



Home-Based Literacy Portfolio Project Overview

Dr. Jane Baskwill
Mount Saint Vincent University

The Home-Based Literacy Portfolio Project

involves parents of pre-school children in the development and use of home-based literacy portfolios to support their children's developing literacy. A series of workshop sessions and one-on-one consultations provides parents with information and strategies to help build and expand their knowledge base to support children's literacy learning and to help parents become more confident about communicating and sharing that knowledge with their child's school. Parents learn how to set up the portfolio, record their observations, collect samples and learn how to use their observations to support their child's literacy learning by building on authentic daily life experiences. A protocol and manual, based on this model, along with a set of YouTube videos, is being developed to share with other agencies involved with family literacy and those interested in helping families develop successful home-school partnerships.

**Need For This Activity**

Parent-teacher contact is increasingly viewed by both educators and researchers as a critical element in children's school success. Evidence suggests that parents and teachers best serve children when they work as partners in supporting children's learning in compatible ways. However, an imbalance exists between what each group brings to the partnership. Many parents are not aware that their children can be well on their way to succeeding in literacy by giving them the opportunity to learn its functional uses through authentic daily life experiences (Taylor, 1997). If parents do have this understanding, many are unsure of the exact role they should play (Lapp, Fisher, Flood & Moore, 2002) in fostering their child's literacy development. They are insecure about their personal knowledge base, may have burdensome schedules, overwhelming responsibilities, and personal beliefs about the roles of the teachers and the school.

School personnel want parents to support children's learning but are unsure of how to keep them involved. Lack of knowing on the part of parents is often seen by school personnel as a sign of disinterest (Lee, 2007, 2008). There is little opportunity for parents to learn how to share and document their child's literacy development and few opportunities to learn how to support that learning in developmentally appropriate ways.

Just as in the health field, clients are encouraged to take a more active role in their own health care needs, so too do parents need to become more articulate about their child's literacy needs and share their knowledge of their child's literacy development. In order

to truly become partners in their child's learning, parents need to develop a personal knowledge base about their child's developing literacy and the ways in which they can foster further development.

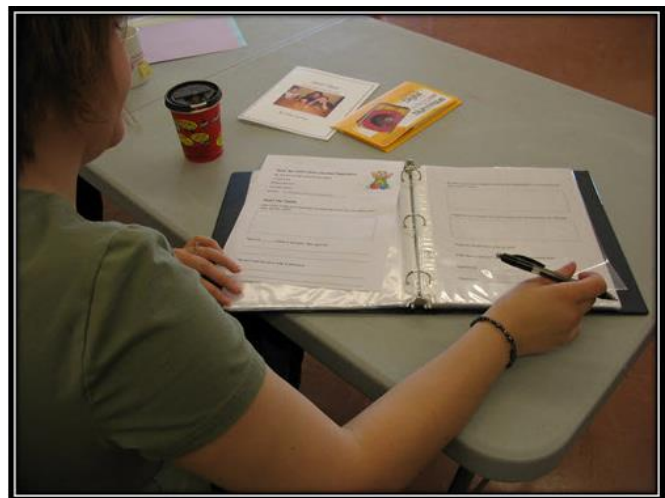
There is also a need for parents to learn how to manage their time and schedule appropriate learning opportunities as a natural part of their family activities. They also need to learn how to articulate the information they have to their child's school/teacher and to understand the importance of parental involvement in children's school success.

A gap in communication about home-based literacy practices and children's literacy development prior to starting school currently exists in rural Nova Scotia. There is no mechanism for helping parents observe, document and share their child's literacy development. The ***Home-Based Literacy Portfolio Project*** meets this need and partners the Valley Community Literacy Association with nursery school, parent resource centres, and local schools, along with faculty and students from Mount Saint Vincent University, to make an important bridge between home-based literacy knowledge and the school.

Project Goals

The Home-Based Literacy Portfolio Project aims to:

- help parents become more aware of children's literacy development
- build a greater awareness of parents' role in children's literacy development
- assist parents to observe, record, document and interpret their child's literacy development
- reinforce and expand parents' repertoire of skills and strategies to enable them to support children's literacy learning in natural and authentic ways
- create a home-based literacy portfolio with parents as a bridge to home-school literacy conversations



- create a resource binder and support videos on YouTube of the 6 workshop modules, for sharing with interested groups throughout the province

Expected Outcomes

There are two major outcomes anticipated:

1. Parents will become more skilled observers and interpreters of children's literacy learning and will forge a partnership with their local schools through the sharing of home-based literacy portfolios.
2. A resource binder describing the creation and use of home-based literacy portfolios with families, based on this project, will be developed for use by those interested in family literacy programming. Content will be available in limited print quantities as well as online. The material will also be supplemented with videos accessed through YouTube so that anyone could use the material. It will also make it easy for VCLA instructors to quickly implement the program with students in their classes who are parents. Presentations could also be made at various sites (i.e. daycares) that would involve going to YouTube and viewing the videos and showing how staff could easily implement the program with parents (**In development**).

A series of 6 workshop sessions and 2 one-on-one consultations provides parents with information and strategies. Parents learn how to set up the portfolio, record their observations, and learn how to support their child's literacy learning through authentic daily life experiences.

The participants are given a set of family-generated books of local interest. These books were initially created as part of the *Publish It Family Literacy Project*. The books are particularly appropriate as they show Nova Scotia families engaged in everyday activities. These books help illustrate for parents the importance of such activities and help facilitators connect how everyday family activities become springboards to literacy learning for the entire family in enjoyable and interesting ways.

One-on-one consultations, midway and at the end of the project, tailored to individual families, help grow parents' confidence and skills and give them practice talking about their literacy observations. During the consultation, parents are helped to make a plan for supporting their child's literacy learning in the future. Parents learn how to communicate with their child's school, liaise with other agencies (i.e health, family resource centres) and learn how to share the information in their home-based literacy profiles.

Local facilitators are recruited from the local pool of substitute and retired teachers and Nursery School and Family Resource Centre staff. With the help of Mount Saint Vincent BEd and Literacy graduate students, they deliver the workshop modules.

Accommodations are made as needed for parents who needed more support. Personal recording devices, cameras, a laptop with text-to-speech software, along with alternative strategies for recording are made available as the need arises.

For more information contact:

Dr. Jane Baskwill
Faculty of Education
Mount Saint Vincent University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
Canada

jane.baskwill@msvu.ca

