

**Implementing a Bilingual Family Literacy Program with Immigrant and Refugee Families:
The Case of Parents As Literacy Supporters (PALS)**

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this study was to document the design and implementation of a bilingual family literacy program, Parents As Literacy Supporters or PALS (Anderson & Morrison, 2000) in five linguistic communities in the Greater Vancouver area of British Columbia.

Theoretical Frame

This study is informed by several overlapping theoretical perspectives. First, the work is guided by *socio-historical theory* (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1998) and its central tenet that learning is social as for example, when parents verbally guide their children's learning within the Zone of Proximal Development. This study is also informed by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) *ecological theory* of human development wherein children's learning is seen as occurring within three overlapping spheres of influence: the family, community and school. We also draw upon a *literacy as social practices* perspective (Heath, 1983; Street, 1985) in that the functions and purposes for which people engage in literacy, how it is learned and taught, and the meanings that people ascribe to literacy vary across socio-cultural contexts (Clay, 1993). And finally, whereas literacy was once conceived of as the ability to read and write, there is increasing recognition that there are *multiple literacies* (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Leu, Kinzer & Corio, 2004) in that meaning is represented and constructed through a range of modalities (Eisner, 1991; Jewitt & Kress, 2003).

Literature Review

Interest in the family as a site for children's literacy development came to the forefront with Taylor's (1983) classic study in which she documented how young preschool children in six middle class families in the United States were acculturated into literacy as their parents and significant others invited them to "write" grocery lists or birthday cards with them, pointed out

the ubiquitous print on signs, notices and logos in the environment, and shared books with them. However, Heath (1983) in documenting the literacy practices in families from three different communities found although some form of printed texts was present in all of the homes and the children in all of the homes were exposed to literate practices, only the middle class white children (Townpeople) successfully progressed through school. Likewise, Purcell-Gates (1996) in her study with 20 families from a low socio-economic neighborhood found considerable variation in their literacy practices. She found that children from families where there was *more frequent* reading and writing of *more complex* or extended texts (e.g., novels, reports, and letters) had greater knowledge of print at school entry than those children from families where there was less frequent engagement with more complex texts.

Much of the initial research in family literacy focused on the role of parents in young children's literacy development but more recently, researchers have begun to investigate the roles that significant others play. For example, Gregory (2005), in her ethnographic studies with immigrant families in East London, has illuminated the important roles that siblings play in supporting each others' learning. Mui and Anderson (2008) documented the important roles of the Nannies in a joint or extended Indo-Canadian family in supporting children's learning by playing similar roles to the siblings in that family and in Gregory's studies. Although print literacy has been the focus of much of the research, more recently researchers have also begun to focus on multiple literacies within the context of the family. For example, in her case study of Rajan, an eight-year-old from a working class family, McTavish (2009) reported technology mediated much of the literacy as he played video games, chatted online and emailed friends, and looked up information he needed to complete school assignments and for other purposes on the internet. Likewise, Carrington and Luke (2003) described how the two children in their study

engaged productively in a number of digital literacy practices at home but struggled with literacy in school. And finally, although most studies in family literacy have focused on children learning literacy in their first or home language, Li (2006; 2010) and others have looked at children learning to become literate in a second or third language within the context of their homes and communities.

Recognizing that the family is potentially a rich site for early literacy development, educators in the 1980s began developing family literacy programs to support and encourage young children's early literacy acquisition. Although family literacy programs have proliferated, there is a general dearth of research as to their efficacy and the results of the limited research have been mixed. For example, in a study of the long running, federally funded, Even Start program in the United States, St. Pierre, Ricciuti and Rimdzius (2006) "found no statistically significant or educationally important impacts on Even Start families when they were compared with control families on child literacy outcomes, parent literacy outcomes, or parent-child interactions" (p. 953). On the other hand, Jordan, Snow and Porche (2000) reported that children who had participated in an intervention called Project EASE made significantly greater gains in measures of vocabulary, comprehension of story, and story sequencing than children in a control group. In a Canadian study, Phillips, Hayden and Norris (2006) tracked nearly 200 families who participated in the *Learning Together: Read and Write with Your Child* program; they found that the children made significant gains in literacy compared to a control group, although the adult literacy measures did not significantly change. On the other hand, Anderson and Purcell-Gates (2010) reported that both the children and the adults who participated in the intergenerational literacy program, *Literacy For Life* demonstrated significant growth in literacy compared to the norm.

Parents As Literacy Supporters

The Parents As Literacy Supporters (PALS) program was developed by Anderson and Morrison in 1999-2000 in collaboration with other educators and members of the community. The developers had prior experiences working with families in diverse communities and in family literacy programs and they drew on these, and the research on early literacy development (e.g., Teale & Sulzby, 1986) as they developed the program (Anderson & Morrison, 2000). PALS was initially piloted in two inner-city schools in Langley and the next year expanded to two schools in diverse neighborhoods in Vancouver. Based on very positive feedback from the families and the educators working with them, the program quickly grew over the 10 or so years since its inception and is currently offered in communities throughout British Columbia, in the Northwest Territories, and Ontario, as well as in Switzerland and Uganda. As the program spread, it was adapted and modified to meet the needs of the communities. For example, in First Nations communities, aboriginal culture and languages were incorporated. Likewise, one of the schools in Langley, working with the cultural worker, modified the program to meet the needs of the local Vietnamese community, many of whom had been in Canada for some time but who tended not to participate in the school events such as assemblies, parent-teacher interviews, or special events (Perkins, 2010).

As we developed the PALS in Immigrant Communities project, we drew upon, and were informed by, our experiences working with families in different contexts (Anderson, 1995a; Anderson, Fagan, & Cronin, 2003; Anderson & Morrison, 2007; Anderson, Morrison, Leighton-Stephens, & Shapiro, 2007; Anderson, Norman, & Anderson, 2008; Anderson, Smythe, & Shapiro, 2005; Anderson, Smythe, Shapiro, & Morrison, 2003; Anderson, Purcell-Gates, Jang, & Gagne, 2010) and, in particular, the experiences with the Vietnamese community where a

bilingual version of the program was implemented (Perkins, 2010). The PALS in Immigrant Communities project entailed offering the PALS program in Farsi, Karen, Mandarin, and Punjabi in five school districts in the Greater Vancouver region of British Columbia.

Method

Research Sites

Site A was located in a highly populated, middle class residential neighborhood where the majority of the homes are less than four years of age. Twenty-four percent of the population is South Asian and is evenly split between children, adults and seniors. The school is a K–5 school with a student population of 400. The area around Site B is primarily middle class and is made up of older homes, with the majority of those being rental units. The population is made up of immigrants from East and South East Asia and China. The majority of the adults within the community have a university education. Site B was located in an annex adjacent to a K–7 school with a student population of just over 400. Of the five sites, Site C was located in the least populated and least ethnically diverse, working class residential area comprised mostly of rental units. The school is a K–5 school with a student population of approximately 200. The location of Site D changed from Year 1 to Year 2. Both schools in which the program took place are located in middle class residential area where the majority of the adults have a university education. Both schools are K–7 schools and house a student population of approximately 400. Site E was located in a working class, highly populated residential area in which the largest ethnic group is from South Asia. The majority of homes are privately owned. It is a family neighborhood, with children forming the largest demographic group. The school in which the program took place was a K–7 school with a population of around 500.

Data Collection and Measures

We employed the following instruments and data collection procedures in the study.

Test of Early Reading Ability-2 (TERA-2). The Test of Early Reading Ability-2 (Reid, Hresko, Hammill, 1989) is a widely used, standardized instrument that measures children's early or emerging understanding of print and print concepts. The test was designed for use with children aged three to eight. Trained personnel administered Form A of the test in Session 1 and Form B of the test in Session 9 individually to children at each site. For children with limited ability to understand English, a native speaker of the child's first or home language translated the prompts verbatim and when necessary, translated the child's responses to English.

Parents' Perceptions of Literacy Learning Interview Schedule (PPLLIS). The Parents' Perceptions of Literacy Learning Interview Schedule (PPLLIS) was designed to measure whether parents' perceptions or beliefs reflect a more traditional, skills based orientation or a more emergent, constructivist orientation (Anderson, 1994). The PPLLIS was administered in the first languages of the participants (or English if they preferred) in the first orientation session and in Session 9.

Children's Artifacts. In Sessions 2 and 9, we provided each child's family with a large (10'' X 13'') manila envelope labeled with the child's name, the date, and the facilitators' names. We asked them to collect all of the examples of children's drawings, writing, printing, painting and so forth and to return these in the envelope to the facilitators at the next session.

Focus Groups. The questions were presented in English and then translated by the cultural workers. Participants' responses were then translated into English and where necessary, follow-up questions were asked or clarification or elaboration sought. The focus group sessions

were digitally recorded and the English translations of the questions and the responses transcribed in their entirety and analyzed.

Session Debriefing. As was indicated earlier, each PALS session has a component where the adults meet with the facilitator for about one-half hour after they have been working with their children at the centres in the classroom. We audio-recorded the debriefing component of Sessions 4 and 8 each year; these were transcribed in their entirety.

Field Notes. The Principal Investigator and the Research Assistants took field notes for each session they attended. As well, after each session, the researchers typically wrote their reflections on the sessions.

Facilitators' Notes. We provided the facilitators at each site with a digital recorder and asked them to reflect and comment on each session in terms of their overall impression of the sessions, what seemed to work well, what needed adjustment, concerns and questions and so forth.

Results

Test of Reading Ability-2. To determine children's growth in literacy, we aggregated the Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) scores for both years and then compared the differences in the mean (average) scores over time (Sessions 1 and 9). A one-way repeated measures analysis of variance was conducted to compare the scores on the Test of Early Reading Ability 2 (TERA-2) at Time 1 (Session 1) and Time 2 (Session 9). There was a statistically significant increase in TERA-2 scores at the $p < .05$ level from Time 1 ($M = 35.91$, $SD = 20.12$) to Time 2 ($M = 52.71$, $SD = 22.92$), $F(1, 91) = 42.56$, $p < .001$. The effect size, partial eta squared = .318, was large according to Cohen's (1988) criteria. The change in the average of the NCE scores is depicted in Figure 1a.

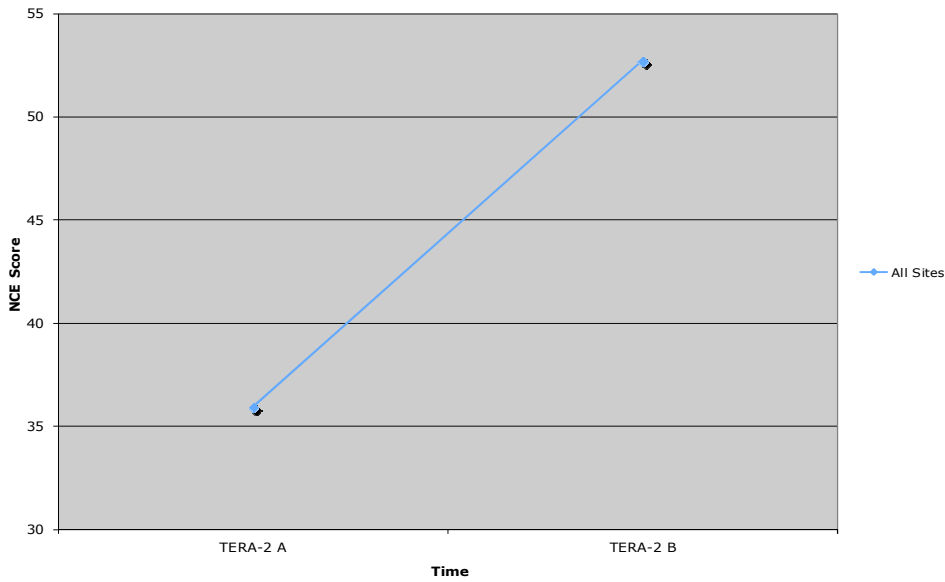


Figure 1a. Mean difference of Test of Early Reading Ability-2 scores from Time 1 to Time 2.

We also disaggregated the data and tested for effect of site and no significant differences were found (See Figure 2a). However, the growth overall was less in Site A than at the other sites. Furthermore, although the mean TERA-2 scores at both Site A and Site C increased over time, the average NCE score at the end of the program is at approximately the 40th percentile. That is, the children at both sites made statistically significant gains in literacy knowledge. The research literature clearly demonstrates that the more literacy knowledge that children possess upon school entry, the more likely they are to be successful in learning to read and write and therefore, we would argue that the gains the children made are also educationally significant and we believe that the prognosis for the children’s success in school has improved because of their families’ participation in the program. However, because these children on average are scoring below average, they will likely need additional support to continue to build on the gains that they have made in the relatively short duration of the PALS program.

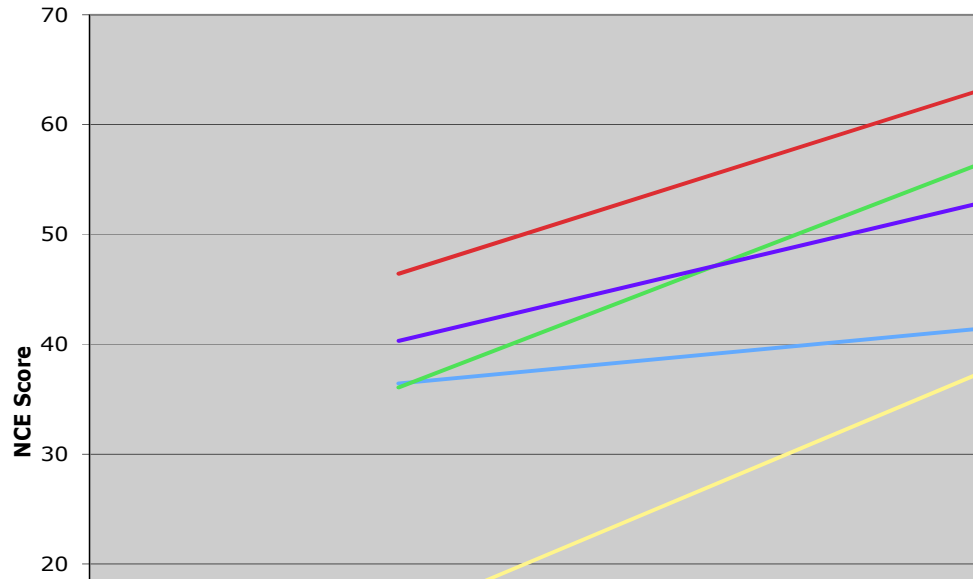


Figure 2a. Mean difference of Test of Early Reading Ability-2 scores from Time 1 to Time 2 by Site.

