in Homes</i>	17
<i>Book Gifting as family literacy</i>	17
<i>Books and Beyond: Activities supporting family literacies</i>	18
Jointly constructing meaning through shared digital devices	19
<i>Digital Devices in Homes: Children’s digital literacies learning</i>	20
<i>Families as educators of digital literacies</i>	21
<i>Families as mediators of digital devices for young children</i>	23
Section IV: Young children’s learning, early learning resources & moving online	25
Young children’s learning and early learning resources	25
Going online	27
References	30
Appendix 1:	37

Family Time Online Project: Related Literature Review

Introduction

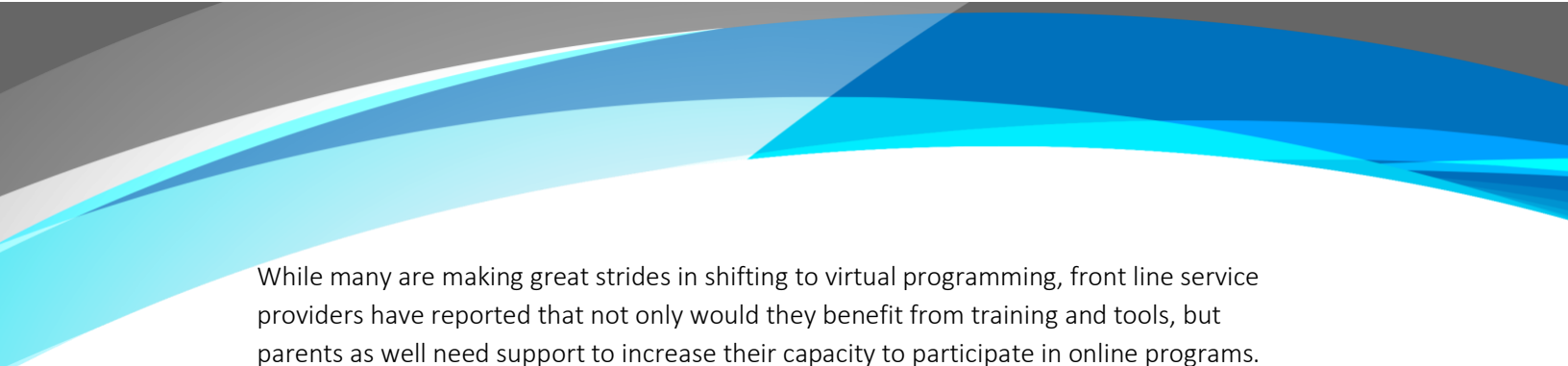
We know that parents have a profound and lasting effect on how children become literate and that they (parents) can maintain and strengthen their own literacies in the process of fostering their children's literacy development. It follows that family literacy programmes have enormous potential to maximize early literacy and parents' learning by building upon family strengths and literacy practices. (Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick: Going Online with Babies and Families: Family Time proposal: 2021)

Infants, toddlers, and young children initially learn literacies in their home with family members, friends, within community practices and events; in conversational, singing, dancing, and playing ways; as they experiment with various everyday materials such as spoons, pots, pans, groceries; with differently designated materials including books, papers, markers, toys; and increasingly, over the past decade, through virtual and digital means, with digital devices such as cell phones, tablets and computers. Family literacies are living literacies – they are about being in and of the world. ¹ They are literacies that occur within everyday activities, differ from family to family, and often hold commonalities across generations (Taylor, 1983). Children within their families are learning literate ways of being and literate identities from birth. (NBCF, 2008)

In New Brunswick, people within families and various organizations encourage, celebrate, and coordinate young children's literacies learnings. Recognizing that family literacy is firstly within homes, it is also integrated into province-wide programmes such as: Born to Read NB; Healthy Families-Healthy Babies; Family and Early Childhood Agencies; Family Resource Centres; Talk with Me; NB Public Libraries; and the department of Education and Early Childhood Development

This *Families Literacies – Going Online Project* was initiated in response to the actions taken by people in these agencies in their work with families and young children as living, learning, and working conditions were drastically altered by the COVID pandemic. Across Canada (Friendly et al, 2020) and within New Brunswick (Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick, 2020; Gould & Corey, 2021), the pandemic led to substantial changes in programming with face-to-face program cancelled, reduced, or shifted to on-line, often with little or no preparation. As the rationale for this *Going Online Project* articulates:

¹ Rowsell and Pahl, What is living literacies? in *Living Literacies: Literacies for Social Change*- Boston: MIT press 2020, p.1.



While many are making great strides in shifting to virtual programming, front line service providers have reported that not only would they benefit from training and tools, but parents as well need support to increase their capacity to participate in online programs. Those who are most vulnerable are often the very ones who may lack the technology and skills to participate in online programming (p.2).

This scan of the literature for LCNB is comprised of areas relevant to families' literacies in the context of this project:

- Emergence of and current thinking on family literacies
- Home as a literacy learning environment (HLE)
- Joint meaning making with the sharing of books
- Joint meaning making and young children's digital literacies.
- Young children's learning, early learning resources, and moving online.

Section I: Family literacies and literacy learning in the home

Many Families, Many Literacies ²

Descriptive studies of families and literacy in many different countries with many different cultural traditions have changed narrow preconceptions [of family literacies]. These studies show that each family is an original, that there is a seemingly infinite variety of patterns of cooperation and domestic organization and that flexible household arrangements are often an adaptive response to an uncertain world. Within family settings there are both multiple literacies and multiple literacy practices. In cultures in which the Indigenous languages do not have a long, written tradition, the Indigenous languages are as sophisticated and complex as in cultures that do have a long-written tradition. And families living in multilingual communities evolve new literacy practices that reflect but do not replicate literacy practices in either the first or second language tradition. (Taylor, 1997, p1)

Family literacy as a concept, theory, and practice in the research emerged from the doctoral research of Denny Taylor in 1981 (Taylor, 1981,1983:). Forty years later, Denny Taylor (2018) remains deeply and actively involved in family literacy research and programming. It has been her life's work locally, nationally, and internationally (<https://www.dennytaylor.com/videos>) involving family literacies as a site for climate change, refugee stabilization, peace initiatives, and disaster response. In her family literacies studies, Taylor works with a qualitative research approach to understand, in detail, how families learn and teach literacies in the context of their homes. In her first family literacy project, she spent three years in the homes of six families. She observed and documented literacy practices and events, interviewed and talked with parents, and as she said over the course of her initial 3-year study, came to recognize the parents and children as co-researchers. Considerable family literacy studies and family literacy programs have emerged from Taylor's research, and other detailed ethnographic and community action research studies.

Another group of studies focused upon children and families' literacy practices and events within the *home literacy environments* (HLE) highlights research in language and literacy through the development of hypotheses and statistical analysis. Where qualitative-ethnographic research uses observation, conversations, documentation, and interviews to gather data, a quantitative research approach uses inventories, questionnaires, and assessment tools to quantify and analyse structural and process factors affecting early reading. Structural factors quantified include social economic status (SES), maternal education, and parent occupation. Process factors are items such as number of times reading aloud, number of books in the home, and quantity of words spoken in the home.

² Sub-title for this section is taken from Denny Taylor's book – *Many Families, Many Literacies* (1997)

What has been interesting in the compilation of this research is that longstanding and recent qualitative research in family literacy and more recent work in HLE reach similar findings, implications, and recommendations through different approaches to collection and analysis of data.

