



---

*Early Childhood Education* is the official journal of the Early Childhood Education Council (ECEC) of The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA). The journal assists the ECEC to achieve its objective of improving practice in early childhood education by publishing articles that increase the professional knowledge and understanding of teachers, administrators and other educationists involved in early childhood education. The journal seeks to stimulate thinking, to explore new ideas and to offer various points of view. It serves to promote the convictions of the ECEC about early childhood education.

Copyright © 2012 by The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), 11010 142 Street NW, Edmonton, Alberta T5N 2R1. Unless otherwise indicated in the text, reproduction of material in *Early Childhood Education* is authorized for classroom and professional development use, provided that each copy contain full acknowledgement of the source and that no charge be made beyond the cost of reprinting. Any other reproduction in whole or in part without prior written consent of the ATA is prohibited. Although every effort is made to ensure accurate scholarship and responsible judgment, opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the ECEC or the ATA. ISSN 0012-8171

Individual copies of this journal can be ordered at the following prices: 1 to 4 copies, \$7.50 each; 5 to 10 copies, \$5.00 each; over 10 copies, \$3.50 each. Please add 5 per cent shipping and handling and 5 per cent GST. Please contact Distribution at Barnett House to place your order. In Edmonton, dial 780-447-9432; toll free in Alberta, dial 1-800-232-7208, ext 432.

Personal information regarding any person named in this document is for the sole purpose of professional consultation between members of The Alberta Teachers' Association.

---

# Table of Contents

Volume 40, Number 1, 2012

## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

2 *Anna Kiroua*

## FEATURE ARTICLES

Family Literacy Through Story Reading

8 *Olivia N Saracho*

Images of Childhood: Reggio-Inspired, Plains Cree-Derived

16 *Janine Tine*

How Do Pakistani Parents Perceive Their Children's  
Placement in Special Education Classes?: Over-Referral in the  
Toronto District School Board

22 *Afshan Amjad*

Voices of Immigrant Children in Canadian Picture Books

29 *E Linda Reichenauer*

*Early Childhood Education* is indexed in CBCA Education.

**On the cover:** A word cloud based on International Innovations in ECE: A Canadian Forum on Early Childhood Frameworks (held July 13–15, 2012, in Victoria, BC).

# A Personal Reflection on International Innovations in ECE: A Canadian Forum on Early Childhood Frameworks

---

Anna Kirova is a professor in the Department of Elementary Education, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta. She teaches courses in early childhood education in both the bachelor of education program and the master of elementary education program. Her research interests include peer relationships and social inclusion of young children, particularly immigrant and refugee children; issues related to global migration and education; and collaborative arts-based research with children.

---

I am taking this opportunity to share some thoughts on International Innovations in ECE: A Canadian Forum on Early Childhood Frameworks, a conference organized by the University of Victoria's School of Child and Youth Care and held July 13–15. As the name of the conference indicates, the focus was on childhood frameworks currently used in the field to advance policies and programs, as well as theory and practice. The organizers, UVic professors Alan Pence and Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, stated the forum's aim as follows: "to explore innovations in ECE and to consider the role that frameworks can play in opening new possibilities for the early years field in Canada."<sup>1</sup>

"But what exactly is a framework?" one may ask. "Why are we talking about frameworks? How many frameworks are there, and how do I know which one to choose? What if I like some aspects of one framework and other aspects of another? Can I combine them? What if I am not *right*?"

As I often do when I am wondering about the meaning of an English word, I consulted Cambridge Dictionaries Online (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org>) and found the following synonyms and definitions for *framework*:

- Theoretical account
- Model
- A hypothetical description of a complex entity or process
- Fabric

- A structure supporting or containing something
- The underlying structure
- Brace
- Mount

With these meanings of *framework* in mind, I am intrigued by the possibility of reflecting on the presentations I attended (and I went to as many as one possibly could!) and on the descriptions in the conference program (which contains 124 sessions, including individual presentations, workshops, panels and keynotes). My intent is not to summarize or review the content of the sessions but, rather, to identify (if I can) trends in the underlying structures of the richly textured fabric that weaves together ideas common to two distinct yet inseparable fields: early childhood education and child care.

It is important for me to think of frameworks in the fields of early childhood education and child care as fabric woven from different threads as I reflect on the opening keynote speaker, Margaret Carr. In addition to being the well-known author of *Assessment in Early Childhood Settings: Learning Stories* (2001), Carr was codirector of the project that developed New Zealand's national early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (New Zealand Ministry of Education 1996).