Parents' Perceptions of Literacy Learning Interview Schedule (PPLLIS). Although there were differences across the sites, participants generally held perceptions of early literacy learning that were consistent with an emergent literacy perspective (See Figure 2a). Furthermore, across all sites, participants' perceptions at the end of the program were more consistent with an emergent literacy perspective than they were at the commencement of the program, although these differences are not statistically significant and only marginally so in the case of Site B, for example.

To determine whether there was a relationship between parents' perceptions of literacy learning and children's early literacy knowledge, we correlated parents' scores on the PPLLIS and children's scores on the TERA-2. We did not find a statistically significant relationship.

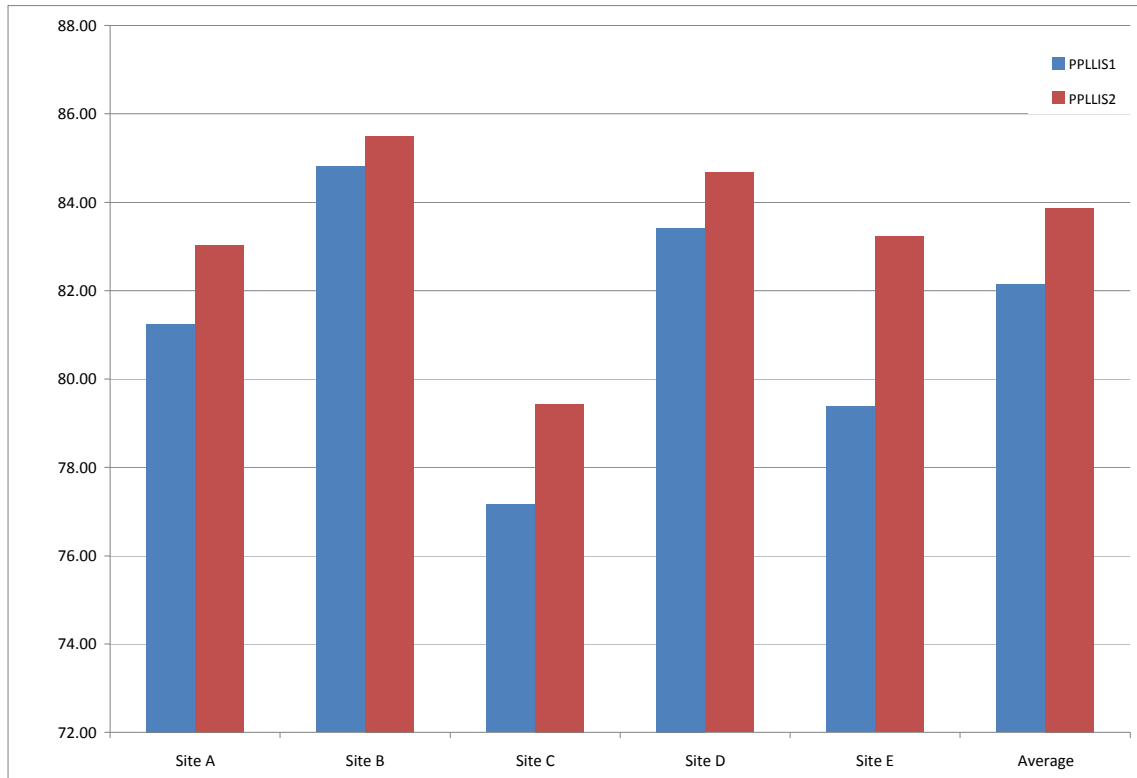


Figure 3a. Parents’ Perceptions of Literacy Learning Interview Schedule scores over time expressed in percentages.

Children’s Artifacts. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Harste, Woodward, & Burke, Wohlwend, 2009), we found that the children used various modalities to construct and represent meaning. Although most of the artifacts were generated by the children, it is noteworthy that worksheets and pages from coloring books and other commercial sources accounted for more than one-fifth of the samples. Furthermore, previous researchers (e.g., Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Wu, 2009) found that children incorporate elements of the orthography of their first or home languages in their early attempts at writing; we found no evidence of this phenomenon as English orthography only was apparent. (Add something here)

Focus Group. Many participants indicated that they engaged in joint book reading or shared reading at home in the first language, others indicated that they read in English, while still

others shared the books in both languages. Most of participants indicated that they speak their first language at home, with some of them also indicating they code-switch using both the first language and English. A few participants indicated they spoke only in their first or heritage language because of their limited facility in English. Some of the participants saw maintenance of first language as being very important and central to their cultural identity. Others believed that it was important to maintain their first language because having two languages would be an advantage for their children in future employment possibilities. Still others saw a second language as a form of linguistic capital—that knowing more than one language is a “good thing”.

In addition to using the books that were provided in the project, participants indicated that they also found the other materials very helpful. They also indicated that they and their children benefited in a number of ways from their participation in PALS. Parents indicated that they benefited by learning about the different ways that they could support their children. They indicated that having the program operate in their first or home language was essential; however, several of them also indicated that because of the bilingual format (English and first language) of the program, their own English learning was enhanced. As expected because of the foci of the program, they believed that children’s language and literacy and mathematics learning were enhanced. They also believed that the children had become familiar with the school and thus their transition to kindergarten would be smoother. Several participants indicated that their children’s ability to play and to learn had been enhanced.

Session Debriefing. We audio-recorded this debriefing portion of Session 4 (Literacy and Play) and Session 8 (Oral Language). Participants believed that they and their children derived a number of benefits from the session on play and they indicated that they would encourage their children to color and draw at home more so than they had done previously. Some

of the participants felt that there was not sufficient time for their children to engage in play while others felt that more opportunity should be provided for children to get to know each other prior to proceeding to the centres as they felt that children would be more inclined to play together and collaborate if they knew each other better.

The participants indicated that the children enjoyed this session on oral language and thought that it promoted collaboration and encouraged children's learning. They believed that the songs that helped their children to learn English also helped them to learn rhyming and patterning, to memorize stories, to develop their coordination when movement accompanied the music, and to recognize words. They commented on the motivational aspect of learning through song and rhyme and recognized the multiple ways that children can develop language in age appropriate ways.

Facilitators' Notes. For the most part, the facilitators made general comments about the session, for example, indicating the number of people who attended (e.g., "Twenty families registered, 17 came tonight"; "Glad to see 4 dads") or making observations of how the session had gone (e.g., "Very busy evening"; "Kids were really excited today"). On occasion, the facilitators also took the opportunity to engage in planning (e.g., "We need to have the book and CD *Here we go round the mulberry bush* set up and ready to play for next time"). The facilitators' notes provided a venue for reflection and they took advantage of this. For example, they often discussed a particular activity and how it needed to be adjusted, such as "Children sat too long—they sat during a story time and then had to sit through another one at the end." They also revealed that they were learning about the lives of the families with whom they were working, as well as learning about and discussing differences and commonalities across cultures.

Summary/Conclusion

In conclusion, we believe that the results of this study of PALS in Immigrant Communities project demonstrate the viability of a bilingual family literacy program in enhancing young children's literacy development in preparation for their entry to school. The results also suggest that parents also benefit, in terms of their understanding of young children's early learning and different ways to support that learning. Interestingly, although we did not directly focus on developing the adults' language and literacy, some of them said that they believed that their own skills in these areas had been enhanced through their participation in the program and their working with their children. Furthermore, the findings suggest that families do understand the value and benefits of children maintaining their home or first language, when provided with the proper explanations and support. And finally, this study demonstrates that a project such as this can be a tool for professional development, especially with regard to teachers working in cross-cultural and cross-linguistic settings.

Implementing a Bilingual Family Literacy Program in Immigrant and Refugee Families: The Case of Parents As Literacy Supporters (PALS)

The purpose of this study was to document the design and implementation of a bilingual family literacy program, Parents As Literacy Supporters or PALS (Anderson & Morrison, 2000) in five linguistic communities in the Greater Vancouver area of British Columbia. In this report, we: 1) provide the theoretical frame that we drew on to inform the study, 2) review the related literature and trace the development of the PALS program, 3) outline the methodology that we used, 4) provide the results of the study, and 5) discuss the findings of the study in terms of theory, contribution to knowledge, and implications for practice. We believe it is important to provide a thorough overview of the framework, an in-depth review of the literature, and a detailed description and evolution of the PALS program because it demonstrates the rigorous and informed manner in which we have worked in developing and implementing it across multiple contexts and communities.

Framework

Overarching this study is the socio-historical theory of Vygotsky (1978) and those who continue to work with and develop his ideas (e.g., Wertsch, 1998). A central tenet of this theory is that a great deal of learning is social as parents and caregivers verbally guide children within the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky proposed that adults structure activities so that children are able to engage in more complex behaviors than they could on their own. Adults and significant others provide support, pose questions and phrase statements according to children's current knowledge, thereby extending children's learning beyond where they are currently able to function on their own. More recently, Gregory and her colleagues have documented the important role that children, not just adults, play in supporting each other's

learning. Furthermore, Rogoff (2003) has demonstrated the cultural aspects of such learning. Her work demonstrates that the ways in which learning is supported differ in important ways across cultures, a point that we have documented in our own work with families (Anderson & Morrison, in press). And of course, as the foundational work of Piaget (1974) illustrated, children are also quite adept at learning on their own through the processes of accommodation and assimilation as they experiment with objects in their environment.

This study is also informed by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of human development. According to this theory, children's development is best understood as occurring within three overlapping spheres of influence: the home, school and community. Like Piaget, Bronfenbrenner stressed the importance of biological development, although he also postulated that factors outside of children's immediate environment affect them. For example, government policies that affect the access to resources in communities and neighborhoods in turn have an effect on how children develop.

We also draw on a literacy as social practices perspective (Heath, 1983) to inform this study. Traditionally, literacy has been conceived of as an amalgam of cognitive and linguistic skills transferable from one context to another, or what Street (1985) referred to as the *autonomous model* of literacy. However, over the last several decades, researchers such as Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanic (2000) and Street (1985) have shown that literacy also needs to be conceived of as complex, cultural and social practices. For as Clay (1993) suggested, the functions and purposes for which people engage in literacy, how it is learned and taught, and the meanings that people ascribe to literacy vary across socio-cultural contexts.

Traditionally, literacy has been thought of as the ability to decode and encode meaning through print. However, over the last several decades, a more expansive definition of literacy has

been promoted. For example Eisner (1991) argued that “literacy is broadly speaking the ability to encode and decode meaning in any of the forms used in culture to represent meaning” (p.14). Jewitt and Kress (2003) proposed that literacy encompasses the different ways that meaning is represented through different *modalities* while Cope and Kalantzis (2000) argued for the importance of *multiple literacies*. Others (e.g., Leu, Kinzer, & Corio, 2004) suggested that the digital age has spawned *new literacies* as technology takes on increasingly important roles in communication. While acknowledging the significant role that print still plays and the importance of children becoming proficient in decoding and encoding print, we also acknowledge the importance and significance of the broader conceptions of literacy.

Literature Review

Denny Taylor popularized the term *family literacy* with the publication of her book of that name in 1983. In that foundational work, Taylor documented how young, preschool children in six middle class families in the United States were acculturated into literacy as their parents and significant others invited them to “write” grocery lists or birthday cards with them, pointed out the ubiquitous print on notes, signs, notices and logos at home and in the community, and shared books with them.

However, others had identified the family as a potentially rich site for literacy learning prior to Taylor. For example, a century ago, E.B. Huey, a pioneer in the study of reading, proclaimed: “The secret of it all lies in the parents reading aloud to and with the child” (Huey, 1908, p. 332). Two important studies, by Durkin (1996) in the United States and by Clarke (1976) in Scotland, revealed that children were indeed learning to read at home prior to formal schooling. But it seemed to be Taylor’s study that led to a veritable explosion of research in young children’s literacy development in the context of the family (e.g., Baghban, 1984; Bissex,

1980). As Adams (1990) pointed out, many of these studies were conducted by parent academics with their own children and thus their generalizability was questionable. However, these studies did have the effect of shifting the focus from reading (and storybook reading in particular) to a broader view of literacy including writing.

As we have pointed out elsewhere (Anderson, Anderson, Friedrich, & Kim, 2010), an interesting bifurcation occurred around this time and the term *family literacy* began to connote different things to different people. For some, family literacy means programs or interventions, often aimed at poor, less well educated families based on the notion that these initiatives would better prepare children for school entry and boost their chances of being successful in school and consequently, in life. For others, however, *family literacy* means describing and understanding the literacy practices in which families engage as they go about their daily lives. We next highlight some of the research in each of these paradigms, family literacy practices and family literacy programs.

Family Literacy Practices

As mentioned earlier, a foundational work in family literacy was Taylor's study with the middle class families living in the northeastern United States. Around the same time, though, a landmark study by Shirley Brice Heath conducted in the Piedmont area of the southeastern United States demonstrated the complexities inherent in considering the family as a site for literacy learning and teaching. In that ethnographic study that took place over several years, Heath (1983) documented the literacy practices in families in three different communities. She found that some form of printed texts was present in all of the homes and that the children in all of the homes were exposed to literate practices. However, only the middle class, white children (Townpeople) successfully progressed through school. The children from Trackton, a working

class white community, and Roadville, an African American community, experienced difficulty. Essentially, Heath concluded that the communicative patterns and the discursive practices of Townspeople fitted or mapped on those of the school; on the other hand, communicative patterns and the discourse processes that the children from Roadville and Trackton were socialized into differed from those of the school, and hence the children's difficulties with literacy and learning there.