These two research paradigms ideally act in a complementary way, yet quantitative analysis, usually presented numerically and generalized to entire populations, is often overvalued as a form of cognitive science, while qualitative analysis, which provides detailed descriptions and analysis of a phenomena, often is devalued as a soft science.

Family Literacies Research

Taylor's initial family literacy study was to learn, with and from families, how reading and writing were being taken up with young children in a home environment. She describes the families as white, middle class, and living in suburbs (1983) A follow-up study (1988) with African-American children and families in an urban environment produced similar findings. In the first study, Taylor spent three years with six families and developed multiple and "systematic ways of looking at reading and writing as activities which have consequences in and are affected by family life." She summarized her findings in the context of intergenerational learning, and specifically with the concepts of change and conservation. She found that parents as literacy educators *drew upon their childhood memories*. Some parents worked towards *change* as they wanted their children's print related experiences, both writing and reading, to be more positive than their childhood experiences, whereas other parents wished to *conserve* the positive, affectionate relationship with print, books, and family members that they had experienced as children. Taylor's findings further revealed that there was a strong sense by the adults that *reading should be for pleasure* rather than pressure. Taylor's research also revealed that *younger siblings were introduced to reading and reading related activities* earlier than the oldest child, thus *siblings were learning with and from each other*, and adults. Children's literacy learning, then, was:

- shaped by parents' childhood reading histories & experiences
- shaped by siblings
- attuned to the individual child's needs and interests
- in the context of family and family activities
- in process all day
- often spontaneous – that is, not necessarily planned

And

- reading aloud was a near daily practice
- print related activities were a daily occurrence
- being together was a pleasurable activity

This first family literacy study led to another study by Denny Taylor and Catherine Dorsey- Gaines, *Growing Up Literate: Learning from Inner-City Families* (1988) which took place in the homes of African-American children living in high-poverty households. In this study, as Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines learned, children had rich literacy lives, and parents believed in their own abilities to educate their children. Specifically, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines found:

- Families use literacy for a wide range of purposes (social, technical, and aesthetic) for a wide range of audiences, and in a wide variety of situations.
- Literacy is not always liberating. The economic circumstances within which the families live create a social (political) climate in which print in various forms is used to intrude on everyday life.
- Education and literacy cannot be used interchangeably. Family members were highly literate, and yet not educated in the formal sense of the word (1988, p.202).

Prior to and at the time of Taylor's (1983) and Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines's (1988) studies, there were additional ethnographic work with families and children's home literacies prior to school. These included:

- Studies in learning to read, in the home, prior to formal schooling had been undertaken by Millie Almy (1949), Dolores Durkin (1966), and Margaret Clark (1976).
- Families' home language and literacy contexts were studied comprehensively by Shirley Brice Heath (1983), and Gordon Wells, (1985).
- Case studies of individual children's literacy practices within the home were examined by Glenda Bissex (1980) and David Doake (1988).
- An emerging body of work on young children's early writing and its relationship with reading conducted by Marie Clay (1975), Carol Chomsky (1971), and Don Holdaway (1978).

It was with Taylor's work, however, that the term family literacy was coined (Andersen, 2017). As family literacy research grew, family literacy programs were established. Auerbach (1989), well known as a family literacy researcher and curriculum developer, identified three approaches to family literacy:

- An *intervention model* intended to transmit schooled literacies, leaving aside family's own literacies, strengths, and diversities.
- A *multiple literacies model* which recognizes the mismatch in literacies between home and school, thus advocating home literacies as a way to bridge to schooled literacies and vice versa.
- A *critical inquiry-based approach* which also recognized the existence of multiple literacies while emphasizing a participatory-partnership way with families to learn and understand their literacies and the often-complicated nature of their context.

In light of diverse families and diverse literacies, Elsa Auerbach (1989) proposed a social-contextual approach to family literacy, one that values *family strengths, their participation, and multiple literacies*, recognizing that many families live with educational challenges that originate in the broader society rather than in families, such as economic, social and political circumstances, often beyond their control (Auerbach 1989).

Auerbach's social contextual approach recognizes literacies as embedded in community concerns and cultural practices generating possibilities in the development of family literacy curriculum. A social contextual approach deliberately avoids naming and blaming families as deficient in matters of families' literacies.

Family Literacies in Canada

In Canada, family literacy funding was accessible from the National Literacy Secretariat from 1988-2006 (HRDC, 2004)) and the Canadian Council on Learning until 2010. This was a very productive research, programming, and practice era in family literacy in Canada. Each agency had a flexible mandate in relation to literacies across Canada and took up both national and community-based projects. Adele Thomas (1998), Jim Anderson (2005), Lorraine Kennedy (2008), and Antoinette Doyle (2012) described family literacy research and programmes that were developed across Canada during this time period. The Thomas collection, *Family Literacy in Canada: Profiles of Effective Practices*, is written by practitioners and describes a variety of family literacy programs. for example: parent-child; play based programs for children, adult focused programs, and community-based programs (1998). Anderson, Kendrick, Rogers, and Smythe (2005) write as university-based family literacy researchers from a multiple literacies perspective speaking directly to the interdisciplinary nature of multiple literacies, while providing as the title of their book indicates *Portraits of Literacy across Families, Communities and School: Intersections and Tensions*. Their intent is to extend conventional notions of literacy education in communities, schools and families through critical and dialogic discussions (p. iv). Lorraine Kennedy(2008) of the Movement for Canadian Literacy working with the Canadian Association of Family Resources Centres and a national working group produced *Mapping the Field of Family Literacy in Canada*. The intent was to better understand family literacy across Canada and in particular to examine funding and provisions. A variety of programs and services are given the label of "family literacy" including the following:

- Parent involvement – parental involvement in a child's literacy development is encouraged through joint caregiver-child sessions; this type of program focuses mainly on children 0 to 6.
- Intergenerational – both caregivers and children receive direct literacy instruction.

- Focus on primary caregiver – adults are the primary participants, and the focus is on ways in which to develop children’s literacy at home either directly or indirectly; if the child is not yet in the school system, childcare may be provided while caregiver participates in program.
- Activities for the general public – focus is on public awareness, informal participation (e.g., reading tents, ABC Canada’s Family Literacy Day activities).
- Resources – materials (often created by program staff) that support the idea of family literacy are made available (e.g., books for babies) (p.6).

The *Mapping Project* found that “provision of family literacy programs and services that focus mainly on the literacy skills of the caregiver is uneven” (p.13). This was attributed to a lack of funding. In some cases, adult literacy programs funded by provincial and territorial governments focused on family literacy if the main recipient of the program remained the adult. As well, given the prevalence of early intervention (EI), family literacy programming in EI was on the child’s literacy development and parenting skills for the caregiver. In most provinces “family literacy programming is often provided by early learning centres, school boards or by a consortium of community agencies.” Yet, if adult literacy programs were involved, potential gaps in family literacy provision within a community were reduced (p.13). Particular components of family literacies as taken up by various agencies often are contingent upon an organization’s mandate and/or interpretation of that mandate.