*Te Whāriki*, a bicultural curriculum developed and adopted in Aotearoa (New Zealand), incorporates Maori perspectives and is an example of practice grounded in the hopes, perspectives and rights of families and communities. In 1991, New Zealand's ministry of education instigated the development of an early childhood curriculum that would connect with a new national curriculum for schools, articulate a philosophy of good early childhood practice, and incorporate a wide range of services and cultural perspectives (Carr and May 2000).

The resulting curriculum is based on four broad principles (New Zealand Ministry of Education 1996, 14):

- *Empowerment*. Children will be empowered to learn and grow.



- *Holistic development.* Children learn and grow in a holistic way. Their intellectual, social, cultural, physical, emotional and spiritual learning is interwoven across all their experiences.
- *Family and community.* A child's family and community are recognized as part of the learning experience.
- *Relationships.* Children learn through positive relationships with people, places and things.

These principles are interwoven with five learning strands (pp 15–16):

- Well-being (*mana atua*)
- Belonging (*mana whenua*)
- Contribution (*mana tangata*)
- Communication (*mana reo*)
- Exploration (*mana aotūroa*)

The *Te Whāriki* document contains a visual representation of the fabric created by weaving together these four principles and five strands (p 13).

This brings to mind my own childhood weaving experience. I have tried weaving only once, on my great-aunt's loom, after hours of watching her skilfully interlacing threads vertically and horizontally on a loom almost as large as the room. I watched her choose threads according to colour, thickness, texture and, most of all, her image of the final piece. Sometimes she drew the image on a piece of paper; sometimes she worked from her imagination to create what I thought were beautiful pieces, mostly because of the colours she used. As most five-year-olds would be, I was eager to try weaving myself. However, when I was allowed to "play" with the loom, I found that I had to frequently ask how-to questions. Everything looked so easy when my great-aunt did it and not so easy (or beautiful) when I did it.

My limited childhood experience with weaving, brought to mind by the word *fabric* as one possible meaning of *framework*, made me realize that those who participate (literally or figuratively) in the weaving of fabric need to have not only a loom and an image or vision of the final product but also experience—an embodied knowledge of how to weave so that the result is what they intended.

The conference's keynote speakers came from New Zealand, Australia, Italy and Canada. If we think of the education and the child-care systems in those countries as looms, we can immediately see how those systems facilitated or hindered what these skilful, experienced and knowledgeable educators wanted to create, especially if the creation deviated from the well-established model. The very structure, position and capacity of each loom/system determined to a large extent what could and could not be accomplished by those involved in the

development of the framework. Or, as stated in the summary of Carr's keynote,

[We] have developed curriculum frameworks and/or theoretical positions that are very different from the developmental and tidy early childhood programmes that we used to know. They are innovative, and they have their own cultural and historical bases. But they don't always fit with government expectations and priorities, and the winds of political change can blow them away.<sup>2</sup>

These "expectations and priorities" are, in fact, the underlying structures that allow us as early childhood educators to implement big ideas on a big scale, or to try them in our own classrooms first while waiting for the right wind to blow our way so that the seeds we have planted in our classrooms and that have grown into healthy plants can spread their own seeds.

While curriculum frameworks reflect the specific cultural and historical circumstances of the countries in which they were developed, there are some similarities between them. Keynote speaker Jennifer Sumsion played a leadership role in the 2007 initiative undertaken by Australia's Labor government to improve the quality of early childhood education and care, which resulted in *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Australia 2009). She drew some helpful comparisons between the Canadian and Australian contexts, based on shared patterns of historical development—the countries are both former British colonies, established on lands first inhabited by First Nations peoples. Many presenters stressed the importance of addressing the needs of First Nations children aged birth to five, a common task in the field of early childhood in Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

In Canada, Alan Pence's work in Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, and in other First Nations communities exemplifies a contextualized approach as curriculum is constructed out of dialogue between Western early childhood teaching and the understandings of elders and other community members (Moss and Pence 1994). At the conference, both Pence and Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw spoke about the seven-year-old and still ongoing Investigating Quality (IQ) Project, supported by the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development. Based on previous cross-cultural work, this project has explored innovative practices, programs and policies in First Nations communities, as well as in Scandinavia, Italy, New Zealand and Australia.