Although it is sometimes assumed that the homes of children from poor families are bereft of literacy (Auerbach, 1995), studies have found that this is not necessarily the case. For example, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) found that the African American families with whom they worked were very supportive of their children's literacy development, engaged their children in a range of literacy activities, and had high expectations for their children, despite the fact that they lived in poverty in deplorable conditions in an inner-city neighborhood they called "Shaye Avenue".

Purcell-Gates (1996) investigated the relationships between the literacy practices that were part of daily life in lower socio-economic class homes and children's emerging literacy knowledge upon school entry. She found that there was great variation in the literacy practices among this relatively homogeneous group. That is, in some families, literacy events were frequent across a range of texts; in other families, literacy events were relatively infrequent with a limited range of text types such as grocery coupons or the TV Guide that served more limited functions or purposes. As well, children from families where there was more frequent reading and writing of more complex or extended texts (e.g., novels, reports, letters) had greater knowledge of print than those from families where there was less frequent engagement with such texts.

Much of the research in family literacy initially focused on the role(s) of parents in supporting young children's learning. However, Gregory (2005), in her ethnographic studies with immigrant families in East London, illuminated the important roles that siblings play in supporting each others' learning. For example, she audio-taped children as they played school at home and demonstrated how the older children teach the young children in English. She posits that the older children, through playing school, help the young children acquire knowledge that will greatly enhance their language and literacy learning at school while at the same time strengthening and consolidating their own knowledge as they practice their literacy skills through role playing. More recently, Gregory and her colleagues have begun to document the role of grandparents in children's literacy development, an important issue because in East London (and in many other communities including some in the Greater Vancouver area where the present study took place), the grandparents take on much of the responsibility for raising and teaching children. They use a blend of traditional teaching practices from the Bengal and more contemporary, Western pedagogy to teach the children how to read and write. Gregory suggests that these practices exemplify *syncretism*, defined as "a creative process in which people reinvent culture as they draw on diverse resources, both familiar and new" (p.11).

In a study somewhat akin to the work of Gregory and her colleagues, Mui and Anderson (2008) documented the literacy practices of the Johars, a *joint* Indo-Canadian family in a metropolitan area in western Canada. The Johar household consisted of a set of grandparents, their sons/daughters and their spouses, and the grandchildren. Finances are pooled and shared in a joint household and childrearing is also a shared responsibility. The siblings in the Johar family supported each others' learning, helping each other with homework, playing word games and board games, and participating in role playing and dramatic play. However, the Nannies also

supported the children's learning by playing similar roles to the siblings, demonstrating that in some families or household, the range of young children's language and literacy supporters is quite extensive. Furthermore, the Mui and Anderson study points to the need to conceptualize *family* more broadly than the traditional North American nuclear model.

Much of the research in family literacy has focused on children's engagement with print and texts in traditional formats (Anderson, Anderson, Friedrich, & Kim, 2010). However, researchers have also begun to study the role of digital literacy within the family context. For example, in her case study with eight-year-old Rajan, a grade three student from a working class family in an urban area of British Columbia, McTavish (2009) found that at home, much of the literacy that he engaged in was mediated by technology as he played video games, chatted online and emailed friends, and looked up information he needed to complete school assignments and for other purposes on the internet. Rajan's at home literacy experiences were generally not acknowledged in school, a finding consistent with that of Carrington and Luke (2003) who described how the two children in their study also engaged productively in a number of digital literacy practices at home but were regarded as struggling learners at school. Interestingly, they claimed that the children's at home literacy experiences were better preparing them to participate more fully in a global and technological world than were the school practices with the emphasis on decoding print.

Many of the studies reviewed and indeed much of the literature in family literacy focused on families' first language and literacy. However, more recently researchers have begun to document children's bi-literacy development within the context of the family. For example, Li (2006) examined the language and literacy practices of three young Chinese Canadian students who attended the same neighborhood school in an urban area of western Canada. Despite the

same shared language, cultural background, and ethnicity, the children's at home language and literacy practices varied considerably. Anthony Chan's family wants him to retain the Chinese language and he dutifully attended Chinese language school, although he found the lessons difficult and boring. However, they also believe that it is essential that he learn English well and they spoke to him in English at home. Anthony read at home but only in English; indeed, he had already lost his first language. On the other hand, Alana Tang, was immersed in the Chinese language at home. Her family spoke to her only in Mandarin and they regularly taught her how to read and write in Chinese. Alana did watch some English language television programs at home but her family believed it was the school's role to teach her English. They saw their role as ensuring she maintained her heritage language. Kevin Ma spoke only English at home, even when his family spoke to him in Chinese. Kevin was a voracious reader in English at home. He emailed relatives in Hong Kong in an effort to improve his English. Kevin continued to attend Chinese school, although he was making very little progress. As Li (2006; 2010) points out, these three cases indicate that a constellation of factors including parents' education, families' access to various resources, parents' perceptions of the importance of heritage language, and how heritage languages are valued (or not valued) in school and in the community all contribute to children's biliteracy and bilingual practices at home.

To summarize then: 1) most children experience literacy at home prior to school but there is wide variation in the frequency and types of literacy activities at home; 2) home literacy experiences contribute to children's emerging literacy experiences prior to formal instruction in school or preschool; 3) a range of caregivers in addition to parents support early literacy development; 4) many young children currently are engaging in digital literacy practices at home; and 5) although some children successfully become biliterate and bilingual by

maintaining their heritage or first language while learning the dominant language of the communities in which they live, others are not successful for a variety of reasons.

Family Literacy Programs

In the 1980s principally as a result of the publication of Taylor's (1983) seminal work and the plethora of studies that followed, educators began to develop family literacy programs. Today, there are literally thousands of family literacy programs available.¹ Obviously, it is beyond the scope of this study to review these; instead, several different types of programs which have a research or evaluative component are examined.

The federally funded Even Start program in the United States has been one of the longest running initiatives. Started in 1989, the program expanded rapidly throughout the country. Even Start is an example of the Kennan model in that it has four components: 1) early childhood education, 2) a parent-child together time, 3) parenting education, and 4) adult education. In a two-year evaluation project that involved 463 families in 18 sites, St. Pierre, Ricciuti and Rimdzius (2006) "found no statistically significant or educationally important impacts on Even Start families when they were compared with control families on child literacy outcomes, parent literacy outcomes, or parent-child interactions" (p. 953). They attributed the lack of impact to two factors: the lack of consistent attendance at sessions and ineffective curriculum instruction that were determined locally and could vary from site to site.

Jordan, Snow and Porche (2000) reported on an intervention program called Project EASE (Early Access to Success in Education) implemented in schools where approximately 20%

¹ Please see the Centre for Family Literacy in Edmonton

(http://www.famlit.ca/programs_and_projects/programs/tutor.html), LiteracyBC (<http://www.literacybc.ca/>), or the National Center for Family Literacy in the United States (<http://www.famlit.org/>) for examples of programs.

of children were from low income homes in a suburban school district of Minnesota. The majority of families were of European descent and few children spoke a language other than English at home. Project EASE consisted of five, one-month units consisting of an in-school parenting session followed by an opportunity for parents and children to work together so that parents had an opportunity to apply the principles they had been taught or had demonstrated to them. Then, for each of the other three weeks, the teachers sent home “structured activities [that] included scripted interactions and demonstrations of how to engage children in extended discussions surrounding a book” (p. 529). Pre and post test comparisons of the children participating in the project (n=177) and children from similar schools in the district not participating in the project (n=71) revealed that the Project EASE children made significantly greater gains on measures of vocabulary, comprehension of story, and story sequencing.

In another quasi-experimental study conducted over several years, Phillips, Hayden and Norris (2006) tracked nearly 200 families who participated in the Learning Together: Read and Write with Your Child program in a Canadian city. In comparison with children in a control group, children involved in the program made statistically significant gains in literacy knowledge. Phillips et al. found that the program did not significantly affect the adults’ literacy knowledge, which was perhaps to be expected since the program did not have an adult literacy component.

Anderson, Purcell-Gates, Jang and Gagne (2010) documented the development and implementation of an intergenerational family literacy project called *Literacy for Life* with immigrant and refugee families in the Greater Vancouver area of British Columbia. The focus in the program was on *authentic* or *real life* literacy activities defined as *reading real life texts for real life purposes* (e.g., reading a recipe in order to bake a cake to celebrate someone’s birthday).

The program had three components: adult literacy, early childhood literacy, and family or parent-child together time. Pre and post test comparisons of the results on standardized tests revealed that both the adults and children made statistically significant gains in comparison to the norming group.

One of the most enduring programs that has been well documented is Project FLAME-Family Literacy Aprendiendo Mejorando Educando (Learning, Bettering, Educating)—that originated in the Chicago area (Rodriguez-Brown, 2004; Shanahan, Mulhern, & Rodriguez-Brown, 1995). The program attempts to build on the *funds of knowledge* and the social and cultural capital of the Latino families for which it was designed. Families who attend the program must have a child or children ages 3–9. Adult ESL classes are provided bi-weekly and parents as teachers classes bi-monthly. In addition to improving the literacy skills and knowledge of the adults and the children, the program has also been shown to improve the self esteem and the confidence of the participants, allowing them fuller participation in society (Rodriguez-Brown, 2004),

Although many family literacy programs tend to focus on book reading and to downplay or ignore other aspects of literacy (Anderson, Anderson, & Strelasky, 2007), some studies have examined how family literacy programs affect children's writing. For example, Wollman-Bonilla (2001) described a project with middle class, English speaking families in which children took home their journals regularly and their parents responded to them. She found that parents supported the children's writing by responding to their messages and asking them questions about the content of the messages. As well, parents modeled a range of genres in their responses including, "(1) informational texts, (2) jokes and riddles, (3) narrative, (4) moral lessons, and (5) poetic texts" (p. 176). Saint-Laurent and Giasson (2005) compared the writing of children whose

parents had participated in a family literacy program consisting of nine, 90-minute workshops on various topics with children from a similar demographic (i.e., low and middle SES) whose parents had not participated in a program. They found that the children whose families had participated in the program scored significantly higher on the following aspects of writing: length of text, sentence structure, spelling and vocabulary.

In summation then, there are many different types of family literacy programs aimed at different clientele and with different foci. In general, the outcomes of these programs have been positive and in some cases, extend beyond literacy and language learning. Despite this generally positive evaluation of family literacy programs, over the years, concerns about them have been expressed and issues raised; these will now be examined briefly.

Issues in family literacy programs. Elsa Auerbach (1989; 1995; 2010) has been one of the most important voices asking critical questions about family literacy programs. Her critiques have focused on several points: 1) that family literacy programs are targeted toward marginalized families and as if the families are the *problem*; 2) a tacit assumption is that what some families do at home and in their communities in supporting children's literacy development is wrong and they need to engage in literacy that is more school-like; and 3) families need to abandon their first languages and cultures and need to learn the dominant language and dominant culture. According to Auerbach, then, many family literacy programs are based on deficit notions of families and ignore the strengths inherent in most families, no matter what their situations.

Others have raised gender issues in relation to family literacy programs. For example, Macleod (2008) found that very few men attended the family literacy program that was the focus of the study, even though they could be seen heavily involved in childrearing in the community

where the sessions took place. Based on interviews with men who were aware of the program and refused to attend and men who had attended sessions but dropped out, Macleod reported:

It was a feminized atmosphere that catered only for women. Attending would be an ordeal they preferred to avoid as it prevented them from being true to ‘themselves’ due to the ‘femaleness’ of the physical space. This ‘hidden curriculum’ manifested itself in the lack of male presence amongst staff and participants. The designers and providers of the curriculum were, without exception, women. Staffs were without exception female and many admitted not having prior experience of working with men. Tasks/activities were *heavily gendered*. They were heavily rooted in ‘mothering’ (p. 780).

Of course, there is another side to the gender issue and Mace (1998) and Prins and Toso (2008) point out, within family literacy programs, by design or default assume it is mothers who will assume the responsibility for their children’s early literacy development, in addition to bearing many of the other childrearing responsibilities.

Another persistent issue in family literacy programs has been the relative lack of documentation or evaluation of their effectiveness (Senechal, 2008). More than a decade ago, Thomas and Skage (1998) identified the lack of assessment and evaluation of family literacy programs in Canada, commenting “the level of program evaluation in family literacy amounts to little more than testimonials” (p.20). Hannon (2010) noted that this issue still persists, recommending that all programs earmark a portion of their budget to systematically assessing their efficacy and impact. To summarize, although family literacy programs continue to proliferate, a number of issues continue to persist.

Background: Parents As Literacy Supporters (PALS) in Immigrant and Refugee Communities²

In this section, we trace the development and evolution of the Parents As Literacy Supporters (PALS) program. It should be pointed out that from the outset, we have paid attention to the concerns and issues regarding family literacy programs that were just discussed and consistently attempted to address or ameliorate them to the greatest extent possible.

We—Jim Anderson, a professor at the University of British Columbia, and Fiona Morrison, the Primary Grades Coordinator with the Langley School District—began the development of PALS in 1999. We had been invited by the mayor of Langley City to participate in an interagency, community development initiative she was leading in inner-city neighborhoods called *Strengthening Families*. The *Strengthening Families* steering committee consisted of representatives from community services, education, health, social services, as well as from other community organizations. Our role was to assist in developing a program that would support children's education and particularly their literacy development in two schools in the inner-city neighborhood.

The Roots of PALS

We both came with extensive experiences working with families, as well as working in communities where people faced many challenges on a daily basis. For example, Anderson was first involved with a family literacy program in the late 1980s as an assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction with the Avalon North Integrated School Board in Newfoundland.

² An earlier version of this section appeared in: Anderson, J., & Morrison, F. (2000). *The PALS Handbook: Creating and sustaining a Culturally Responsive Family Literacy Program*. Langley, British Columbia Langley School District.

The school district covered a fairly large rural area with a number of small schools in relatively isolated villages. As was (and is) the case with Newfoundland in general, the district was seen as having a low literacy rate.

During his first year in the position, Anderson was approached by the principal of St. Mark's School with the idea of setting up what he called an intervention program. The only school in the community of Shearstown, St Mark's served children from kindergarten through grade 9. Senior high school students from Shearstown attended Ascension Collegiate, a fairly large regional high school located in the adjacent community of Bay Roberts.