More recent studies by Jim and Ann Anderson (2015, 2017), long time family literacy theory and practice researchers in Canada, involve retrospective interviews with adults who had been participants in family literacy programmes in Eastern and Western Canada in the 1980’s. Their findings include the effectiveness: of adults modelling for parents within children’s programmes; animating for parents the transition to school; of honouring home languages, and young children as language brokers. A family literacy project located within the traditional territory of the Haida Gwaii people specifically worked with the action of connecting – connecting with the land, family, stories, ocean, culture, and traditions (p.51).

In the article, *Family Literacy Programs: Where Have They Come from and Where Are They Going?*, Antoinette Doyle (2012) describes family literacies programmes in Canada as emerging from within communities. She also notes that funding based on grants is unstable, and thus community people and initiatives become significant in identifying and often funding local literacies programs. She acknowledges that there is often strong inter-group cooperation among community members including: “literacy program facilitators, community center staff, local business people, health services professionals, church leaders, and local school educators, all of whom provide support financially with funding or in-kind donations, space to operate, expertise in education or other human development areas, or avenues for public awareness about literacy programs available.” (p.93). It is the case in New Brunswick as this proposal submission indicates that there are a number of people within community-based agencies and organizations developing, delivering, and /or coordinating aspects of family literacy within their site and across sites enacting what Doyle names as inter-group cooperation.

Family Literacies in New Brunswick

Although family literacy research and programs have a forty-year history, as detailed above, the literacies of families, in what is now called New Brunswick, has a very long presence. Wolastoqey, Passamaquoddy, and Mi'kmaq families have lived here for over 12,500 years. Currently undergoing linguistic and cultural resurgence, they have enacted Wabanaki ways of being and becoming literate in this territory for many millennia (Bryant, 2017).

The Indigenous languages of the region — Wolastoqey, Passamaquoddy and Mi'kmaq — have no official status in New Brunswick and, with a history of assimilation in monolingual schooling (English or French), have only a fragile and precarious existence. Consequently, while New Brunswick's cultural mix offers exciting possibilities for cultivating intercultural sensitivities, harmonious relationships and dialogue between the English majority and the French minority, it presents enormous challenges for the cultivation of expansive world views and preservation of the linguistic and cultural identities of Indigenous and visible minority children (NBCF-E, p.9).

Research in New Brunswick in family literacy began in 1998-1999, when the Early Childhood Centre at the University of New Brunswick was funded by Health Canada and developed *Parenting for a Literate Community* program (PLC). PLC is community-based family literacy project with multiple partners and multiple funders. The idea of professional development in family literacy was initiated by Lynda Homer, Department of Health and Community Services from her observation that Early Intervention and Family Resource Centre staff were engaged with literacy education with young children and families in the context of their daily work. Aspects of family literacies had become part of their work. (Whitty, Nason, & Hunt, 2000).

The PLC pilot program involved three components including children and parents together, a children's program, and a combined parent education and support group. Initial development work took place with the Fredericton Family Resource Centre, and then with 50 Early Intervention and Family Resource from across the province (Homer, 2008; Nason & Homer, 1999; Clark, Nason & Whitty, 2002). The project resulted in two PLC training programmes, Books for Children and Families (2002), and several additional family literacy support resources. PLC was foundational to the later development of family literacy professional development called *Conversations with Parents* (Homer, 2004) developed in partnership with the Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick (LCNB). Consequently, family literacies as a concept and practice became partially embedded within early learning programs in New Brunswick.

Lynda Homer (2008) in *A Review of the Literature on Family Literacy* offers a number of considerations and questions related to family literacy practices that remain relevant today including:

- How do we build a more collaborative approach to family literacy programming in New Brunswick?
- How do we strike an equitable balance between relationships involving families and schools as well as other institutions?
- The mismatch or lack of integration between school and home literacies combined raises issues of social justice and begs the question as to “whose literacy counts?”.
- Use of deficit-based language in the public and the media is prevalent. Despite the growing concern about this deficit terminology, its usage continues and so does its damaging effects on family literacy learning.
- Studies of the literacy practices in families have resulted in a redefinition of family literacy as “social practice”. Despite these findings, many programs continue to base their program on outdated notions of families and of literacy.
- Practitioners need opportunities to participate in *research in practice*. This will help to close the gap between the research and practice and contribute to the growing body of knowledge on family literacy.
- Program delivery across the system ought to base on principle, pedagogies, and curriculum.
- Collaborative and equitable relationships and connections ensure continuity of learning experiences for children (Adapted from Homer, 2008 pp-18-19).

Family Literacies Today – closing remarks to Denny Taylor

Denny Taylor in a recent presentation for Literacy Quebec, *Family Literacy in the time of Covid-19 and other risks to children and their families* (2021) spoke to current issues and projects worldwide in family literacies. She highlighted ongoing concerns related to the idea of learning with and from families and cautioning against imposing particular literacy formats and content upon families. Thus, forty years later, she maintains a descriptive, rather than prescriptive, stance to family literacy research and programming. Taylor recognizes family literacy programs, which are present in 140 countries as conduits for many kinds of programmes, and specifically in times of Covid-19 and climate change as having a joint emphasis on family well-being, health, and literacies. She outlined a doll-making project from Africa where adults created dolls for children to act as companions when returning to school during Covid-19: an example of supporting children’s health and well-being, while demonstrating the place of community and arts-based approaches within family literacies. In a current publication (2019) Taylor’s commitment and involvement to families locally, nationally, and internationally are evident:

Today, there are family literacy initiatives undertaken by governments, NGOs, UN Member States, academia, the private sector, and the United Nations system, including UNESCO and UNICEF. A systematic analysis of the family literacy initiatives undertaken by UN Member States indicates that family literacy is used in most countries in ways that are in keeping with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.³ Most importantly, family literacy initiatives are used to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies. The focus of family literacy initiatives on many of the other Sustainable Development Goals³ is also both remarkable and profound.

(<https://www.dennytaylor.com/family-literacy-global-peace-initiative>)

When asked during the question period and answer period in the Literacy Quebec webinar about the most current research in family literacies, Denny Taylor (2021) answered that current research in family literacies is what people are doing now with local issues, such as responses to Covid-19. She observed that family literacy work is almost invisible as there is not an international policy focus on families. This invisibility means that ongoing and current researching of family literacy practices often goes undocumented.

The *Going Online Project* is generated from the experiences of daily literacy work with families and children by networks of people who are keeping and kept things going virtually and digitally during the most complicated health crisis since 1918, an example of responding locally.

Documentation of these collective experiences, insights and learnings have the potential to make visible well-being and online literacy work with families while providing a forum for conversations about theory and practice in family literacies, and a foundation for creating professional learning.

³ <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education/sdgs/material>

Section II: Home Literacy/Learning Environment ⁴ (HLE)

Children's language development is fundamentally shaped by their learning environment. During early childhood the family and the setting of early childhood education and care (ECEC) constitute primary learning environments for children, and the quality of the processes within these environments is associated with children's outcomes for language development. (Schmersea et al. 2018, p338)

As noted in the introduction (p.1), home learning environments, or, in some cases, home literacy environments (HLE) are areas of research that intersect with family literacies. The studies reviewed in this section are quantitative in approach, and in some cases mixed methods, both quantitative and qualitative. They are concerned with language and child development prior to school, and the effects of this development with literacy achievement in school and later life. Although the tools and methods of interpretation differ, the findings, implications, and recommendations have similarities with the family literacies literature presented above. Both bodies of work caution against the myth of particular families being deficient with in-home literacies, recognizing that literacies in the home are multiple. Two additional primary joint findings arrived at through different forms of data collection and analysis children's agency- interest and parental interactions, as primary incentives for young children's ongoing engagement with literacies.