New Zealand's leadership in the field, with the development of *Te Whāriki* (New Zealand Ministry

of Education 1996) as a curriculum document that genuinely incorporates Aboriginal perspectives, was acknowledged not only by Jennifer Sumsion but also by Pam Whitty. Whitty led the University of New Brunswick team that developed the *New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care* (University of New Brunswick Early Childhood Centre 2008). In her work with the team in general and Sherry Rose in particular, Whitty emphasized the “relational spaces—sacred spaces” created by a variety of curriculum innovations, and asked if those spaces can, in fact, “transform our existing social relations.”<sup>3</sup>

In her keynote address, Caroline Rowan, who is completing doctoral work at the University of New Brunswick, provided a powerful example of how these new curriculum frameworks can serve as “a catalyst to work with community stakeholders on crafting childcare programs grounded in Inuit ways of knowing and being.”<sup>4</sup> She pointed out how, through troubling hegemonic educational practices, such frameworks have generated practices that honour the cultural roots and native languages of the Inuit and First Nations communities in Nunavik. She talked about projects inspired by using learning stories (Podmore and Carr 1999) as a vehicle for building relationships between people and ideas in a genuine, meaningful way.

Another example of early childhood practice based on rationality is, of course, Reggio Emilia. Although the practice of pedagogical documentation is well defined, described and established in Reggio Emilia schools, I appreciated keynote speaker Carla Rinaldi’s emphasis on the philosophical journey that led to the development of such practice. Weaving various theoretical approaches to understanding and stimulating child development and learning resulted, over time, in this unique pedagogical practice, which changed the meaning of early childhood education and inspired educators around the world. Listening once again to Rinaldi made me hear more clearly the message regarding the “uniqueness” of the philosophical journey Loris Malaguzzi and the staff undertook in order to first explore and then try out, articulate and constantly enhance their approach through an elaborate dance between theory and practice in which one cannot clearly define the line between one and the other.<sup>5</sup>

Returning to *fabric* as a particular meaning of *framework*, I am not sure if *fabric* captures Reggio Emilia’s unique approach as well as it does *Te Whāriki*. The more I think about it, the more aware I become that it is the image of a completed, beautiful, colourful, unique piece of fabric that I find troublesome. This image implies wholeness and completeness, something that is finished in order to

be used (or admired). That is the opposite of the lively, ever-changing, unpredictable and exciting nature of the process of involving children, parents, communities and colleagues in an ongoing dialogue that leads to further changes and negotiation of possible (new) meanings and knowledges. In Ball and Pence’s (2006, 35–36) words, knowledge is “a process that necessarily is incomplete, indeterminate, and contingent on both the place and time of the knowing and on the quality of people’s participation in it.”

But is that not also the case with New Zealand’s *Te Whāriki*, Australia’s early years learning framework, the IQ Project and New Brunswick’s curriculum framework for early learning and child care? Of course it is! As with pedagogical documentation, it is the process, rather than the product, that creates open spaces for exploration; new wonders; and the discovery of unexpected meanings in familiar topics, relations and things in the world around us.

With this new realization, I am now wondering about the implications of understanding a framework as a final product, or as the fabric one has finished making. The following questions arise: Where in the process do the individual educator’s creativity, passion, dedication and professionalism come in? Do we each weave our own fabric? Is this how we “do the work of cultivating a curious, open, and empathetic attentiveness to our encounters,” as the description of Pam Whitty’s keynote presentation states?<sup>6</sup> I can almost hear someone from the regulatory body in any country asking, “How about quality standards?” And I can almost hear myself explaining how a framework document guides our work; how it provides the underlying structure for what we do; and how it is based on well-established theoretical models of the complex processes of teaching, learning and development.

I reread what I just wrote and cannot help but smile as I realize that in my hypothetical answer to a hypothetical question asked by a hypothetical representative of a regulatory body, I managed to use almost all the synonyms for *framework* given by the dictionary. Except for *fabric*, that is. And yet I am not ready to give *fabric* up. In fact, when I look at the session titles and descriptions in the conference program, I am even more drawn to *fabric* as I recognize some recurring threads. One session title even uses the metaphor of weaving (and the loom): “Mindfully Weaving a Framework of Early Childhood Education: Interleaving Conversations,” by Randa Khattar, Karyn Callaghan and Pat Dickinson. The description states,

We are experiencing innovative times in international policy, research, and practice related to the development of ECE frameworks.