As the principal saw it, the school and the community were facing a number of problems. First, there was the issue of low literacy and this was reflected in the day to day work of the children and their performance on provincial assessments. Many of the students had difficulty making the transition from St Mark's to the high school and many of them eventually dropped out of school. As well, the principal believed that parents and children had generally low expectations and this was reflected in the relatively low number of students from the community who went on to attend university or other post secondary institutions. The community also had a significant number of families receiving social assistance. It had no real economic base and many of those who were able to find jobs worked unskilled and seasonal jobs or left the community each year for temporary jobs elsewhere.

The principal believed that essentially a cycle of low literacy, low expectations existed in the community and he saw a preschool intervention program that would help children get a head start in literacy as a way of breaking the cycle. A number of factors appeared to contribute to the initiative successfully getting started. First, the principal was born, had grown up in and still lived in the community, he was well respected and understood the community, its strengths and

its needs well. Second, through his work with a local church and in civic affairs, as well as through his role as principal of the school, he was seen as a leader whom people trusted. Third, he saw the intervention program as a community effort involving the school, parents, church and community leaders, social workers and public health nurses. For example, we met with the local director of social services who was tremendously supportive and indicated that she and her staff would “talk up” the project with the parents with whom they worked. One of the local priests, who also happened to be a school trustee, was a pillar of support. He spoke passionately at the initial meeting with the families and it was rumored that from the pulpit, he would praise the program and encourage parents to participate in it. Other community leaders were strong supporters. This community involvement was seen as crucial and it was highlighted when the proposal to implement the program was presented to the School Board Trustees. They were very supportive, approving a budget for supplies, granting release time for the two kindergarten teachers who would be involved, and lending the support of central office to the project.

For the most part, the program was developed and implemented by Linda Christian, the School District Early Childhood Coordinator and Pamela Norman, a grade one teacher and Sally Peddle, the kindergarten teacher at St. Mark’s School. They strongly believed that it was not enough to provide parents with information about how they could help their children learn literacy and numeracy; they believed that it was necessary to model for the parents how a significant other could support preschool children’s learning. Consequently, the program was designed as follows.

Once each month, groups of six four-year-olds and one of their parents or another caregiver would attend a two-hour session in the kindergarten classroom. One of the facilitators (the ECE coordinator or one of the kindergarten teachers) read a story with the children,

modeling various interactive shared reading strategies. The children then went to one of a variety of centres (e.g., writing centre, art centre, sand/water table, math centre, and so forth). Parents were encouraged to work with their children in the centre and to observe what the children were doing. One of the facilitators also worked with the children, again demonstrating how children's learning could be supported and encouraged. Time was provided for the parents to discuss what they had observed and to ask questions. At the conclusion of each session, the children were provided with a book, writing materials to take home, and an outline and the date of the next session provided. We expected the families to keep the materials since we saw them as essential resources to support learning at home.

Unfortunately, there was no systematic plan to document the effects of the program. However, Norman (1997) anecdotally traced the history of the program. Comparing such factors as retention rates, scores on standardized tests such as the Canadian Test of Basic Skills, and the results of school based evaluation of students prior to the implementation of the program with those of students who had participated in the program, she concluded that the project had been highly successful. Later, Anderson, Norman and Anderson (2008) interviewed 12 of the parents who had participated in the initial cohort of the program. This retrospective assessment revealed that the parents were overwhelmingly supportive of it. Anderson et al. concluded:

Parents learned strategies and skills to support children's learning at school. They also gained insights into teaching and learning in early childhood education, including the role of play. Furthermore, they came to understand expectations for four-and-five-year old children and that there are individual differences in children's learning and different ages at which children meet these expectations. They also recognized that the program had ramifications beyond its impact on children's literacy learning including, helping parents

coalesce as a group and in feeling more comfortable and involved in the school generally (p.5).

Fiona Morrison's interest in and involvement with family literacy stems from several decades of working with young children and their families. She spent many years as an early primary teacher and believed that involving families in supporting young children's learning was a cornerstone of her practice. She engaged in graduate studies in the early 1990s and conducted an ethnographic study with mothers of kindergarten aged children. Several of the women reported that schools were not welcoming places for them and Fiona became interested in exploring what were some of the barriers to meaningful parent involvement. From this experience, she came to the field of family literacy and recognized that there was a rich research base to draw from.

In addition to co-developing the program, Fiona was the facilitator of the program in the pilot project and over several years in a variety of other contexts. As interest in the program has grown, she has continued to provide training, mentoring and support to others as they have implemented the program.

Developing PALS

In developing PALS, we relied extensively upon our previous work with families and we drew from the literature on family literacy to extrapolate the following assumptions or principles:

- that the parents are committed to and interested in their children's literacy development.
- that most parents provide many opportunities for their children to learn literacy at home (Purcell-Gates, 1996; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1998).
- that the kinds of literacy experiences which are being provided in the homes might be (and probably are) different from school literacy (Heath, 1983; McTavish, 2009).


- that some parents need and want knowledge and specific suggestions about how they can support their children's literacy development.
- that we need to help parents acquire this knowledge in a manner which was as unobtrusive as possible and which respected the support that they were already providing their children.
- that the program should reflect a social contextual approach to family literacy by affirming the value of the literacy experiences the parents were already providing for their children and helping them develop and use others which were meaningful and had value in the contexts of their daily lives (Auerbach, 1989).
- that children learn literacy by participating in a wide variety of literacy activities and events and that there is no single or indeed "best" way for children to learn literacy. Thus while we value storybook reading, we believed that there are multiple pathways into literacy and we attempted to reflect this in the activities and strategies (Gregory, 2005; Mui & Anderson, 2008).
- that young children's literacy development is best understood from an ecological perspective. That is, we saw literacy development occurring in three contexts: the school, the community and the home and we recognized that there are overlapping influences from each of these contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Pahl & Kelly, 2005).

Although as mentioned, we had already worked extensively with families and were familiar with the family literacy field, we still wanted to ensure that PALS reflected the social-contextual realities of the local community. Consequently, we hosted several focus group sessions with parents, early childhood educators, and administrators. Based on these discussions, we drafted modules that reflected the topics that the families had identified as important to them. These included:

- ABC's and Learning
- Print in our Community
- Storybook Reading
- Linking Literacy and Play
- Learning to Read
- Early Math
- Early Writing
- Riddles, Raps & Rhymes
- Tiny Techies
- Celebration / Graduation
- Open Session (decided by PALS community)

Several points need elaboration here. First, although theorists see oral language as foundational in children's literacy development (e.g., Dickinson & Tabors, 2001), the parents that we worked with believed that learning the letters of the alphabet and their "sounds" was the essence of learning to become literate. Second, they were also interested in other aspects of young children's learning and requested that children's early mathematics be addressed. Third, they were also cognizant of the increasing role of technology and requested a session on "computers". Finally, we wanted to provide flexibility so that communities could develop sessions addressing topics of local interest or concern so we built in an "Open session". Of course, we were providing *templates* of sessions and these could be modified. For example, when we expanded the pilot programs into a neighbouring city, the families at one of the sites did not want a session on computers or technology—instead they wanted a session about children's television viewing (Anderson, Smythe, & Shapiro, 2005).

In constructing each session, we again relied on our previous experiences in working with families, as well as the literature on family literacy programs. Each session commences with sharing food in recognition of the social dimensions of these programs (See Figure 1 for overview of typical session). Then, the children go to the classroom where the teacher or childcare worker reads them a book or engages them in various play based centres. Meanwhile, the program facilitator and the parents and other caregivers discuss the topic of the day. They also reflect on the previous session, sharing insights and their experiences with the ideas and materials. The parents/caregivers then join the children in the classrooms and they spend about an hour at various centres, each reflecting the theme of the day and infused with literacy in developmentally appropriate ways (Roskos, Christie, Widman, & Holding, 2010). Then while the children are at recess, the parents/caregivers meet again for a debriefing session in which the facilitator encourages and leads them to reflect on the experiences they have just had working with their children, noting what they have observed about their children’s learning and so forth.

<p>Parents As Literary Supporters</p> <hr/> <p>TOPIC: Early Writing: SESSION 6</p> <hr/>	 <p>(Anderson & Morrison, 2000)</p>
<p>Key Ideas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are recognized developmental stages in learning to write in English (scribbling, random sounds, etc.) • All children's attempts at writing need to be celebrated • Phonics and spelling strategies are useful tools in development writing - they must be in context 	

- Children need opportunities to learn and practice correct letter formation in fun and engaging ways
- Writing needs to have a purpose and audience in order for it to be meaningful for young children, (letters, e-mail, etc.)
- Young children's drawing, labeling and writing are related

Session Overview

<p>Eating together (Facilitators, adult participants, and children)</p> <p>Beginning (ADULTS ONLY) What's New? Observations/insights from previous session</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents discuss writing inventory • Examining children's writing (samples) • Stages of development • Model interactive writing process with parents. Highlight the amount of teaching that happens through this process. 	
<p>Middle</p> <p>Writing centres in classroom - some suggestions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shaving cream - children write their names, words from the word wall, etc. • survey - parents and children use clipboards to go around and survey e.g., Do you like snakes Yes/No • find motor booklet - a practice activity to reinforce directionality • scribe a story - parents scribe for their children • magazine picture - use the picture as a stimulus for a story. Parent to record. • Rosie's walk puppets - make a puppet to accompany take home book. 	
<p>End</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debrief What Did You Notice? • Questions/Answers, Looking Ahead 	
<p>Materials for Session</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing in Kindergarten process • Spelling development sheet 	<p>Take Home Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Felt pens • Special pencil • Scrapbook with special cover

Take Home Book

Rosie's Walk Author: Pat Hutchins ISBN: 0-590-41239-6 Publisher: Scholastic
I Went Walking Author: Sue Williams ISBN: 0-590-00464-6 Publisher: Scholastic
I Can Write Author: Rozanne Lanczak Williams ISBN: 0-916119-56-4 Publisher: Creative Teaching Press
Writing Places Author: Pamela Chanko ISBN: 0-7791-0448-X Publisher: Scholastic
A Boy A Dog and A Frog Author: Mercer Mayer ISBN: 0-14-054611-1 Publisher: Puffin
The Very Hungry Caterpillar Author: Eric Carle ISBN: 0-590-03029-9 Publisher: Scholastic Inc.

Figure 1. Overview of session on early writing.³

In January, 2000, we were ready to pilot the program and so we began offering it in two inner-city schools in Langley City. From the outset, the goal of PALS was to work with parents in supporting their children's early literacy development. However, as we implemented the program, we also noted other outcomes, including 1) enhanced self esteem on the part of parents; 2) greater awareness of their children's development, social, emotional and cognitive; 3) an increased awareness on the part of parents of the roles of literacy in their own lives, 4) greater awareness on the part of parents of their roles as parents, and 5) enhancement of their own literacy development. But to reiterate, the activities and strategies and resources which comprise PALS are all designed to help parents help children's language, literacy and numeracy development.

³ This version is from the original PALS Handbook. The Handbook has undergone several revisions as the program has evolved.

Based on the very positive feedback we received from the families, we then decided to expand the pilot and began working in two, inner-city schools in a neighboring city. Although there were challenges working in these multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, sites, the families and the teachers involved in facilitating the program responded positively (Anderson, Smythe, & Shapiro, 2005). Word of the program spread and eventually 25 school districts in British Columbia provided the program and it was also offered in Ontario, the Northwest Territories, Switzerland and Uganda.

As the program expanded beyond the communities where it was first developed, adjustments were necessary. For example, in First Nations communities, aboriginal culture and languages were incorporated. Likewise, one of the schools in Langley working with the cultural worker, modified the program to meet the needs of the local Vietnamese community, many of whom had been in Canada for some time but who tended not to participate in the school events such as assemblies, parent-teacher interviews, or special events (Perkins, 2010). Sessions were offered in Vietnamese and bilingual materials and books were provided. Although the families were very pleased with the sessions, the adults very quickly indicated that they wanted to improve their own abilities in English and so an adult English as a Second Language component was added. Many of the families returned in the second year, and the adults again asked for an adult literacy component to continue, but this time they wanted to focus on technology and the use of computers and the internet. Having acquired sufficient digital literacy to meet their needs, the adults in the third year indicated that they would like to focus on parenting issues and the school again responded to this expressed need (Perkins, 2010).

PALS in Immigrant Communities

The PALS in Immigrant Communities project was a partnership between the developers of the program, Jim Anderson and Fiona Morrison, and 2010 Legacies Now (www.2010LegaciesNow.com). Under the management and expertise of 2010 Legacies Now, and with support from the Province of British Columbia, a three-year pilot project was developed specifically for immigrant and refugee communities. As is mentioned elsewhere in this report, the infrastructure, leadership and support offered by them has been crucial in implementing and documenting this initiative.

As we developed the PALS in Immigrant Communities project, we drew upon, and were informed by, our experiences working with families in different contexts (Anderson, 1995a; Anderson, Fagan, & Cronin, 2003; Anderson & Morrison, 2007; Anderson, Morrison, Leighton-Stephens, & Shapiro, 2007; Anderson, Norman, & Anderson, 2008; Anderson, Purcell-Gates, Jang, & Gagne, 2010; Anderson, Smythe, & Shapiro, 2005; Anderson, Smythe, Shapiro, & Morrison, 2003; Perkins, 2010). We established an Advisory Committee that consisted of representatives from each of the linguistic communities with whom we were working, the funding agencies, and the university; we met with and reported to this group on a regular basis. We also met regularly with a Working Committee that consisted of program coordinators from the participating school boards. In addition to ensuring administrative and logistical support in each of the communities, that group also provided advice and guidance. Finally, prior to commencing the program, we provided the facilitators with an intensive professional development program on working with families from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. We continued to offer ongoing and regular professional development opportunities for the facilitators, as well as providing them with ongoing logistical support.

Over the course of the PALS in Immigrant Communities project, sessions were held in schools in five school districts between January, 2008 and June, 2010. All but one district held at least 22 PALS sessions during this time. During the project, 353⁴ different families participated. The countries of origin included India, the Philippines, China, Taiwan, Burma (Myanmar) via Thailand and via Bangladesh, Bosnia, Korea, Jamaica, Iran, Jordan, Mexico, Sri Lanka, and Romania. Participants included parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, caregivers, infants and toddlers, preschool children, and kindergarten children. In several school districts, bilingual school-aged children supported the families by being volunteer mentors, tutors, translators, and big buddies.