The deficit myth

In their study, *Differential effects of home and preschool learning environments on early language development*, Schmersea et al. (2018) examine quantifiable structural and process variables to predict how HLE interacts with early language development. Structural variables, in this case, refer to home language, Social Economic Status (SES) and maternal education, while process variables address quantity of words and diversity of vocabulary.

The researchers found that structural variables were not predictive of early language development, rather both structural and process variables are mediated by parental talk.

⁴ Home learning and home literacy environments are used interchangeably. Swain & Cara (2019) note likewise: "We need to point out that although we use the term 'home literacy environment' in this paper, much of the literature conflates this with the 'home learning environment', and when we quote from studies that use this latter descriptor we use the abbreviation 'HLE'. "The measurement tools chiefly look at literacy, and in more recent cases literacy and numeracy. As family literacies is by nature multi-modal, the view of literacies in the family literacy research is more expansive.

They conclude that parental interactions “using complex language, responsiveness and warmth” predict early language growth and that active parenting strategies, parents, and child together, and parents collaborating with other adults have a positive effect on children’s literacies.

Ten years earlier, Meluish (2008) found that SES accounts for only 5% variability of young children’s literacy achievement, yet the myth of deficits in particular families lives on. Recent studies by Carroll et al (2019) explain the pervasiveness of the deficit family myth as a consequence of an oversimplification of the relationship between HLE process variables and child attainment in literacy, the latter of which is a complex and multi- directional process. They stress that earlier research on the role of HLE has had the effect of assessing parents and treating children as “passive recipients” thereby missing the place of children’s interest and pleasure in early literacy activities – missing the reciprocities in the interactions. In their work and in the literature cited, they found that parents adjust the amount and nature of the literacy experiences they provide on the basis of the abilities of their child.

Children’s interests, parents’ beliefs and shared reading

After controlling for HLE and SES, children’s literacy interest was found to be the strongest predictor of emergent literacy skills. Children’s choices and interests play a 25% variance in their literacy development.

In their findings, the authors call for a better understanding of the predictors of children’s literacy interest as a way to improve literacy outcomes (p.159). Klucznoik et al (2013)⁵ agree that structural indicators act independently of process indicators. They propose that in addition to interactions, everyday learning opportunities and the beliefs of parents have an effect on young children’s literacy development. The recent McCain 4 report, *Thriving Kids, Thriving Society* (2020) clarifies the pervasive myth of deficit as correlated to SES by drawing upon analysis from the Early Development Inventory, a community-based tool.

Pan-Canadian assessment using the Early Development Instrument (EDI) shows gaps in children’s early development at age 5 years. Across Canada, more than one in four children is having difficulties. Not surprisingly, there is a relationship between socioeconomic status and vulnerability. Children in low-income families are more likely to be vulnerable in one or more areas than those in middle-income families, while those in

⁵ These researchers carefully articulate structural and process indicators, and general and domain specific processes related to what a framework of a home learning environment. (p.423). The focus is on literacy learning and child development.


middle-income families are more likely to be vulnerable than those living in high-income families. But income is not a prescription. While children in the lowest quartile may be twice as likely to be assessed as vulnerable at age 5, *most children in low-income families are on-track*. Vulnerability is spread more thinly across more affluent families and neighbourhoods. (McCain, 2020, p.11)

Wirth (2020) and her colleagues examined the relationship between early linguistic abilities and children's socioemotional competencies. What they determined was that shared reading habits and the HLE influence children's linguistic development as both are closely associated with children's receptive and expressive vocabulary (p.893). Thus, they recommend that "...it is never too early to support children's development by frequent shared story-book reading and language learning" (p905). They further note that while shared reading supports children's cognitive abilities from an early age, their study also shows that shared reading is associated with socioemotional competencies gained through language learning. Therefore, they conclude interventions in the HLE may also support children's socioemotional competencies alongside their literacy growth (p.905).

It is what parents do that matters, not who parents are

One example of what interventions might look like in a family's environment were developed and examined by Jon Michael Swain and Olga Cara (2019). In this mixed methods study, Swain & Cara first speak to the limitations of the HLE tool, as a rationale for constructing a different measurement of home literacies and for the purpose of revising HLE measurements. Drawing on Sylva's (2004) research, they note (p.434) that "it is the quality of a child's relationships and learning experiences in the family that constitutes the most crucial element in improving literacy attainment". As Sylva et al. (2004) maintain, 'what parents do is more important than who parents are' (Sylva et al., 2004: 1).

Swain and Cara re-conceptualise home literacy environments into four areas: family resources; parental literacy behaviours and attitudes; parental beliefs and understandings; and family literacy activities and practices (p, 435-436). From this re-conceptualisation, they developed a family literacy program to provide parents with support and knowledge of early literacy. Their study focuses upon how parents translate and implement messages from family literacy programmes into the home setting, finding that participation leads to changes in family literacies across all four areas identified above (p.431). The main contribution of their study to the field of family literacy is evidence confirming that the home literacy environment is key in literacy acquisition. The data showed that many parents made changes in and to the home setting by translating and transferring the schools' ways of teaching literacy into the home and beyond (p451). The authors counter that this intake of schooled knowledge is not a deficit approach; rather "this is what parents wanted, and the programmes were meeting many of their needs. In effect, the courses were training parents in how to implement school-based literacies into the home setting where they were acting as surrogate teachers"(p.451).



Their data also suggests that there were changes in the quality of the interactions and type of activities in joint reading. Specifically, “many parents were found to be asking more questions to assess comprehension and there was a greater general focus on understanding and making predictions (p.452). A further, and potentially far-reaching change was that the reading experience had become more relaxed, more pleasurable and more meaningful for both parent and child” (p.452). This felt sense of the pleasure in reading and reading related activities resonates with Denny Taylor’s findings in 1983, and within the next section on the co-construction of joint understandings with the sharing of books and digital devices.

Section III: Jointly constructing meaning with books and digital devices

Making meaning of the world is at the heart of communication, literacy and language. We are born into relationships, activities, and routines and it is through these relationships, activities, and routines that we learn to communicate and learn about life and living (Rose & Whitty, 2010, p.3).

At birth, babies have multiple ways of communicating. They communicate through the modes of sound, gaze, gesture, movement, and touch, for example. These modes of communication which, over time, include speech and number are the ways in which we become literate and express and produce our literacies and our literate identities. They are our living literacies (Pahl & Rowsell 2020). Within family literacies and home learning-literacy environments research, interactions are documented as critical to a young child's growth, learning, development, and joy. Interactions occur within the context of relationships, through which infants and young children continue to communicate and learn language as they interact with themselves, other people, spaces, and materials.

Quality of interactions as a research term is exemplified within the family and the home as situated within reciprocal, responsive, and respectful relationships with self, other people, and with materials present in the environment.