These developments often emerge as tensions weaved along the historical warp and weft of change. Like fabric woven neither too tightly (losing flexibility) nor too loosely (losing coherence), we strive for porosity (openness) and balance in our dialogues among tensions in existing frameworks, both provincial and academic.<sup>7</sup>

I wish I had said it so eloquently. I also wish I had read this session description before I started thinking about *framework* in terms of fabric and weaving on a loom. I am relieved, though, that my colleagues have also thought about the skills required in weaving—skills I lacked in my childhood, which prevented me from creating the beautiful tapestry I saw in my mind.

As I continue to search the conference program for common threads, I find the following session topics:

- Play—play as pedagogy; school is a place for play; the storied lives children play; rough-and-tumble play; musical play; dramatic play; play as a framework for identity-making; outdoor play; YMCA Playing to Learn—a pan-Canadian ECE framework
- Diversity—accommodating diverse beliefs and practices; honouring diversity; integrating diversity in early childhood frameworks; promoting diversity through shifting practices; supporting young refugee and immigrant children; young children with disabilities presenting their own stories; rethinking inclusive classrooms for optimal learning; students at risk in the context of Ontario’s full-day kindergarten classroom
- Engaging parents—Ontario’s ELECT (Early Learning for Every Child Today) framework in a family resource program; the complex needs of children and families; parent efficacy and engagement in early literacy; interactive parent-and-child language, culture and play programs; queer parents’ perspectives on early childhood curriculum; collaborating with preschool children, families and local community members in telling “stories from the garden”; the role families play in frameworks and other emerging approaches to ECE; the experiences of families with children with special needs
- Indigenous children—resiliency; innovations in First Nations ECE; Inuit early childhood frameworks; going back to Aboriginal ways; expanding knowledge through Aboriginal and international partnerships; early childhood Indigenous languages immersion programs in BC; embracing culture in a First Nations Mohawk community; culture as a framework for looking

into ECE spaces; cultural approaches to Aboriginal ECE evaluation; Aboriginal English speakers in Canadian classrooms; urban Aboriginal children’s meaning-making; the ECE improvement framework for Nova Scotia First Nations communities; connecting frameworks with Mi’kmaq and Maliseet knowledges in New Brunswick

- Professionalism—teachers as lifelong learners; ECE training; postsecondary early childhood development (ECD) training; career paths for internationally trained early childhood educators; innovations in ECE credentialing; ECE professionalism as an innovation in advocacy; early childhood teacher education; engaging early childhood educators and K–12 educators across transition spaces; ECE professionalism and the contribution of university degrees; professional self-regulation in ECE; constructing professionalism in ECE in four Canadian provinces; ECE professionals’ narratives
- Full-day early learning—provincial initiatives in Ontario; the child’s-eye view of the full-day early learning kindergarten program; four- and five-year-olds in schools and child care in Ontario; policy, practice and full-day kindergarten in Ontario
- Technology—young children and digital photography; an ecological approach to narrative, drama and technology with young learners; introducing communication technology into the letter-writing process

I then created word clouds based on the conference program.





Although these images do not include all the words in the conference program, they do provide a sense of the most clearly represented threads. In addition, they resemble a piece of the collage the presenters made in the two short days we had together, rather than fabric. They look as if they have no beginning and no end; there is no apparent logic in the way the words are coloured or arranged; there are no visible strands or principles—only emphasis through type size based on word repetition.

And yet words are more than just words—they are concepts, representations, ideas, meanings, thoughts, rules, principles, beliefs (to list a few). Another group of early childhood educators in another time and place would make their own word cloud, with differences but also many similarities.

As I explore these images more closely, I wonder where the underlying/supporting structures are. Where is the loom? Why do I feel so liberated if I no longer see a brace? What I see is a frame—a picture frame that is not a supporting structure for what is inside it. The text within would be the same without the frame. Does that mean that we can live without frameworks? Or that what we do is the same, regardless of the framework? Of course not!