Research Ethics

This study was approved by the Behavioral Research Ethics Board (BREB) of the University of British Columbia. As per the conditions of that certificate, we provided letters of consent and assent in the participants' first languages or in English if they requested. The cultural workers explained the research project as necessary and answered any questions or concerns, again in the first language or in English. Furthermore, the participants' first languages (and when requested, English) were used in all of the phases of the data collection including the Test of Early Reading Ability-2 where a translator provided the prompts in the child's home language and then back translated the responses in English.

⁴ Not all families participated in all phases of the research. For example, for the Test of Early Reading Ability-2, 91 children took part over the two years. These were the children whose parents/guardians had given informed consent for their participation, who had attended Session 1 for the first administration of the TERA-2A and were present at Session 9 for the administration of TERA-2B.

Method

Research Sites

Site A is located in a highly populated, middle class residential neighborhood where the majority of the homes are less than four years of age. Twenty-four percent of the population is South Asian. The population is evenly split between children, adults and seniors. The school is a K-5 school with a student population of 400. The families met at the supper hour. A light supper consisting mainly of Southeast Asian finger foods was served prior to the start of the session and the families would eat in the school's multi-purpose room. Immediately following the sharing of food, the adults moved into the computer lab for the adult only session while the children participated in a supervised play session in the library. Both parents and children came together to work at the centres located in the regular kindergarten classroom. The children then returned to the library while the parents participated in the parent debrief session in the classroom.

The area around Site B is made up primarily of middle class families living in older homes, the majority of which are rental units. The population is comprised of immigrants from East and Southeast Asia and China. The majority of the adults within the community have a university education. Site B is located in an annex adjacent to a K-7 school with a student population of just over 400. The program began in the early afternoon and a hot lunch consisting of traditional Asian food was served to the families in the multi-purpose room prior to the session. The parents remained in this room for the adult-only session, while the children were taken to an adjacent room that was set up for kindergarten use. The parents joined the children in that room for centre work. The parents then returned to the multi-purpose room for the debriefing session.

Of the five sites, Site C is located in the least populated and least ethnically diverse neighborhood. It is in a working class residential neighborhood, with the majority of the housing being rental units. The population is older, with the largest number of people being classified as senior citizens. The school is a K–5 school with a student population of approximately 200. The program took place in the early afternoon. Parents and children arrived at the school while the school was in session. They came directly to the multi-purpose room. The children were directed to one section of the room where they played quietly with toys while the parents met with the facilitator and cultural worker at the other end of the room. Parents and children came together in the centre of the room to work at the different stations. The children were then given a snack consisting of fruit, vegetables and cold cuts, while the parents participated in the debriefing session after which they joined their children for a snack.

The location of Site D changed from Year 1 to Year 2. Both schools in which the program took place are located in middle class residential neighborhoods that are made up of an equal number of rental and privately owned homes. The population in both neighborhoods is split evenly between seniors, young adults and children. The majority of the adults living in the neighborhood have a university education. Both schools are K–7 schools and house a student population of approximately 400. In both years, the program took place over the supper hour. Parents and children arrived at the school and shared in a light supper consisting of cold sandwich wraps or pizza and fruit or vegetables. Parents and children were separated for the parent only session, but came together for centre work that took place in a kindergarten classroom. Parents met separately as a group for the parent debrief session immediately following the centre work time.

Site E is located in a working class, highly populated residential area in which the largest ethnic group is from South Asia. The majority of homes are privately owned. It is a family neighborhood, with children forming the largest demographic group. The school in which the program took place was a K–7 school with a population of around 500. The program ran first thing in the morning. When parents and children arrived at the school gym, they enjoyed muffins, fruit and chai tea. The children sat on the floor on mats, while the parents sat behind them on low benches. The session began with a story read by the school librarian and translated by the school cultural worker. The parents then left the gym and entered the library for the parent only session while the children remained in the gym for songs and stories. The parents returned to the gym to participate with their children in the various centres set up around the room, before returning to the library for the debrief session.

Data Collection and Measures

A number of measures and data collection procedures were used in the study. These are next described in turn.

Test of Early Reading Ability-2 (TERA-2). The Test of Early Reading Ability-2 (Reid, Hresko, & Hammill, 1989) is a widely used, standardized instrument that measures children's early or emerging understanding of print and print concepts. The test was designed for use with children aged three to eight. It measures three constructs of emergent literacy based on a review of the literature: meaning, alphabet and conventions of print.

In terms of reliability, Reid, Hresko, and Hammill, (1989) reported, “the average internal consistency reliability coefficient alpha for Form A and Form B are: Form A: Age Three: 98; Age Four: 94; Age Five: 89; Form B: Age Three: 91; Age Four: 93; Age Five: 92” (p. 25). Test-retest reliability when “the raw scores for Form A were correlated with those for Form B and the

influence of age was partialled from the resulting coefficient...was .79” (p. 26). Then to examine validity, Reid et al. (1989) indicated that

the TERA-2 scores of 63 children, aged 49 to 72 months, were correlated with their performance on the Basic School Skills Inventory-Diagnostic (BSSI-D) Reading subtest. The correlation coefficients were partialled to control for the effects of age, resulting in the following coefficients: Form A, .61; Form B, .52. These coefficients are significant beyond the .01 level. In a separate study, the TERA-2 scores of 34 students ages 6 to 9 were correlated with their scores on the Paragraph Reading subtests of the Test of Reading Comprehension. The partial correlation procedure was used to control for the effects of age, resulting in the following coefficients: Form A = .36, Form B = .34 ($p < .05$) (p. 28).

Trained personnel administered Form A of the test in Session 1 and Form B of the test in Session 9 individually to children at each site. For children with limited ability to understand English, a native speaker of the child’s first or home language translated the prompts verbatim and when necessary, translated the child’s responses to English.

Parents’ Perceptions of Literacy Learning Interview Schedule (PPLLIS). Anderson (1994) developed the PPLLIS modeled somewhat on Deford’s (1985) *Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP)* that she developed to determine whether teachers held more holistic or more skills oriented perceptions about teaching and learning of reading. The PPLLIS was designed to measure whether parents’ perceptions or beliefs reflect a more traditional, skills based orientation or a more emergent, constructivist orientation. Content and face validity were established in the original study (Anderson, 1994) and the instrument has been used in different

contexts (Duren, 2006; Lopez & Gunderson, 2006). For this study, the original version of the instrument was circulated to the facilitators and the working group. Based on their feedback and suggestions, the instrument was modified and then translated into the respective languages (Appendix A)⁵. This version of the PPLLIS contains 23 items and respondents answer either “yes”, “not sure”, or “no”. As well, respondents are asked “What are the five most important things you are currently doing to help your child learn to read and write?” with spaces to write the answers provided.

The cultural workers provided the instructions and explanations in the first languages of the participants and assisted any individuals who had difficulty with reading or writing. After the session, they also translated the answers to the open ended questions into English, for those participants who elected to answer in their first language. The open ended responses were then divided into idea units and then categorized according to a modified version of a scheme developed by Anderson (1995a) and are shown in Table 1.

Children’s Artifacts. We provided each child’s family with a large (10’’ X 13’’) manila envelope labeled with the child’s name, the date, and the facilitators’ names in Sessions 2 and 9. We asked them to collect all of the examples of children’s drawings, writing, printing, painting and so forth and to return these in the envelope to the facilitators at the next session. We shared examples of the kinds of literacy materials children typically produce and answered any questions and addressed any concerns that the families raised. To analyze these artifacts, we randomly selected approximately 20% of the sample. We then read all of the samples in each

⁵Because of space limitations, the translated versions of the PPLLIS are not included; however, these are available in Chinese, Farsi, Karen, and Punjabi from the first author (jim.anderson@ubc.ca).

envelope, sorting and categorizing them as shown in Table 2. The analysis is based on this categorization scheme.

Focus Groups. In Year 1, we held two focus sessions at each site during the last half-hour of Sessions 3 and 7. However, we recognized immediately that there was insufficient time to conduct the focus groups within the time frame of a regular session; there was no time to probe answers or responses and everyone felt rushed. Furthermore, preliminary analysis of the data revealed no discernible differences over time in terms of the responses to the questions and indeed, a great deal of repetitiveness and redundancy was apparent. Therefore, in the second year, we collaboratively made the decision to invite parents to attend a separate focus group session about three-quarters of the way through the year. It was felt that by that point, they would feel comfortable in sharing their opinions about the program and would have had sufficient experiences in the program to comment on it in an informed manner.

In both Year 1 and Year 2, the questions were presented in English and were then translated by the cultural workers (See Appendix B). Participants' responses were then translated into English and where necessary, follow-up questions were asked or clarification or elaboration sought. The focus group sessions were digitally recorded and the English translations of the questions and the responses transcribed in their entirety.

Session Debriefing. As was indicated earlier, each PALS session has a component where the adult participants meet with the facilitator for about one-half hour after they have been working with their children at the centres in the classroom. This debriefing time that is led by the facilitator: 1) provides the adults with an opportunity to comment on what they have observed about their children's learning; 2) is an opportunity for adults to talk about which centres their children (and they) preferred and why; 3) allows time for the participants to ask questions or

request explanations; and 4) allows the participants to examine their roles while working one on one with their children. We audio-recorded the debriefing component of Sessions 4 and 8 each year; these were transcribed in their entirety and then analyzed.

Field Notes. The Principal Investigator and the Research Assistants took notes for each session they attended. In the field notes, the researchers: noted the number of families in attendance; described the events of each session as they unfolded; noted participants' comments or questions; described how the families participated noting in particular such things as participant structures in the adult-child-together time in the classrooms⁶, insightful comments made by children or adults, and children's display of knowledge or skills; and made note of issues that arose or challenges that the facilitators or the families faced. As well, after each session, the researchers typically wrote their reflections on the sessions.

Facilitators' Notes. We provided the facilitators at each site with a digital recorder and asked them to reflect and comment on each session in terms of their overall impression of the session, what seemed to work well, what needed adjustment, concerns and questions and so forth. We transcribed all of the facilitators' notes that were available and then read them in their entirety. We then divided the data into *idea units* (Kontos, 1981) and organized these into categories. Next, we coded each idea unit according to the categories that we developed that were capable of describing all of the data (See Appendix C).

⁶ For example, we noted in our field notes that in addition to the verbal support and scaffolding that is heavily promoted in Western pedagogy, parents were supporting their children in a number of culturally different ways. Based on our analysis of these data, we wrote the following chapter:

Anderson, J. & Morrison, F. (in press). Learning from/with immigrant and refugee families in a family literacy program. In A. Lazar & P. Schmidt (Eds.), *We Can Teach and We Can Learn: Achievement in Culturally Responsive Literacy Classrooms*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Results

To reiterate, the purpose of this study was to document the implementation of a bilingual family literacy program with immigrant and refugee families. In this section, we report in turn on each of the data sources just described.

Test of Reading Ability-2

To determine children's growth in literacy, we aggregated the Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) scores for both years and then compared the differences in the mean (average) scores over time (Sessions 1 and 9). The Normal Curve Equivalent is a way of comparing children's scores at the commencement and at the end of the program with the scores of the children involved in the norming group. According to WordLingo,

The Rochester School Department webpage describes how NCE scores change: In a normally distributed population, if all students were to make exactly one year of progress after one year of instruction, then their NCE scores would remain exactly the same and their NCE gain would be zero, even though their raw scores (i.e. the number of questions they answered correctly) increased. Some students will make more than a year's progress in that time and will have a net gain in the NCE score, which means that those students have learned more, or at least have made more progress in the areas tested, than the general population. Other students, while making progress in their skills, may progress more slowly than the general population and will show a net loss in their NCE ranks.

(Retrieved from http://www.worldlingo.com/ma/enwiki/en/Normal_curve_equivalent
December 5, 2010)

A one-way repeated measures analysis of variance was conducted to compare the scores on the Test of Early Reading Ability 2 (TERA-2) at Time 1 (Session 1) and Time 2 (Session 9). There was a statistically significant increase in TERA-2 scores at the $p < .05$ level from Time 1 ($M = 35.91$, $SD = 20.12$) to Time 2 ($M = 52.71$, $SD = 22.92$), $F(1, 91) = 42.56$, $p < .001$. The effect size, partial eta squared = .318, was large according to Cohen's (1988) criteria in which an effect size of .01 is considered small, .06 is considered medium and .138 is considered large (e.g., Pallant, 2007). The change in the average of the NCE scores is depicted in Figure 2.

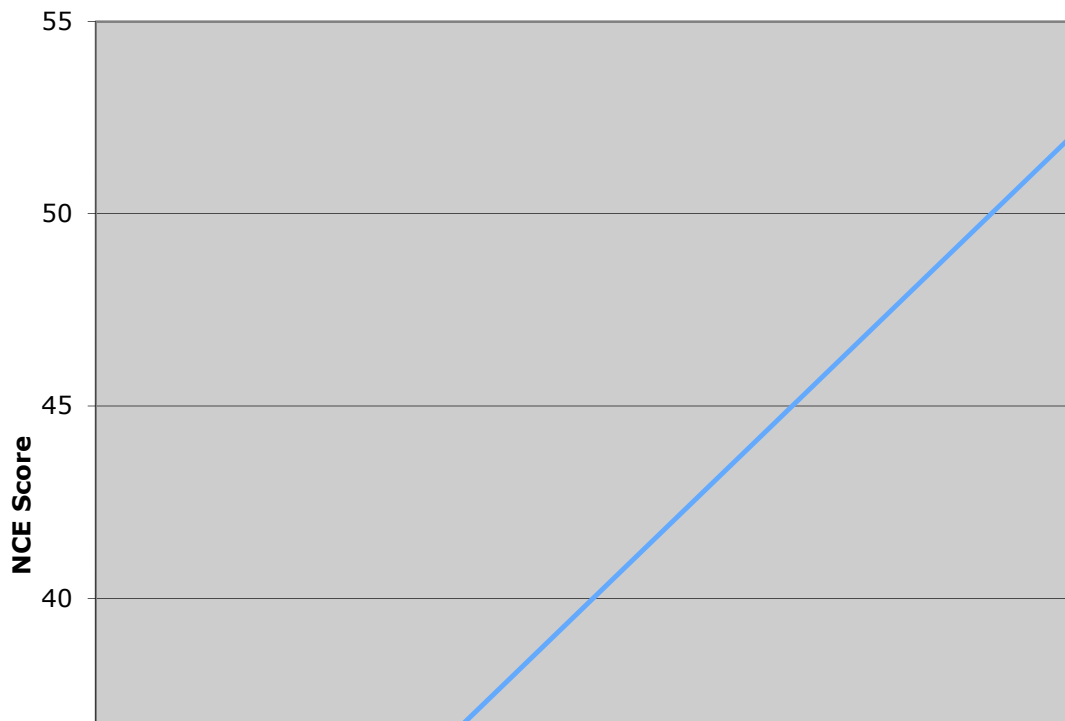


Figure 2. Mean difference of Test of Early Reading Ability-2 scores from Time 1 to Time 2.