Jointly constructing meaning through shared books

Adult-child dyads and interactions with books

One of the most researched areas of material opportunities with literacies involving joint meaning making is shared reading. *Sharing Books with Babies*, produced by Born to Read New Brunswick and the Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick (2020) <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1847522595380329>) provides an example of research in action as children and adults jointly share books. In addition, the video shows instances of young children on their own with books and other objects, also a key literacy practice that contributes to a young child's literacy. Although books may be present in homes, it is the joint meaning-making of sharing books by parents with children, children's own 'reading like-behaviour', and children's time alone with their favourite books (Holdaway, 1978) that realise the literacy affordances of books in the present, while opening spaces, skills, knowledge, and dispositions to other literacy benefits in the present and future.

Anne Morgan (2005), in her qualitative study found that within mother-child dyads shared reading was a “jointly constructed activity between mother and child” (p.300). Shared reading, then, is a reciprocal process rather than a one-way endeavour. Analysis of the data found that mothers had multiple strategies for engaging children with books such as: naming and discussing illustrations; simplifying questions; connecting the child’s experience to real life experiences; making abstract references; and giving positive praise. Children initiated interactions through asking questions, commenting, interrupting, and reading the story back to their mothers.

Preece and Levy (2020) note that “shared reading facilitates more complex talk than during caretaking or play and provides an opportunity for physical proximity and social interaction,” yet as they further note, very few studies have looked at barriers to reading aloud (p.633). To gain insights into possible barriers to shared reading, they interviewed 19 mothers and 1 father in a socio-economic and culturally mixed sample. What they learned is that parents are motivated to read with their children “*when there is clear evidence of a child’s pleasure*” and they were less motivated to do so when they perceived their child’s feedback as negative. Parents typically take their reading cues from children, much as Morgan (2005) above found. Preece and Levy also found that parents engage with books in a variety of ways that disrupt a linear reading of the book, such as reading the pictures, shortening stories, paraphrasing texts, and inserting their child’s name. Children’s pointing, talking, and laughing were all seen as positive feedback for the parent to continue.

Adults and children sharing books is a reciprocal and often non-linear process that is pleasurable and flexible.

Adding to the research on book dyads, a collective case study of 24 caregivers-toddler dyads sharing books, researchers Cross, Fletcher and Neumeister (2011) videotaped reading interactions of adults and children with books. They found that shared interactions were more likely to occur when “caregivers shared control of the book and discourse, were ‘in tune’ with the child’s needs and abilities and answered their own questions to the children” (39). In categorizing styles of shared interactions, Hammer et al. (2005) found four distinct styles, also present in the studies above. These include labelling, child-centredness, text reading, and combinational, the latter being a combination of the previous three. The researchers also observed that a combinational style aligned most closely with an interactive reading style often used in classrooms, adding that regardless of style, labelling and child-centred styles provided opportunities for “children to be active participants in reading interactions” (343).

Books in Homes

Quantitative research on the effects of books in the home with young children speaks of books as interventions with direct correlations to reading achievement in schools. For example,

children who are read with regularly in their first two years of life were found to have greater language comprehension, larger vocabularies, and higher cognitive skills than their peers who are not

(Raikes, H., Pan, B.A., Luze, G.J., Tamis-LeMonda, C.S., Brooks-Gunn, J., Constantine, J., Tarullo, L.B., & Rodriguez, E.: 2006). Book oriented homes were found to assist young children with “development of vocabulary, information, comprehension skills, imagination, broad horizons of history and geography, familiarity with good writing, understanding of the importance of evidence in argument, and many others.” (M.D.R. Evans, M., Kelley, J., Sikora, J., Treiman, D.: 2010:19). Studies focusing on adult word counts, conversational turn-taking counts, and child vocalisations counts during shared reading periods (Gilkerson, J., Richards, & Topping, K.: 2017) found that “Reading periods yielded much higher adult word counts and conversational turns than non-reading periods, indicating a greater degree of parent–child language engagement and interaction during reading periods. Such differences were not evident in child vocalization” (92). In a study utilizing an Early Story Reading (ESR) questionnaire, Brown, Westervelt and Gillon (2017) analyzed questionnaires from 113 families from across social-economic neighbourhoods. The questionnaire was adapted for parents of very young children and consisted of checkboxes, scales, and open responses. The researchers found that 76% of parents read with their children from birth, up from previous studies a decade earlier where this figure was 49%. Sharing books was seen by families as a favoured activity by both the adult and the child as reported by the parents. The majority of houses had at least 30 books, and the majority of parents read board books with their children.

Book Gifting as family literacy

Research on book gifting programs found that book gifting, considered to be a family literacy program (Eden et al: 2020) promotes children’s home literacy environment increasing interest in reading, in the present, and higher reading scores during early education (de Bondt, M., Willenberg, I. A., & Bus, A. G. 2020). As well, book gifting places books in homes that might otherwise not have access to books (Hardma & Jones, 1999; Moore & Wade 2003; Le Tourneau et al, 2015; Whitty et al , 2016). In a recent review of book gifting programs internationally, Eden et al (2020) found that book gifting programmes are in place in Japan, Korea, Thailand, the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Denmark, and Belgium. In

addition to books at birth, *Dolly Parton's Imagination Project* and *Reach Out and Read* were reviewed. Evaluations of the programs indicate that gifting books promotes more book buying, more book sharing, and more visits to the library (p.55).

Parents reported that, because of the book-gifting program, they read earlier than they might have with their children, increased their reading, and increased their joint interactions over books (p.56).

The *Maritime Early Literacy Team* project (MELT) funded by the Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR) examined the influence of book giveaway programs in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island. The findings from the study are similar to those articulated by Eden et al (2020). The quantitative analysis of data (Letourneau et al, 2015) showed that participation in newborn literacy programs positively impacted parenting behaviors and attitudes. Analysis of the qualitative data (Whitty et al., 2016) on the impact of book gifting initiatives provided evidence that: access to carefully selected books engage babies and families with books; book giveaways promoted earlier reading; baby book preferences appeared within the first year of life; book collections specifically selected for babies evoke mutual pleasure of child-adult-sibling-friend relationships; reading rituals become established throughout the day and with particular practices; the complexities of sharing books contributes to everyday communication and attachment; and reading aloud is intergenerational. Given the findings, the researchers recommended that book gifting programmes continue.

Books and Beyond: Activities supporting family literacies

In a family literacy workshop study, Roberts and Rochester in *Learning through everyday activities: Improving preschool language and literacy outcomes via family* created an approach to workshops with parents developed from their observations that literacy programmes typically have taught book reading, writing, and alphabet knowledge, rather than drawing from immersion in the everyday. The workshop series they developed focused upon infusing “literacy practices, in combination, into existing and necessary family activities, such as grocery shopping, preparing meals, and bath time, thus positioning family interactions as sites for authentic literacy learning “(2). Their content and design have a clear resonance with initial family literacy research taken up by Taylor and others, and with shared reading.

Roberts and Rochester also note that family literacy programs often focus either on code or comprehension strategies with positive effects occurring in either code or comprehension depending upon the program focus, that is what is emphasized is what shows improvement. These programs, they acknowledge, are seldom situated “in social contexts that reflect families’ backgrounds, (or) are

congruent with how they (families) engage in literacy within their everyday lives, and value and leverage home literacy practices” (p.6). They found that with a five-session infused family literacy workshop, families were able to change their family literacy practice with positive effects on children. They note that “families increased their engagement in activities known to support early literacy and children who participated in those activities demonstrated literacy growth” (26-27).