A word not captured in the images, a word that Jennifer Sumsion used, put everything into perspective. That word is *rhisomatic*. At the end of her presentation, Sumsion mentioned that she has been inspired by the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1980), for whom the process of “becoming” is not one of imitation or analogy but, rather, generative of a new way of being that is a function of influences rather than resemblances. This becoming, she said, is not a linear process of achieving learning outcomes; rather, it is a rhisomatic process. The Wikipedia entry for *rhizome* quotes Deleuze and Guattari:

As a model for culture, the rhizome resists the organizational structure of the root-tree system which charts causality along chronological lines and looks for the original source of “things” and looks towards the pinnacle or conclusion of those “things.” A rhizome, on the other hand, is characterized by “ceaselessly establishe[d] connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles.” The rhizome presents history and culture as a map or wide array of attractions and influences with no specific origin or genesis, for a “rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*.”<sup>8</sup>

I finally understand why I was not entirely comfortable with the meanings of *framework* in

the dictionary. I now wonder if we should be talking about maps that guide our journey with children and families instead of frameworks. But that is a task for the next ECE forum. This forum allowed those in the fields of early childhood education and child care to begin to share ideas and see them as fluid rather than fixed, emerging rather than preset, and becoming rather than not-yet or not-quite-yet. I am grateful to have been part of the discussions and to have this opportunity to reflect on my experiences.

## Notes

1. From the conference program ([www.confmanager.com/communities/c2529/files/hidden/ECE\\_Conference\\_Program\\_FINAL\\_web.pdf](http://www.confmanager.com/communities/c2529/files/hidden/ECE_Conference_Program_FINAL_web.pdf)), page 1 (accessed August 21, 2012).
2. From the conference program, page 7.
3. From the conference program, page 9.
4. From the conference program, page 10.
5. From the conference program, page 7.
6. From the conference program, page 9.
7. From the conference program, pages 37–38.
8. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhizome\\_\(philosophy\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhizome_(philosophy)) (accessed August 21, 2012).

## References

- Ball, J, and A Pence. 2006. *Supporting Indigenous Children's Development*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Carr, M. 2001. *Assessment in Early Childhood Settings: Learning Stories*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE.
- Carr, M, and H May. 2000. “*Te Whāriki: Curriculum Voices*.” In *Early Childhood Services: Theory, Policy and Practice*, ed H Penn, 53–73. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Deleuze, G, and F Guattari. 1980. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Trans B Massumi. London and New York: Continuum.
- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Australia. 2009. *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. Canberra, Australia: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Also available at [www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Policy\\_Agenda/Quality/Documents/Final%20EYLF%20Framework%20Report%20-%20WEB.pdf](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Policy_Agenda/Quality/Documents/Final%20EYLF%20Framework%20Report%20-%20WEB.pdf) (accessed August 21, 2012).
- Moss, P, and A Pence, eds. 1994. *Valuing Quality in Early Childhood Services: New Approaches to Defining Quality*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- New Zealand Ministry of Education. 1996. *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Education*. Wellington, NZ: Learning Media. Also available at [www.educate.ece.govt.nz/~media/Educate/Files/Reference%20Downloads/whariki.pdf](http://www.educate.ece.govt.nz/~media/Educate/Files/Reference%20Downloads/whariki.pdf) (accessed August 21, 2012).
- Podmore, V, and M Carr. 1999. “Learning and Teaching Stories: New Approaches to Assessment and Evaluation.” Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research



in Education (AARE)–New Zealand Association for Research in Education (NZARE) Conference on Research in Education, Melbourne, Australia, December 1. Also available at [www.aare.edu.au/99pap/pod99298.htm](http://www.aare.edu.au/99pap/pod99298.htm) (accessed August 21, 2012).

University of New Brunswick Early Childhood Centre. 2008. *New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care*. Fredericton, NB: Department of Social Development. Also available at [www.gnb.ca/0000/ECHDPE/curriculum-e.asp](http://www.gnb.ca/0000/ECHDPE/curriculum-e.asp) (accessed August 21, 2012). ♀

—Anna Kirova

# Family Literacy Through Story Reading

Olivia N Saracho

---

*Olivia N Saracho is a professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership at the University of Maryland. She has written and edited several publications in the field of early childhood education. Her research interests include emergent literacy, family literacy, cognitive style and play.*

---

### Abstract

This study examined whether a five-month story-reading intervention with families would support children's literacy development. The informants were children from five kindergarten classrooms and their families. Twice a week, the families practised story-reading techniques. Data were collected using observations, interviews and documentary analysis to construct a detailed account of the family literacy program. The learning process was described through observations; samples of children's work; photographs; and in-depth periodic interviews with the children, families and teachers. The families used children's interests and abilities in selecting story-reading strategies, materials and experiences to develop children's literacy acquisition. They motivated children to read and write by reading stories to them, engaging them in conversations, writing stories with them and extending their reading experiences. These experiences are consistent with those in the literature on literacy development. Directions for practice and research are also discussed.