To determine if there were gender differences in the TERA-2 results, we disaggregated the data and compared boys' and girls' NCE means over time. A one-way repeated measures analysis of variance was conducted to compare the scores on the Test of Early Reading Ability 2 (TERA2) by gender at Time 1 (Session 1) and Time 2 (Session 9). There was no statistically

significant increase in TERA-2 scores at the $p < .05$ level from Time 1 ($M = 35.91$, $SD = 20.12$) to Time 2 ($M = 52.71$, $SD = 22.92$), $F(1, 90) = .410$, $p = .523$.

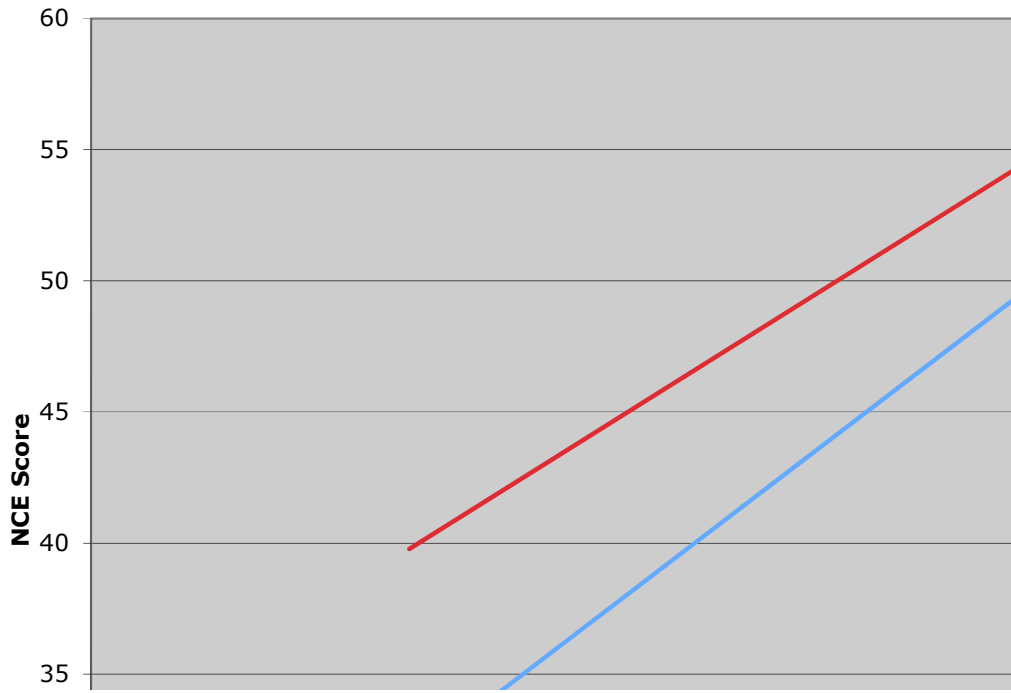


Figure 3. Mean difference of Test of Early Reading Ability-2 scores from Time 1 to Time 2 separated by gender.

We also disaggregated the data tested for effect of site and no significant differences were found. However, several trends are apparent (See Figure 4). First, the growth slopes are fairly consistent, with the exception of Site A. When we further disaggregated the data by year, the NCE mean scores for Site A actually decreased from Time 1 to Time 2. Although there was a decrease in scores from Time 1 ($M = 47.44$, $SD = 16.53$) to Time 2 ($M = 40.10$, $SD = 24.40$), a paired sample t-test revealed that the decrease was not significant, $t(8) = 1.041$, $p = .328$ (two-tailed) at the $p < .05$ level.

Further, although the increase in NCE means score for children in Site A showed increase over time, it is still at the 40 percentile approximately. And although the mean NCE

score in Site C increased over time as much as at any other site, it too is below 40 after the children have participated in the program.

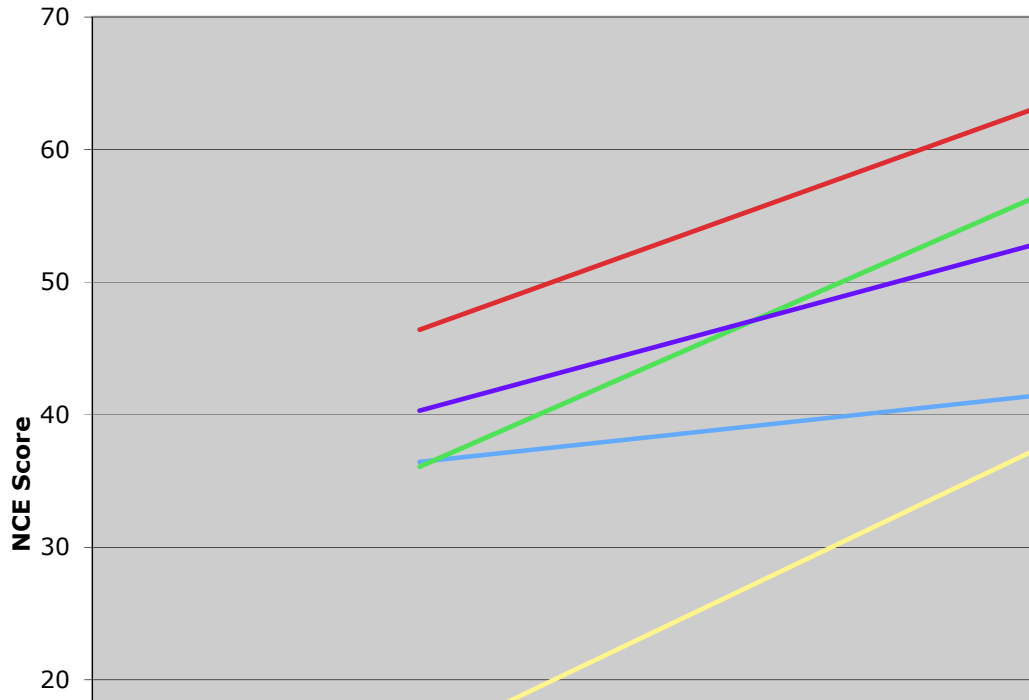


Figure 4. Mean Difference in Test of Early Reading Ability-2 scores from time 1 to time 2 separated by site.

Parents’ Perceptions of Literacy Learning Interview Schedule (PPLLIS)

The PPLLIS consists of 23 items and participants respond to three choices: “Yes”, “Unsure” or “No” (See Appendix A). Each response was then coded as 1, 2, 3, according to its fit with an emergent literacy perspective. For example in Item 8, “Children can learn about reading and writing before they begin formal reading programs or instructions at preschool or kindergarten/first grade”, a “Yes” response would be coded 3, a “Not sure” response 2, and a “No” response 1. We added the scores on each item to arrive at a total score out of a possible 69 and then converted this to a percentage. In Figure 5, the average percentages over time are presented.

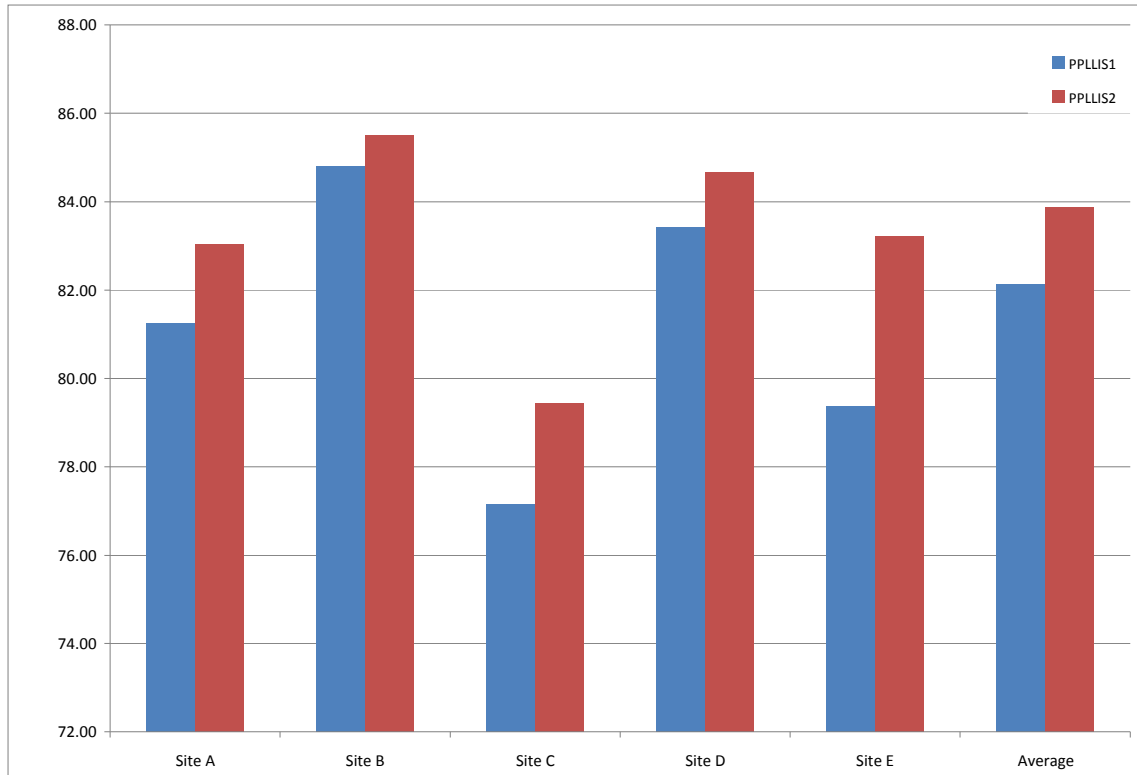


Figure 5. Parents’ Perceptions of Literacy Learning Interview Schedule scores over time expressed in percentages.

Although there were differences across the sites, participants generally held perceptions of early literacy learning that were consistent with an emergent literacy perspective. Furthermore, across all sites, participants’ perceptions at the end of the program were more consistent with an emergent literacy perspective than they were at the commencement of the program, although these differences are not statistically significant and only marginally so in the case of Site B, for example.

In addition to completing the 23 items, participants were asked “What are the five most important things you are currently doing to help your child learn to read and write?” As indicated in Table 1, the most frequent response across sites was “Participating in Literacy Activities/Events” with the child. As can be seen, participants in Site B named this category

nearly twice as frequently as participants at any of the other sites. Interestingly, they also identified “Teaching Literacy Skills” and “Providing Support for Practicing Literacy Skills (Child)” more frequently than the other participants. On the other hand, they identified “Valuing demonstrating and encouraging literacy” less frequently than did any other group.

Table 1

Categorization of Parents’ Responses on Open Ended Prompt

Response Category	Site A	Site B	Site C⁷	Site D	Site E
Participating in literacy activities/events (adult/child together)	29 (1.45)	89 (2.70)	6 (.6)	31 (1.15)	48 (1.37)
Providing Support for Emergent Literacy Activities/Events (child alone)	11 (.55)	8 (.24)	0	7 (.26)	3 (.08)
Teaching literacy skills (adult)	7 (.35)	36 (1.09)	0	20 (.74)	29 (.83)
Providing Support for Practicing literacy skills (child)	1 (.05)	7 (.21)	0	2 (.07)	3 (.08)
Valuing, demonstrating and encouraging literacy	19 (.95)	10 (.30)	4 (.4)	12 (.44)	25 (.71)
Knowledge development	16 (.8)	21 (.63)	1 (.1)	16 (.59)	22 (.63)
Joint activities (not literacy related)	3	4	0	9	8

⁷ Some of the participants in this site had limited experiences with formal schooling. This factor might explain the relative lack of responses, despite the encouragement and support of the cultural worker and the fact that they could provide the responses orally. Thus the results here from Site C should be interpreted with caution.

	(.15)	(.12)		(.33)	(.23)
Other responses	7	3	1	3	9
	(.35)	(.09)	(.1)	(.11)	(.26)
Number of participants	20	33	10	27	35

Children's Artifacts

Previous research with young children (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Shickedanz & Casberque, 2004; Wohlwend, 2009) has shown that they use various modalities to construct and represent meaning and this was also evident here as shown in Table 2. For example,

Table 2

Children's Artifacts

Category	Percentage of total
Drawing (no print)	29
Commercial (worksheets, coloring books)	22
Drawing (with name)	11
Drawing and letter strings/words	11
Scribbles/letters	6
Letters of alphabet/numbers	5
Tracing letters	5
Craft (cutting or gluing)/print	4
Craft/No print	3
Numbers	2
Name/letter strings	1

More than 50% of the samples contained children's drawings either alone or accompanied by some form of print. In addition, some children also produced crafts that involved gluing or cutting and pasting. Although most of the artifacts were generated by the children, it is noteworthy that worksheets and pages from coloring books and other commercial sources accounted for more than one-fifth of the samples. Likewise, some children engaged in tracing and "connect-a-dot" activities. Although previous researchers (e.g., Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Wu, 2009) found that children incorporate elements of the orthography of their first or home languages in their early attempts at writing, interestingly, we found no evidence of this phenomenon here.