“Activities known to support early literacies” hold a prominent place in the *New Brunswick Early Learning and Childcare Curriculum Framework-English*, (2008) and within the related support documents *Play and Playfulness* (2008), *Communication and Literacies* (2010), *Our Youngest Children: Learning and Caring with Infants and Toddlers* (2011).⁶ As well, *Exploring Literacies: Talk, Sing, Read, Create Through Play Every day* (2018)⁷ a guidebook published by the New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for families, draws from these documents focusing upon actual and possible literacies within families and the home environment for adults and children together. These documents are created from a combination of research and lived experience and carry within them multiple approaches and stories that define, support, and extend young children’s literate abilities and possibilities. Although, the book is a critical cultural literacy object, young children’s literacies are infused throughout the day.

The New Brunswick developed *Parenting for a Literate Community* (Homer & Nason, 1999) was a co-constructed series of workshops with families which subsequently became a *Parenting for a Literate Community* training programme with Early Intervention and Family Recourse Centre staff (For details, see Whitty, Nason & Hunt, 2000). While books acted as a critical cultural tool in being and becoming literate within this project, the principles of the program and the activities developed recognized literacy learning, growth, and development as infused within daily life well beyond books.

Jointly constructing meaning through shared digital devices

Literacy now, for children and society, involves a complex intersection of online and offline practices, and a requirement to adapt quickly to fluid and constantly emerging practices and technologies, as well as changing relationships with literacy and texts. Children’s digital lives, in many instances, have also been amplified due to various COVID-19 lockdown or restriction measures. Given such sweeping literacy changes, children, and indeed all global citizens, have urgently needed to acquire knowledge and proficiencies to navigate this complex digital world. (Linda Laidlaw, Suzanna Wong, Joanne O’Mara (2021) *Reimagining Literacy: Being Literate in the Pandemic Era* Language and Literacy Volume 23, Issue 2, 2021 Page 1-13

⁶https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/education/elcc/content/curriculum/curriculum_framework.html

⁷ <https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/ed/pdf/K12/ExploringLiteracyHandbook.pdf>

In *Young Children Playing and Learning in a Digital Age a Cultural and Critical Perspective*, Stephen and Edwards (2018) recognize that, learning from and with books and digital technologies takes place within a social, cultural, and material context with people who mentor, guide, teach, model, share etc. particular ways of being with children and particular objects. These people are parents, children, siblings, other family members, friends, or peers who are physically or virtually present. All literacy learning is mediated, and as the shared book research indicates the kind of interactions that occur with and over books determine the impact of the mediation. The case is the same with digital devices in homes, be they tablets, computers or mobile phones which have become an integral part of families' everyday language and literacies. This is particularly the case since 2010 when the touch screen, initially in the form the iPad, became available, and tapped into young children' capacity to interact with tablets through touch. (Stephen & Edwards, 2018)

Digital Devices in Homes: Children's digital literacies learning

By the age of two research has found that most children are using a tablet or laptop and for those children aged under five who have access to tablets in the home, approximately a third of them own their own tablet.

The vast majority of children with access to tablets use them to watch TV programmes and video clips or to play games and use apps. Half of pre-schoolers use apps of some kind either on a smartphone or a tablet. More than one in three children under five are using mobile phones to access apps and games (2016, Sefton-Green, Marsh, Rested, & Flewitt, p8).

A Canadian case study by Harrison and MacTavish (2018) '*i'Babies: Infants' and toddlers' emergent language and literacy in a digital culture of devices* specifically situates their research in the context of family literacy noting that with "the influx of technology in children's home environments, it is important to understand children's digital literacy developments from a family literacy perspective" (p.163). They work with the premise that 21st century technologies challenge young children, parents, and caregivers and make necessary a rethinking of how literacy develops in very young children. Working with children under two, they found that young children's independent interactions with iDevices show a range of activities including: accessing and viewing photos; accessing YouTube song videos; and accessing and interacting with apps specifically downloaded for their enjoyment.

Storybook apps were noted to have a range of interactivity capacity depending upon the design of the app. Drawing on Guy Merchant's work, they concur that some storybook apps afford much more discussion, often those related to interests and popular culture. Young children also interact culturally and socially with family members through smartphone and tablet activities. Family members were constantly mediating use of devices, in part the researchers theorize, as the devices belong to a family member, who do not want images, apps, or contacts deleted nor accidental calls made. They conclude

with the recognition of a “dearth of research” on the place of digital devices within family literacies, suggesting that further research would benefit parents’ learning with mobile devices and would help inform educators about the digital literacies that children bring when they enter settings outside the family.

In *Porous boundaries: Reconceptualising the home literacy environment as a digitally networked space for 0–3-year-olds* (2020) Rosie Flewitt and Alison Clark review and problematize the literature on Home Literacy Environment (HLE) contending that conventional definitions of HLE have not yet included new digital practices for young children’s knowledge about literacy or the ways in which very young children negotiate digital networks (p.447).

They recognize the digital literacies of children under three as “an under researched area.” (447).

Digital literacies are defined as:

- developing the skills and knowledge to communicate effectively and find information when using digital technologies.
- understanding, producing, and sharing texts in diverse formats.
- being creative, collaborative, and critical.
- showing cultural and social understanding of how texts are used, and
- and being aware of e-safety (p.447).

In a case study analysis of two children under three, Flewitt and Clark counter a dystopian perspective of digital media as fracturing family life (p. 466) finding instead “affect, coupled with the intra-action between people, materials and spaces in these networks, drives very young children’s early literacy practices in the current digitally-mediated era” (p.447)

Families as educators of digital literacies

Karen Wohlwend (2017) in *Toddlers and Touchscreens: Learning “Concepts Beyond Print” with Tablet Technologies* investigates early literacy implications of young children’s widespread access to digital tools using fingertip swiping and tablets, which are just the right size for young children (p.1). As she observes, “Reading on a tablet engages interactive text in ways that require more complex handling than a periodic page turn to handle, carry, and operate” (p.1). Space and images are organized quite differently than in books, and icons, for example, are not permanently situated, thus infants are learning differently than with books. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_yFAiBgAnY). The dominant modes for making meaning have become sound, image, and animation with print being secondary. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ly0y_XeKhU) As Wohlwend points out, babies learn their worlds

through touch and the touch screen is particularly suited to this way of interacting See for example *a magazine is an iPad that does not work* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXV-yaFmQNk>).

Wohlwend's learning from very young children's interactions with tablets led her to revise Marie Clay's 'concepts about print' which is centred upon young children's book-handling knowledge to a 'concepts about screens' guide (See Appendix 1 and below), thereby naming and making visible young children's actions within the context of families. Further, she points out that children's experiences and learning with tablets and other devices often takes place in the laps of adults, with scaffolding by parents playing an instructive and interactive role. As she observes "the so-called 'amazing' digital aptitude of young children is learned and built from tiny multimodal actions—gazing, clicking, tapping, swiping on a glass screen—that combine to make up a dramatically new reading nexus" (6). These multi-modal actions are supported and modelled by adults and siblings, and include:

Navigating Among and Within Apps:

- Tapping arrow icons or lightly touching areas of screens where arrow icons are not visible but expected in order to open a new screen
- Swiping scroll bars to load more options
- Tapping icons/words to launch an app
- Swiping the screen to turn a page, return to a screen, or load the next photo
- Pressing a button to go to the home screen with app menu to change apps
- Tapping an icon (e.g., checkmark, "x") to confirm and proceed or cancel an
- action or to close a page or application (Wohlwend, 2017.p.6)

Listening to e-Books

- Tapping an icon to open e-book
- Pressing a toggle button to increase volume on e-book ("turn up, turn up")
- Tapping arrows to turn page
- Tapping words to activate highlighting and read aloud features (ibid)

Wohlwend's study illustrates that so-called "technotoddlers" digital literacies are not intuitively learned, as often as been touted with the 'digital natives' discourse, rather they are situated within what she calls "a nexus of practice" where adults and children are sharing devices, and parents and siblings are scaffolding children's multi-modal actions.