Family literacy studies have shown that family story reading has an impact on children's success in school-based literacy instruction (Dearing et al 2004; Hindman and Morrison 2011). Family story reading involves any adult family members (such as parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles) reading appropriate texts to children at home.

The effect of story reading on children's early acquisition of language and literacy has been thoroughly documented (Bus, de Jong and Van Ijzendoorn 2007). Studies indicate that the early readers are those children who are frequently read to at home (Durkin 1974/75).<sup>1</sup>

Several studies have examined the relationship between families' reading stories to children and children's reading achievement. In the most effective story reading, family members do more than read the text; they also support children's ability to understand the story. They describe pictures, label objects, explain events, ask questions and relate the story to children's life experiences. They discuss the content of the story and direct children's attention to the pictures and the print (Price, van Kleeck and Huberty 2009). These strategies promote children's comprehension and linguistic expression (Hammett, van Kleeck and Huberty 2003; Price, van Kleeck and Huberty 2009) and nurture their reading ability.

These findings suggest that a family literacy intervention can help families learn to read stories to children and relate the stories to children's daily lives in a way that promotes literacy development.

## Family Literacy Interventions

Researchers have recommended intervention approaches as a means to provide families with strategies that promote children's literacy acquisition (Saracho 2001, 2008). For example, in a longitudinal study, the National Early Literacy Panel used five types of intervention to promote early literacy development, one of which was parent and home programs (National Center for Family Literacy and National Institute for Literacy 2008). However, as Sénéchal and Young (2008) show, there is a lack of intervention research on families reading stories to their children in kindergarten to Grade 3.

Interventions that integrate high-quality story reading in the home and in the classroom can develop children's literacy. Investigators use interventions to determine which elements in a story-reading event promote literacy skills. In intervention studies, children listen to stories and engage in a response activity, such as role-playing a story, retelling a story and retracing a story through pictures. Activities in which children respond to literature improve their comprehension skills and sense of story structure, which helps them relate the parts of a story to each other and to integrate information.

Families can learn strategies for reading stories to children that will improve children's reading achievement. This raises the question of what types of story-reading experience can best help families promote their children's literacy development (NCFL and NIFL 2008; Saracho 2001, 2008).

## Purpose of the Study

Studies show that family story reading has an impact on children's success in school-based literacy instruction; therefore, it is important to provide families with a literacy intervention program in which they can acquire knowledge of story-reading strategies and experiences and learn ways to use them in their family environment.

The purpose of this study was

- to develop an intervention program that would help families support their children's literacy development through story reading, and then examine its success;
- to identify the story-reading approaches, strategies and materials that families used to promote their children's literacy development;
- to examine the story-reading behaviour of children and their families; and
- to describe story reading and the task-related characteristics of the story-reading experiences.

This study should contribute to an understanding of the literacy practices families can engage in with children in the home.

## Method

The case study method was selected to describe the results and implications of the family literacy intervention in this study.

Stevenson (2004, 41–42) writes, "The case itself may be descriptive of what has already taken place or is currently taking place, or it may be interventionist in enacting changes to be studied and documented." In case study methodology, data are collected through observations, interviews and document analysis to build a detailed account of a single case or multiple cases (Stake 2005; Stevenson 2004; Yin 2009).

This case study documented what families did with their children in nurturing language and literacy in the home during and after a five-month intervention on instructional story reading.

## Informants

Qualitative researchers use sampling procedures that differ from those of quantitative investigators, who use their results to generalize to large populations.

The sample in this study matched the larger population as closely as possible. It also offered data

sources that are representative of the larger population. The researcher used a methodological and sequential selection to ensure that the sample provided data that appropriately represented the various characteristics and behaviours of the group being studied. The researcher chose her sample based on the characteristics and behaviours of the family members, rather than focusing on the effects of a specific treatment. Thus, the informants were those who had a specific interest in their children's literacy development.

To identify the informants, the researcher used the mapping procedure, which consisted of thorough documentation of significant characteristics and behaviours within the study group, including the researcher's role, and a thorough description of how the data would be gathered throughout the mapping process to consider its effects on the general results of the study.

This process was provided to the informants—children from five kindergarten classrooms and their families (parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, other adults). The families volunteered to join other families twice a week for five months to learn and practise story-reading techniques.

The kindergarten teachers who worked with these families all had state certificates qualifying them to teach at this grade level, and they all emphasized literacy in their classrooms.