Focus Group

As was pointed out earlier, at each session we provided bilingual materials including bilingual children's books in English and the families' home language. Many participants indicated that they appreciated the books and that they engaged in joint book reading or shared reading at home in the first language. Other families indicated that they read at home in English, while others indicated that they shared the books in both languages. For example, one of the mothers indicated that after her child had become familiar with the books, the mother read the Punjabi text while the child "read" the English. Some parents indicated that they were unable to read in English and read with their children only in the home language. Others indicated that they read only in the first language as a strategy to help children maintain their heritage language. Interestingly, one parent reported being unable to read in the home language and read with the child in English only.

One of the aims of this project was to promote children's first or home languages while simultaneously supporting their learning English, encapsulating the principle of *additive bilingualism* (Schechter & Cummins, 2003) and biliteracy. Overall, most participants indicated that they speak their first language at home, with some of them also indicating they code-switch using both the first language and English. They also indicated similar patterns while attending the PALS sessions. A few participants indicated they spoke only in their first or heritage language because of their limited facility in English. Some of the participants saw maintenance of first language as being very important and central to their cultural identity. Others believed that it was important to maintain their first language because having two languages would be an advantage for their children in future employment possibilities. Still others saw a second language as a form of linguistic capital-that knowing more than one language is a "good thing".

Despite the generally positive feedback regarding the bilingual and biliteracy orientation of the program, a few parents indicated resistance on the part of their children toward either the first or home language or English. For example, three participants indicated that their children resisted using the first language at home, wanting the family to speak and read English with them. Interestingly, two families indicated that their children wanted them to use their first language, and were averse to using English. It should also be noted that during one of the focus group sessions, several of the parents asked the researcher who was present if there had been any research that indicated that children's language learning is not impeded when they learn a second or additional languages. When they were assured that there was a significant body of research on second and additional language learning, the families requested copies of some of the research articles and these were sent to them as requested.

When asked about the materials they found valuable and which they used at home, books

were most frequently mentioned. Several participants also mentioned that they and the children also enjoyed using a deck of cards that they received. They reported using the cards for pretend play, for counting, for matching games similar to “Go Fish”, and for imaginary play. For example, a father at one of the sessions indicated that he and his child used the cards as visual props to construct narratives about “kings” and “queens” and “knights”. The participants also valued such items as scissors, glue, and magnets that they indicated the children used in their imaginary play, game play and art. Several families also indicated that they frequently used a puppet theatre that was provided and modeled in one of the sessions.

As indicated earlier, children in homes where reading and writing mediate daily living begin to participate in literacy events from an early age before formal instruction (Taylor, 1983). Some families reported that their children engaged in imaginary play with the literacy materials provided, “read” the bilingual books, and “wrote” using the paper and writing utensils such as markers and crayons as they scribbled and pretended to write, drew pictures and so forth.

When asked about any benefits they believed accrued from the program, the participants identified a number of ways that they believed the program helped them and their children. Many parents indicated that they benefited by learning about the myriad ways that they could support their children’s learning. They also indicated that having the program operate in their first or home language was essential; however, several of them also indicated that because of the bilingual format (English and first language) of the program, their own English learning was enhanced. As expected because of the foci of the program, they believed that children’s language and literacy and mathematics learning were enhanced. But they also believed that the children had become familiar with the school and thus their transition to kindergarten would be

smoother. Furthermore, several participants believed their children's ability to play and to learn had been enhanced because of their participation in the program.

Although the participants were generally very positive about the PALS program, they also offered some suggestions for changes. At two of the sites, the families indicated that they would like more frequent sessions, and that they would like the program to be made available for families of older children. Some families also asked for more activity (or parent-child together) time while one family suggested field trips for example to the local temple and other places of interest. At one site, the parents also requested that they receive instruction in letter/sound relationships in English because they were unfamiliar with this aspect of learning to read and write, having learned a different orthography in their first language. And finally, some participants suggested more focus on school readiness.

Session Debriefing.

As the culminating portion of each PALS session, the facilitator meets with the adult participants and encourages them to reflect on and discuss the experiences they have just had working with their children in the various centres (See Figure 1). For the purposes of this study, we audio-recorded this debriefing portion of Sessions 4 and 8 and we present the analysis of each session in turn.

Session 4. This session focused on literacy and play at all sites. Participants identified a range of activities that they and their children engaged in. These included identifying the letters of the alphabet, coloring, drawing, letter writing, listening to stories, and pretend reading. They also said that their children were also involved in cutting, pretend play, and solitary play. Participants mentioned a range of different materials that their children accessed and enjoyed at the centres. These included literacy-related materials such as books,

internet stories, letters, numbers and stickers, as well as materials related to pretend play such as dinosaurs, dolls, house, plastic bears, puppet, road map and sand.

The participants believed that they and their children derived a number of benefits from the session on play. For example, they indicated that because of the session, they would encourage their children to color and draw at home more so than they had done previously. Furthermore, they said that they would engage more in joint or shared reading with their children. They also said that they recognized that their children enjoyed pretend reading and writing and that the session instilled confidence in their children as they played with others, sang songs as part of the group and so forth.

Interestingly, some of the participants felt that there was not sufficient time for their children to engage in play. Others felt that more opportunity should be provided for children to get to know each other prior to proceeding to the centres as they felt that children would be more inclined to play together and collaborate if they knew each other better. At one site, the participants requested that the facilitators teach them more songs.

Session 8. This session, titled “Riddles, Raps and Rhymes” and focused on supporting children’s oral language development. The participants indicated that the children enjoyed this session and thought that it promoted collaboration and encouraged children’s learning. They also felt that music had a calming influence on children and saw it as an activity that the whole family could engage in. In addition, they believed that the songs helped their children learn English and that they also helped them learn rhyming and patterning, to memorize stories, to develop their coordination when movement accompanied the music, and to recognize words. They commented on the motivational aspect of learning through music and rhythm and recognized the multiple ways that children can develop language and literacy in age appropriate ways.

Referring to the various activities that they and their children had just engaged in, the participants mentioned the following: art, listening to songs in their heritage or first language, listening to music, and singing. They also appreciated learning about the following materials in this session: bilingual internet stories, bilingual websites, heritage language song lyrics, internet lyrics, nursery songs, and websites. The participants indicated that they appreciated the new materials and resources they had been provide in this session and that they would continue with the singing and other activities at home. However, some of them felt that they would have benefitted from some modeling of how the English songs were sung, as well as hand gestures and some of the other activities that accompanied the songs in order to support their children's singing and learning at home.

Facilitators Notes.

In terms of frequency, general comments about the session predominated across sites. For example, the facilitators tended to, indicate the number of people who attended (e.g., "Twenty families registered, 17 came tonight"; "Glad to see 4 dads"), make overall observations of how the session had gone (e.g., "Very busy evening" ; "Kids were really excited today"), and remark on specific activities or segments of the session (e.g., "The parent debriefing went well today"; "Children really like coming up and holding a duck during story time"). Less frequently but on many occasions, the facilitators also took the opportunity to engage in planning. Often, this planning was for the next session (e.g., "We need to have the book and CD *Here we go round the mulberry bush* set up and ready to play for next time"), as well in long range planning (e.g., "This year, the space was too big-next year, we need to set up the tables and chairs for food").

It was also apparent that the facilitators notes provided a venue for reflection and that the facilitators took advantage of this. For example, they often discussed a particular activity and how it needed to be adjusted, such as “Children sat too long-they sat during a story time and then had to sit through another one at the end.” They also revealed that they were learning about the lives of the families with whom they were working, and for example when one of them remarked, “Parents are starting to visit and make arrangements to get together outside of here [the program]”. The facilitators’ notes also provided an opportunity to learn about cultural differences. For example, after one of the sessions, the cultural worker who was also co-facilitating the sessions, explained:

We don’t have these types of activities in schools in [home country]. We don’t have team activities. We don’t turn and talk to each other – no group work. In our schools we don’t have group projects to do together. And for adults, it’s funny, I went to some training and I was like “oh my God, what are we doing talking together and playing with each other, this is so strange” Even this kind of research, talking...it’s new in our culture. Our teachers just talk and then exam, exam.

As with any program, on occasion, it was necessary to make adjustments and for example, after a session when it had proven difficult to get parents to talk about their experiences and observations working with their children at the centres, one of the facilitators commented, “Let’s suggest they talk in groups then share with the larger group-to try to get more input”.

Less frequently, but on occasion, administrative matters arose and were discussed. Here, issues of promoting the program, accessing resources and personnel, and long term planning for the program were discussed.

Discussion

Before discussing the findings of this study, it is important to acknowledge the complexities of implementing a bilingual family literacy program in five different cultural and linguistic communities. Appropriate materials have to be procured, necessary translations done, the nuances and practices and preferences of different communities learned, and ongoing professional development and support provided. Therefore, in many ways, the findings of this study are but the tip of the iceberg, as it were and a report such as this cannot capture the commitment, effort and time of the many people involved in working with the communities and families involved in this project.

Children's Early Literacy Learning.

The finding that children who participated in the program demonstrated statistically significant growth in literacy knowledge compared with the children in the norming group on the Test of Early Reading Ability-2 is especially promising. That is, even though the PALS program promoted children's language and literacy development in their *first language* as well as in English, the children outperformed the comparison norming group in English, their second or additional language. As was noted earlier, there is a general dearth of research in family literacy programs generally and in bilingual family literacy programs in particular. Hirst, Hannon, and Nutbrown (2010) also found that the children in their study made significant gains in early literacy knowledge compared to a control group. That study involved a small number of children (n=16) from one ethnic group (Pakistani) most of whom spoke Mirpuri Punjabi while Urdu was the home language for some of the families. The study was conducted over one year. The present study involved a much larger number of children (N=90), included more cultural and linguistic groups, and data were collected for two years. And of course, the studies were conducted in two different countries—Canada and the United Kingdom—with different education systems. However, despite

these differences, the finding from both studies that children's literacy learning in English increases significantly relative to comparison groups suggests that bilingual family literacy programs can be effective in promoting maintenance of families' home language while helping children acquire the literacy skills and knowledge in the dominant language that will be the language of instruction when they go to school in a year or so. Researchers (e.g., Purcell-Gates & Dahl, 1991; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) have shown that this early or emergent literacy knowledge that many children acquire in the preschool years greatly facilitates literacy learning through the formal literacy instruction that children will encounter as they enter school.

Although overall the average TERA-2 scores of the children in this study increased significantly relative to the comparison or norming group, some caution is called for in interpreting these results. As was reported previously, although the mean scores of the children in Sites A and C increased over time, they were still below the 40th percentile after the children had completed the program, suggesting that these children will need continuing and additional support to consolidate and build on the gains they have made.

Although somewhat predictably, the boys performed less well on the TERA-2 than the girls, the fact that they made similar gains over time is reassuring. Concerns have been raised about the gendered nature of family literacy programs in that most facilitators in these programs are women, few fathers typically participate in them to provide male role models, and the activities are seen by some as being feminized (e.g., Macleod, 2008). Although in developing the PALS program we took care to ensure that there were activities that we believed to be gender neutral as well as balanced between the activities that were more attractive to either gender, in the PALS in Immigrant Communities project, nearly all of the program facilitators and cultural workers were women and fewer fathers than mothers participated in the program. However, the results here suggest that the boys and girls benefitted equally from the program.

Children's artifacts. Consistent with previous research in emergent literacy (e.g., Harste et al, 1984; Wohlwend, 2009) the children in this study attempted to represent meaning using an array of different modalities. However, unlike previous researchers, we found no evidence of children's attempts to incorporate the orthography of their home language into their early attempts at writing. For example, when Harste et al. asked preschool children from homes where Arabic, English, or Hebrew were used to write, the children's attempts "looked like" Arabic, English, and Hebrew, even though the children were not able to spell and write conventionally in their home language. We noticed early in our analysis the dearth of first language orthography, and in follow-up interviews and focus group sessions we inquired of the families about the children's early attempts at writing. In response, some families indicated that although they speak and sometimes read in their first language at home, they nearly always write in English. Furthermore, in some communities, literally all of the environmental print such as signs, labels, notices and so forth are in English so children have very little opportunity to see the written form of their home language on a daily basis. Moreover, some parents indicated that their children have very little opportunity to see them write at home as they use text messages, word processing or email to write informally and to compose more formal texts on the computer. And finally, some families indicated that any time they write with their children, they do so in English as a way of supporting their children's early literacy development in that language to get them ready for school.

Parents Perceptions of Literacy Learning

Previous research with the PPLLIS (e.g., Anderson, 1994; 1995a) suggests that while middle class, Euro-Canadian families tend to hold beliefs about literacy learning consistent with an emergent or holistic paradigm, those from different cultural and linguistic groups tend to hold

more traditional, skills oriented beliefs. Thus the finding that in general all of the groups in this study tended to hold beliefs more consistent with an emergent literacy perspective was unexpected. Although the previous research was conducted nearly two decades ago, that alone would not seem to be an explanation for the differences in findings between the studies and we are unable to provide an explanation for the disparate findings.

Although there were similarities in participants' perceptions of literacy learning across sites, there were also differences. As explained earlier, this study was informed by a *literacy as social practices* paradigm (e.g., Heath, 1983; Street, 1985) and thus differences across social and cultural groups such as we found are expected. However, these differences were not as pronounced as we expected and there was much greater homogeneity than we hypothesized at the outset. Of course, as with any instrument, this finding may be attributable to measurement error with the PPLLIS, although, to reiterate, previous studies have indicated it has fairly good psychometric properties.

Because the PALS program is based on current knowledge of early literacy and reflects a developmental or emergent literacy perspective, we anticipated that parents'/caregivers' perceptions of early literacy learning would change and reflect that perspective more *after* participating in the program. While indeed there was some change in that direction, it was not as pronounced as was anticipated. Given that parents tended to hold views consistent with an emergent literacy perspective when they began PALS suggests a possible ceiling effect might explain this finding. That is, there was relatively little room for change in perspectives over the course of the program.