Wohlwend's analysis and chart of 'concepts of screens' names and categorize critical aspects of digital literacies, their modes of access, and interactions with tablets, thereby infusing digital literacies into

families' literacies. She recommends that we not "withhold or simplify programs until children are 'ready' but to appreciate their multi-linear problem-solving as a useful new literacy disposition" (p.9).

She also recognizes, as do many others, that early access and experiences with touchscreen technologies is "an issue of social justice tightly tied to income disparity" (p.10).

She further elaborates that a "financial divide separates not only have and have-not households but also early education centers--doubly discouraging as schools are important sites for ensuring equitable and regular access to new literacies for all children" (p.10). Thus the *Going Online Project* with families and children, with the tablet as a central digital tool, recognizes current conceptualization of digital literacies as central to family literacies *and* equitable access to digital literacies.

Families as mediators of digital devices for young children

In their literature review documenting parental responses to their child's use of technologies in Estonia, Nesli & Siibak (2016) write that many scholars, regardless of their stance on technology, agree that "the role of parents and their various mediation strategies in guiding young children's digital device usage cannot be overestimated" (228). In 198 interviews with parents, they found that "parent screen time, parent attitudes and the child's age are all associated with touch screen use among infants and toddlers". The top three reasons for young children's engagement with touch screens as reported by parents were education, entertainment, and behaviour regulation. Although parental mediation strategies were dependent on the age and gender of the child, the majority of parents "combine different mediation strategies in order to fulfil their role as mediators of young children's digital play" (227). The findings of Lauricella, Wartella, and Rideout (2015, 15) suggest that the child's age, parent attitudes, and parent screen time "play a dynamic and complex role in children's screen time with these technologies". According to their findings, children of parents who are active tablet and smart phone users spend significantly more time using tablets and smart phones, compared to the children whose parents use these devices less – pointing, as Wohlwend did, to economic situations as a significant mediating factor with young children's and their families' access to digital devices and digital literacies.

An extensive series of studies on young children engagement with digital devices is the *COST Action IS1410A Day in the Digital Lives of 0-3s* (Gillen et al, 2018). These studies across Europe involves 13 families and children ages 8-34 months, and their findings resonate with the studies above. An ethnographic 'day in the life' methodology was used to gather data. The researchers found that technology

- plays a range of roles in children's lives
- is often integrated into the rhythm of the day with relatively fixed times for various activities

- is often used to influence the children's moods, that is to make them happy or to influence their behaviour
- is combined with traditional toys and games, even with children who spent relatively more time with technologies
- was often integrated seamlessly as part of non-technological activities, and
- even when not being used by young children was being observed by children watching their parents and siblings in using technologies (p3&4)

The parents in a day in the digital life studies commented on their children's abilities to identify the apps they like to use, open them, find the content they wanted, either on their own or with some assistance. Some could also drag items over screen, swipe the screen or make alterations such as changing the volume. A few could take a photo, or even make a video with some assistance (p4). Children also learned about digital media and people's relationships with technology through observing others in the home, including adults or older siblings. Some learn from older sibling(s), through observation and asking for their help before approaching parents. The researchers noted that children also apply skills they have learned from using one device to another (p4). Although parents had both positive and negative thinking about technology at such young ages, most believe that children should be exposed to and acquire these skills early. Also, most parents recognise that digital technologies and content contribute to children's playing together and had the effect of strengthening peer culture.

As the authors write, parents realize that "If children are not able to access this peer culture, they may be excluded which can threaten their peer relationships" (5-6).

Section IV: Young children's learning, early learning resources & moving online

Families with a new baby are at the beginning of a journey that continues over the years. Parents are under a great deal of pressure to be perfect parents, to raise children who are 'school ready', who are socially aware, who eat right and exercise, and so much more. Navigating through the advice and pressure must seem daunting at times (2011, Elliot, Ashton, Hunt & Nason, 2011 p8).

Young children's learning and early learning resources

The recognition and critical place of young children's very early learning has been prominently supported internationally through ongoing *OECD Starting Strong* reports over the past 15 years. *OECD Starting Strong* reports speak to the need to establish a "new systemic and integrated approach for children aged 0-8" (OECD, 2006:13), and most recently, to the need for early learning and care services for children birth to 3 (OECD: 2021). Thus, as Nichols et al (2012) observe, early learning although initially situated within the family is much "more than the business of families and education" (4).

Education for and with young children is found in differently located spaces and agencies constituting what Nichols et al (2012) refer to as an "early learning agenda" (4). As the partnerships within the *Going Online Project* proposal highlight, there are numerous agencies in New Brunswick involved with young children's early learning including: public health, family resources centres, public libraries, family and community agencies, talk with me, and family and early childhood services. In addition, there are many other agencies and organizations within communities that support children and families in various ways.

With many resources available, how do parents learn about and enact this so-called early learning agenda? What materials do they access and where do they find them? In *Resourcing Early Learners*, Nichols et al (2012) traced resources available to parents of "early learners", birth to three, in three neighbourhoods and two countries. They interviewed 35 mothers, 3 grandmothers and 10 fathers and mapped the resources used. (39). They worked with families within 'hard-to-reach' networks including culturally diverse families and fathers. Their intent was to learn about families' priorities for their children's learning, the resources used, places of access, social networking including virtual, the practices of learning they engage in with their children, and decision making around borrowing or purchasing. The perspective they take of early literacy learning is that children and adults use a range of modalities, meaning literacy is much broader than reading and writing of print text. (157)

The research team learned that to locate resources, parents moved physically and virtually into and out of their neighbourhoods, travelled outside their region, and made use of cyberspace. Parents then are located in one place, and also are mobile, connected and networked across local and global spaces. Although they found a wide variety of players providing programs and distributing knowledge for early

learners, they found that “the types of knowledge and practice being circulated are far less diverse” (159-160).

Peter Moss (2019) professor of Early Childhood Provisions at the University of London cautions about the uncritical taking up of dominant ideas. He writes:

“We live in a world of stories or discourses, ways of thinking and talking about things. Within this multitude of stories or discourses, certain ones can become particularly influential” (13).

The most prevalent narrative or discourse about children’s learning within *Resourcing Early Learners* study about early learners is the developmental narrative. When one story or discourse becomes prevalent, there is a tendency to make the one story the true story, which has the effect of universalizing young children’s learning, creating a one size fits all approach, running counter to the premise of many families, many literacies that has been a key theme within the literature reviewed. Peter Moss (2019) suggests that there are alternative stories that emerge when we ask questions that particularize learning and context, questions such as:

What do we want for our children? What is the purpose and meaning of education? What are the fundamental values and ethics of education? What is our image of the child? These are stories that draw on a wide range of disciplines and theories. These are stories that are aware of the risks of early childhood education – but also believe in the possibilities of an education that might contribute towards a more democratic, caring, just, and sustainable world (16).