## Materials

The materials used in this study were children's books and items available in the home.

The children's books were selected based on the kindergarten children's interests, concerns and age. The books were developmentally appropriate for five-year-olds and were of interest to both the children and the families. In addition, the books contained elements that would motivate adults to engage in story reading with young children: powerful illustrations, engaging narratives, humorous situations and characters of a familiar type. The selected books were child-centred and had aesthetically pleasing illustrations. The children were able to interact with the books through humour, adventure and problem solving (Harris 2008).

The items from the home (such as toys or plants) were used in activities meant to extend the content of the selected stories. The objects were developmentally appropriate (easily used and safe for young children), authentic (representative of the home environment) and functional.

Materials for writing (paper, pencils, markers) and art (paintbrushes, tempera paints) were also used.

## The Story-Reading Intervention

With the recognition that the family's more active role in story reading may be beneficial to a child's



literacy development, an intervention was developed to teach family members how to provide literacy instruction through story reading.

The family story-reading intervention consisted of 30 sessions: 10 sessions to provide instruction to families and 20 sessions to allow families to demonstrate what they had learned.

During the first 10 sessions, teachers provided families with instruction in how to select appropriate stories to read to children, how to use appropriate strategies in reading stories, and how to extend stories through the use of appropriate materials and experiences.

In selecting developmentally appropriate stories, the families learned that good picture books and storybooks

- transmit the mores, attitudes and values of the culture;
- help children experience the emotions of others;
- are factual, realistic and imaginative in order to foster children's curiosity and nurture their interests;
- provide children with opportunities to learn the language, such as allowing them to explore the meaning of language and stimulating them to use their higher mental processes through language; and
- help children think about meanings in language by encouraging them to see relationships, recall similar feelings and incidents, and develop concepts, while generalizing and abstracting ideas (Saracho 2012).

The families also learned to select stories with fresh and well-paced plots, originality, credibility, specific conversations, well-defined characters, authentic and predictable results, a main plot, and an arousing climax (Saracho 2012).

Next, the families learned a variety of strategies for reading these stories to their children, participating in active discussions, recording children's dictation of the stories and motivating children to interact with books.

The teachers also showed the families how to extend the stories through related objects. Then, they demonstrated how to use story events to help children make accurate predictions about the plot and anticipate language, plot and sequence patterns. The teachers also provided strategies to extend the family-child interactions.

At each session, the teachers greeted the informants individually upon their arrival. After everybody had arrived, techniques were taught and modelled. The families adapted these techniques to match their individual styles and situations. New children's books, materials and activities that related to the children's environment and the family members' interests were introduced at each session.

## Data Collection

Data were collected using observations, interviews and documentary analysis to construct a detailed account of the family literacy program (Stake 2005; Stevenson 2004; Yin 2009). This case study used these procedures to focus on a literacy program that was examined under natural conditions.

In the sessions, the teachers provided the families with a literacy program they could use at home. The informants were videotaped while participating in the sessions that involved developing materials, lesson plans and activities. When the children attended sessions, dyad interactions between family members and children were videotaped. In addition, in one session, family members were asked to select and demonstrate a story-reading experience with related literacy activities. The informants were also interviewed at the beginning and at the end of the literacy program, each workshop and the demonstration activities.

The study provided a description of the learning process through observations; samples of the children's work; photographs; and in-depth periodic interviews with children, families and teachers. Throughout the study, samples of the children's stories were collected, field notes were recorded in a notebook, photographs were taken, and sketches were drawn to complement the field notes.

## Analysis

The videotaped observations and interviews were transcribed, typed and summarized. A summary account was completed for each dyad (family member and child). Each dyad profile was qualitatively examined for interaction patterns that might indicate the cultural context of the home, story-reading techniques, literacy abilities, knowledge of resources and beliefs about literacy.

Dyad interactions related to the families' preferences with regard to children's stories, story-reading strategies and activities were the primary units of analysis. The workshops and the informants' descriptions of their story-reading experiences in the home were extracted from the profiles to examine if the families had acquired new skills in story reading to promote their children's literacy development. The program included conventional and unconventional story-reading strategies for families to use both at home and at school.

The data presented a distinctive picture of the family literacy program, including its worth, innovations and trends in specific contexts. These data were bound to their explicit contexts and responded to the intervention program's general questions. Hence, a line of reasoning surfaced based on those components of the case that contributed to