A previous study by Anderson (1995b) suggested a relationship between parents' perception of literacy learning and their children's early literacy knowledge; that is, the more

consistent parents' perceptions were with an emergent literacy view, the higher their children tended to score on measures of early literacy. Or conversely, the higher children scored on measures of early literacy, the more consistent their parents' views of literacy learning were with an emergent literacy paradigm. To test whether that finding would also apply in this study, we ran a correlation analysis using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient on the relationship between the child's early reading ability as measured by the TERA-2 and the parent's perceptions of literacy as measured by the PPLLIS. We found no significant relationships between TERA-2 A and PPLLIS 1, and between TERA-2 B and PPLLIS 2. It should be pointed out that we had 64 dyads for which we had all four scores.

Families' Language and Literacy Practices

Consistent with a *literacy as social practices* perspective (Street, 1985), the families reported engaging in a range of literacy practices at home. Shared book reading was frequently mentioned. Families indicated considerable flexibility here and for example, in some cases, the adult read the bilingual texts in the home language while the child "read" the text in English. While they confirmed that they continued at home some of the literacy practices that they had encountered in the PALS program, they also adapted these to fit their particular context, and for example, used the playing cards as props.

Previous research (e.g., Wong-Fillmore, 1991) suggests that many immigrant and refugee families tend to eschew using and maintaining their first language in an attempt to ensure their children learn the dominant or majority language. Certainly, it was very apparent that the families with whom we worked wanted their children to learn English but there was very little apparent resistance that we could detect to maintaining the home language as well. Furthermore, the families had different reasons for wanting to hold on to their first language. Except for the

study by Hirst et al. (2010), there has been very little research with bilingual family literacy programs. Unlike the Hirst et al. study where a more laissez-faire stance was taken wherein families could opt for English or the home language, in the present study a bilingual/biliteracy perspective was a central feature of the PALS in Immigrant Communities project. To reiterate a point made previously, there are sound cognitive, linguistic, psychological and social reasons for encouraging children to use and maintain their first language while learning a second (or additional) one. For as Wong Fillmore (1991) argued

When parents are unable to talk to their children, they cannot easily convey to them their values, beliefs, understandings, or wisdom about how to cope with their experiences. They cannot teach them about the meaning of work, or about personal responsibility, or what it means to be a moral or ethical person in a world with too many choices and too few guideposts to follow. What is lost are the bits of advice, the *consejos* parents should be able to offer children in their everyday interactions with them. Talk is a crucial link between parents and children: It is how parents impart their cultures to their children and enable them to become the kind of men and women they want them to be. When parents lose the means for socializing and influencing their children, rifts develop and families lose the intimacy that comes from shared beliefs and understandings (p. 343).

In essence then, the families in this study saw the value of and supported additive bilingualism as they helped their children develop language and literacy skills in English which they knew would be essential for them at school while at the same time retaining their home language and culture.

Families' Perspectives of their Participation in the PALS Program

The finding that the families valued learning about ways that they could support their children's literacy learning is consistent with previous studies (Anderson & Morrison, 2007; Anderson et al., 2008; Anderson et al., 2005) of the PALS program. Likewise, the families indicated that through their participation in the literacy activities and events alongside their children at the centres, they learned to appreciate the developmental nature of young children's learning and understood better how children can learn through play. In other words, we had made the early childhood pedagogy visible (Gregory, Williams, Baker, & Street, 2004) for families and they appreciated it.

Although the families were generally very supportive of the PALS in Immigrant Communities program, they did have suggestions for improving and making adjustments to the program. We see it as essential to address these issues and concerns either by making modifications to the program or by providing more thorough explanations of the possibilities and the limitations of the PALS program as we move forward in working with other families and communities.

Facilitators' Reflections and Roles

No matter how theoretically sound a particular program is or how thoroughly it reflects best practices as determined by current research, as we see it, a key to the success (or failure) of any program are the people who are responsible for implementing it. And thus the facilitators in the PALS in Immigrant Communities project were major contributors to the success of this initiative. Especially important we believe, were the roles of the cultural workers who served as co-facilitators at each of the sites. Although perhaps we initially envisioned the role of the cultural workers more as translators, we very quickly came to realize that their roles entailed

much more. That is, they were the cultural brokers who: knew how to reach out to their communities to invite people to join the program; helped all involved in implementing the program learn the cultural nuances, practices and preferences of their community; helped create a sense of trust with the families and communities; and helped make adjustments so that the program would better fit the families and communities.

A key principle overarching all of our work with the PALS program is that we must be able to “read” families and communities so that we can make adjustments to meet their aspirations and needs. As was reported earlier, there was considerable evidence that the facilitators were also guided by this principle as they made plans for the future, reflected on what worked and what did not, and identified what needed to be adjusted or modified. Implementing a program that assumes a fairly strong theoretical and pragmatic stance while at the same time respecting and responding to local contexts is a difficult exercise. That the facilitators were able to do this to the extent they did speaks to their dedication and professionalism.

Significance

This study, we believe, is significant for a number of reasons. First, in addition to contributing to the research literature on family literacy generally, it is one of very few studies that we are aware of that has documented a bilingual family literacy program with immigrant and refugee families. In an age of unprecedented movement of people and globalization, it appears that initiatives such as the PALS in Immigrant Communities project will increasingly be needed. That the children showed significant gains in **English literacy** as compared to the norming group within a bilingual program that promoted maintenance of the home language is also significant, we believe. One of the criticisms of family literacy programs is that they devalue the home language and promote the dominant language. This study suggests that this need not necessarily

be the case. Furthermore, although previous research suggests that families tend to abandon their home languages so that their children can learn the dominant language, such was not the case here. The results of this study suggest that parents do value their own language and want their children to maintain it, as long as they also learn the language of instruction at school so that they can be successful there. Finally, this study contributes to the converging evidence that family literacy programs do make a difference in young children's early literacy development. The stability of the results over two years and with a moderately large number also enhances the reliability and validity of the results, we propose.

Challenges

Despite the very positive results of this study, it is important also to acknowledge that we encountered a number of challenges. Indeed, documenting the implementation of a program across different sites and with different cultural and linguistic groups was an enormous challenge, even with the excellent support provided by the LegaciesNow 2010 professional staff infrastructure. At times, we underestimated how time consuming some of the data collecting procedures were, and for example, we had to add an orientation session in Year 2 to lessen the amount of administrative detail that proved to be very onerous in that session in the first year. Likewise, we found that we needed to decrease the number of focus group sessions from two to one in Year 2 and to hold the focus groups apart from a regular PALS session. Although we provided ongoing professional development and support in which the theoretical and empirical literature underpinning a bilingual approach to family literacy were explained and reinforced, there were occasions when we felt that there was not enough focus on the participants' first languages at some sites and we needed to intervene, albeit in a judicious and professional manner. Likewise, although research indicates that parents informally teach their preschool-aged

children about print and its functions at home (e.g., Senechal, 2008), some of the facilitators and members of the working group believed it inappropriate to suggest to parents that they teach their children the letters of the alphabet and the associated letter-sounds in developmentally appropriate ways. That is, even though the research clearly indicates that parents in literacy rich homes do teach their children about print and the letters of the alphabet in contextually embedded, and developmentally appropriate ways as we did in the PALS program, there was resistance, at least in some quarters to the notion of teaching this knowledge to preschoolers. Moreover, our work with PALS over the years suggests that all parts of each session, not just the activities at the centres are important. We found ourselves fairly consistently having to emphasize the importance of the debriefing component of the sessions at the ongoing professional development sessions.

Further Research

Although the findings from this study are promising, we believe that further research is necessary. First, although children made significant gains in literacy knowledge over the course of the program, whether they will be able to maintain this growth is not known. Therefore, longitudinal research that would follow children from the program into the first one or two years of school is necessary. Second, although we were able to garner some anecdotal evidence of how the families “took up” in their homes the literacy practices and activities that they learned about in the program, research is needed in the homes and communities to understand more thoroughly how a family literacy program such as PALS impacts the home literacy practices of families. Third, in this study, we did not thoroughly document how the program was actually implemented at each site. A more micro-level analysis of the events and activities across the sites would add to our understanding of family literacy programs, as there is very little evidence of this type of

documentation in the literature and instead, very general, macro-level descriptions and accounts are the norm.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we believe that the results of this study of PALS in Immigrant Communities project demonstrates the viability of a bilingual family literacy program in enhancing young children's literacy development in preparation for their entry to school. The results also suggest that parents also benefit, in terms of their understanding of young children's early learning and of different ways to support that learning. Furthermore, the findings suggest that families do understand the value and benefits of children maintaining their home or first language, when provided with the proper explanations and support. And finally, this study demonstrates that a project such as this can be a tool for professional development, especially with regard to teachers working in cross-cultural and cross-linguistic settings.

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Appendix A

PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF LITERACY LEARNING

Anderson, 2008

Name _____ M F

Relationship to Child _____ Child's Name _____

Child's Birth date: (D) _____ (M) _____ (YR) _____ Date of Interview _____

Language(s) Spoken at Home: _____

Language(s) Spoken by Child: _____

PLEASE CIRCLE YOUR CHOICE OF ANSWER FOR EACH STATEMENT

LEARNING TO READ

- | | | | | |
|----|---|------------|-----------------|-----------|
| 1. | A child learns to read by first learning the phonetic symbols and/or letters of the alphabet and their sounds; then words; then sentences; and then books or stories. | Yes | Not sure | No |
| 2. | Teaching a child to recognize single words on flash cards is a suitable and practical technique to teach reading. | Yes | Not sure | No |
| 3. | A child benefits from hearing their favorite books over and over again. | Yes | Not sure | No |
| 4. | You should encourage a child to join in while you read a familiar book to them. | Yes | Not sure | No |
| 5. | It is a good idea to point to the words as you read them to a child. | Yes | Not sure | No |
| 6. | You are helping a child to learn to read by encouraging him/her to talk about what is being read. | Yes | Not sure | No |
| 7. | You should encourage your early reader to "read" familiar books by using the pictures to retell the story. | Yes | Not sure | No |

PLEASE CIRCLE YOUR CHOICE OF ANSWER FOR EACH STATEMENT**EARLY WRITING (Writing sometimes means handwriting or printing. Here, writing****means writing notes, lists, poems, signs, stories and so forth)**

- | | | | | |
|----|---|------------|-----------------|-----------|
| 1. | It is necessary for a child to know the phonetic symbols and characters; and /or the letters of the alphabet and the sounds of the letters before he/she begins to write. | Yes | Not sure | No |
| 2. | A child should learn to neatly print characters and/ or the letters of the alphabet before attempting to print notes, messages, lists, stories, etc. | Yes | Not sure | No |
| 3. | When he/she begins to write, a child should be encouraged to write only easy words and very short sentences. | Yes | Not sure | No |
| 4. | A child's early scribbles and drawings are actually considered to be writing | Yes | Not sure | No |
| 5. | A child can begin to write (notes, stories, labels for pictures, lists) before he/she knows how to read. | Yes | Not sure | No |
| 6. | Learning to read and learning to write are similar to learning to talk, in that children learn these skills gradually, and begin at different ages. | Yes | Not sure | No |
| 7. | Reading to children, and reading with children helps them to learn to write. | Yes | Not sure | No |
| 8. | Children can learn about reading and writing before they begin formal reading programs or instruction at preschool or kindergarten/first grade. | Yes | Not sure | No |

THESE ACTIVITIES HELP CHILDREN LEARN TO READ AND TO WRITE:

- | | | | |
|--|------------|-----------------|-----------|
| 1. Talking to children about what they see/hear. | Yes | Not sure | No |
| 2. Taking children on outings in the community. | Yes | Not sure | No |
| 3. Having children pretend (or try or attempt) to write grocery lists with you, and find items in the grocery store. | Yes | Not sure | No |
| 4. Reading to children. | Yes | Not sure | No |

FINAL THOUGHTS:

- | | | | |
|--|------------|-----------------|-----------|
| 1. Schools should be totally responsible for teaching children to read and to write. | Yes | Not sure | No |
| 2. It is very important that children see their parents reading and writing. | Yes | Not sure | No |
| 3. Children have to be a certain age before they can begin to learn to read and write. | Yes | Not sure | No |
| 4. Children learn to read and write by playing | Yes | Not sure | No |

WHAT ARE THE *FIVE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS YOU ARE CURRENTLY DOING* TO HELP YOUR CHILD LEARN TO READ AND TO WRITE?

Appendix B**FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS**

- 1) In IPALS, we conduct sessions in your first/home language and we provide bilingual books. How important is it for you that we work with you and your child in your first language? Why do you think it is important?
- 2) Do you read to your child in home/first language at home? When? What? How often? Do you speak with your child in home/first language at home? When? How often? Does your child write/pretend to write in home/first language at home? What? How often?
- 3) Do you read to your child in home/first language at school in IPALS? Do you speak with your child in home/first language at school IPALS? Does your child write/pretend to write in home/first language at school in IPALS?
- 4) IPALS is a bilingual program where we use English and your first/home language? Do you think IPALS has helped you in learning to speak English? Write English? Read English? Listen in English? How?
- 5) Have you found the books/materials we provided helpful or useful? How/why are they useful?
- 6) What are your/your child's favourite take home materials? Why are these favorites? Your child's favorites?
- 7) Were there some materials that you did not find as useful? Which ones? Why?
- 8) How often do you use the books and take home materials at home?
- 9) Do you see your child using the books and take home materials at home? If so, how often? How?
- 10) What are some of the most important things or ideas you have learned in IPALS?

- 11) What are some of the most important things your child has learned in IPALS?
- 12) Did the IPALS program turn out to be like you thought it would be when you first registered for the program? How has it been the same as what you expected? How has it been different?
- 13) What do you think we need to do more of in IPALS? What do you think we need to do less of in IPALS?
- 14) What is missing from the program? How can we improve it?

Appendix C**CATEGORIES FOR FACILITATORS NOTES**

Comments on Session	“Went very well. Parents were really interested”
Planning	“We could purchase a cake for the celebration. Maybe we could purchase some balloons as well”
Reflection	Facilitator (cultural worker): “It was interesting that they heard it was good for them to talk to their children. Some of them didn’t know that. Canadians talk to their children a lot, that’s not normal in our culture. It’s crazy how much people here talk to their children. One lady said she feels silly talking to her children.”
Administrative	“Let’s meet on January 5 at 12:15 to plan for January 15”