Research from family literacies and HLE recognize children as learners from birth, parents as educators, and family spaces as learning spaces. The family literacies and home literacies environments research speak to multiple and diverse literacies in homes – they tell many stories and evoke and illuminate many literacies. Each of these bodies of literature recognize that learning language and literacies is diffused across the day and across various practices, events, and materials. The research has found that resources in homes and joint meaning making with these resources, be it books or digital devices or other practices and objects, is how young children become and express their literate identities. The shared meaning-making that takes place within families over objects such as books and digital devices makes visible the nuanced and very specific ways that families teach their children, and the reciprocal nature of the interactions. As well, early access to materials like books and digital devices matters. Where once concerns were raised about homes without access to books, now concerns are being raised about homes without access to digital devices. With the pandemic, equitable access to digital devices and knowledge of the affordances of these devices within families’ literacies has been made visible and urgent.

Thus the *Going Online Project* is in a unique position to both contribute to a newly emerging body of research and to design child, parental and practitioner digital literacies support programs.

Going online

In an extensive literature scan of American research and programs, Ramos, Barmdad and Lloyd (2021) reviewed Early Childhood virtual services prior to and during COVID-19. They found that prior to Covid-19 virtual Early Childhood Services (ECS) were used with families with specialized needs, those living in remote areas, or with those having less access to early care and health services. Virtual services, then, expanded access for families to receive services from a variety of specialists regardless of geographic proximity.

The two most common benefits of virtual services delivery prior to and during COVID-19 were increased access, and improved convenience and flexibility. The benefits were felt by families and service providers alike. For example, time and money were saved by both families and service providers as no driving was required. Additionally, for service providers, it meant they could theoretically work with more families. The main convenience related to virtual service delivery was improved flexibility in scheduling and fewer cancellations due to lack of travel barriers. Related to flexibility and convenience was the recording of sessions and access to online materials which meant families could access and utilize materials in their own time and at their own pace. Additional benefits, less cited include,

- reduced provider cost compared to in-person delivery.
- improved levels of comfort for families as they are in their own homes.
- more frequent (virtual) supports which encourage participation and retention.
- and improved outcomes for family and/or children (p.2)

In addition, four strategies for engaging and supporting families with young children were identified. These strategies and their sub-components include: (see pages 3-7)

- 1) Use of engaging online lessons to support parent learning and skills
 - a. Websites & self-guided lessons
 - b. Digital learning platforms
- 2) Use of virtual communication technologies to help parents integrate learning into real-life contexts.
 - a. One to one coaching on place of in person visits
 - b. Check-ins to support online learning
- 3) Use of technology to make sure helpful information and resources are at parents' fingertips
 - a. Texts to share info with parents
 - b. Resources lists
 - c. Calling, emailing, texting to supplement interventions
- 4) Use of technology to build relationships and improve a sense of community.
 - a. Online forums & virtual group meetings
 - b. Tailored communication

The authors also noted that critical to virtual delivery of services is the need to consider community strengths and needs, mental health needs of family members and practitioners, equity, and sensitivity.

Throughout the pandemic, Early Learning and Childcare Centres (ELCC), early childhood agencies, organizations, and facilities within New Brunswick, across Canada, and internationally went online, closed, and/ or delivered resource packages to children's homes. Over the past year much has been written about and advocated for within Canada related to ELCC, yet much less has been researched about other services and agencies that continue to support families and their young children, and the online and offline opportunities and challenges encountered at this time.

In a recent Canadian study, the authors (van Rijhin et al, 2021) contend that given the renewed focus on universal early learning and childcare across Canada, "planning for childcare must therefore recognize the larger policy context, including the many other systems within which children and families interact, if it is to serve children and families" (2). The partners in the *Going Online Project* are part of this larger early learning policy context in New Brunswick. Their insights, practices, and capacities to shift to alternative forms of connecting with families with young children to ensure continuity of support and services to families can inform this larger context.

In Fall 2020, the Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick (LCNB) conducted a survey to study the impact of Covid, specifically in the literacy sector in New Brunswick. The online survey consisted of multiple choice and short answer questions. There were 92 participants from a range of adult, early childhood and literacy communities. LCNB found that over half the respondents initially had worked from home.

Challenges identified included: adapting programs to deliver online, engaging families and learners online, and increased costs due to PPE. It was also reported that many learners lived in rural areas and lacked adequate access to internet and technology.

Suggested supports identified included staff training for teaching online, leading webinars, and facilitation for parents on Zoom. The need for more technology resources for participants was also mentioned.

Recommendations brought forward are as follows:

- Recognizing the critical role of literacy program facilitators and volunteers.
- Providing continuous professional development opportunities and support for them.
- Emphasising digital literacy for learners, families, participants and program providers
- Increasing access to technology and internet capacity for rural and vulnerable populations.
- Going forward, blended programming with the option of in-person time is recommended to help ensure equity and access for all.(p.3)

As noted earlier, the *Going Online Project* is generated from the experiences of daily literacy work with families and children by networks of people who are keeping and kept things going virtually and digitally during Covid. Documentation of these collective experiences, insights, and learnings have the potential to make visible well-being and online literacy work with families, while providing a forum for conversations about theory and practice in family literacies, and a foundation for creating professional learning. Reflecting on her 40 years of experience within family literacies, Denny Taylor writes “There is no doubt that family literacy has become a social science concept that is now ubiquitous as an organizing principle – a way of framing vital programs for children, their families, and communities throughout the world” (2019:2).

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Appendix 1:

Concepts about screens – Adapted from Marie Clay by Karen Wohlewend(2017).

Research on early childhood literacies with technologies (Marsh, 2004; Merchant, 2005; Wohlwend & Kargin, 2013) has recently expanded “bookhandling” and concepts about print to accommodate mouse-handling and a new set of computer literacy concepts and relationships specific to interacting with screens (e.g., keyboard strokes, understanding the mouse–cursor relationship, screen navigation in Table 1).

Some concepts about screens

Desktop Computers	Multi-modal Action	Onscreen Reading Practice
Mouse-handling	Double-clicking Clicking Hovering	Open an application or select options Open or confirm options View a drop-down menu
Keyboarding	Tapping (key, spacebar, arrow keys) Toggling (between keys on numeric pad, arrow keys)	Type a letter or space Start a new line Move cursor Move cursor or avatar in various in-game moves

Some concepts beyond print

Tablet Features	Multimodal Action	Onscreen Reading Practice
Touchscreen	Tapping Swiping Pinching Stretching Dragging	Select & open or turn a page Select, highlight, copy & paste text Play or animate Scroll through pages Turn a page Select & highlight text Resize an object, image, screen to make it smaller Resize an object, image, screen to make it larger Add, delete, move or reposition objects Draw using a paint program
Buttons	Pressing	Power on/off Return to home menu of apps Capture screen shot Enable voice over or other readaloud options Adjust volume
Voice Recording & recognition	Speaking	Locate info, or initiate a browser search Open a digital text or app Record narration & dialogue (i.e.: for video) Interact with or through online avatar