



Canadian  
Children's  
Literacy  
Foundation

Fondation pour  
l'alphabétisation  
des enfants  
canadiens

## Early Literacy Matters Roundtables 2020

Report published June 2020





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## Foreword

The Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation (CCLF) seeks to ensure all children in Canada are equipped to reach their full potential. We do so by promoting and developing children's literacy initiatives, championing literacy partners across Canada, and supporting families in building strong literacy skills in their homes and communities. We believe this will enable Canada's children to become the most literate in the world.

Our approach is rooted in an understanding that there are many complex barriers to literacy – from learning differences and health challenges to socioeconomic factors – and the solutions are equally complex. Many of these barriers are overcome by our strong education systems with caring teachers, publicly funded libraries, and literacy champions working with families and serving their communities. Yet, despite this supportive infrastructure, too many children still struggle to acquire the literacy skills they need to thrive. This is in part due to resource limitations and inequitable access, as well as broader complex societal challenges that directly impact families.

To help address obstacles and strengthen our collective impact on early literacy, we at CCLF seek to understand what approaches have been successful in building early literacy, how we grow those successes, and what challenges can be addressed through national, coordinated efforts. To develop a more fulsome understanding, CCLF hosted a roundtable series in early 2020 that attracted 100 attendees from 59 different organizations. To our knowledge, no similar national consultation on early literacy has been conducted in the last decade.

It was deeply inspiring to witness the dedication of all roundtable participants to building a more literate society. While there were some differences across the groups, there were far more commonalities, grounded in the need for partnership and collaboration – with each other, with families, with other sectors and with governments.



In this report, you will read about what we heard: potential pathways to success, common challenges and how national, coordinated efforts can help advance early literacy efforts.

These inspiring and informative roundtable dialogues were made possible through partnerships with five co-hosts: Decoda Literacy Solutions in Vancouver; Centre for Family Literacy in Edmonton; Bookmates in Winnipeg; Frontier College in Montreal; and Read to Me in Halifax. All deeply rooted in their communities, the co-hosts provided critical insights into their local and regional literacy landscapes.

Of course, today the world is in unprecedented flux. When we set out in February 2020 to co-host our first two events in Edmonton and Vancouver, COVID-19 was only just emerging in Italy. Two weeks later, while we were in Halifax and Montreal, the severity of the situation was becoming clear. Our last event, which was to take place in Winnipeg, was postponed as schools and businesses were starting to close due to the spread of COVID-19.

While no one knows what our post-pandemic new normal will look like, we anticipate that many of the challenges identified at the roundtables will be even more acute. What has not changed is that strong literacy skills are fundamental to a thriving, resilient society, and building these skills needs to start in early childhood. It is up to all of us to make sure this is front and centre.

The foundational work we did together in these roundtables will become even more relevant as we move forward. A consultative, collaborative approach that builds respectfully on the learnings of the past and thoughtfully creates pathways forward will be core to our collective capacity to build a richly literate future.

Thank you to everyone who believed in the value of coming together to discuss the importance of early literacy. We look forward to ongoing collaboration. Together, let's make Canada's children the most literate in the world.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ariel R. Siller". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ariel Siller  
CEO, Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation



“A driving force of my career has always been to feel like I’m making some sort of social impact. I really believe in the importance of parents knowing the key role that they play in literacy from birth. The number one predictor of reading success later in life is having books in the home, and programs like Read to Me help families who might otherwise not be able to afford books.”

**Nancy Edgar**

Program Manager, Read to Me! Program



“We do not often get the opportunity to gather together such a diversity of stakeholders of the early literacy world from the francophone and anglophone communities. We were able to reflect on common challenges and discuss potential solutions while exchanging on best practices. There was also strong consensus throughout the event. This feels like the beginning of new collaborations that will hopefully be supported by CCLF.”

**Mélanie Valcin**

Regional Director – Quebec, Nunavut and Atlantic Canada, Frontier College

# Children's Literacy In Canada

Literacy is more than just reading and writing. It is the foundation upon which we learn, connect with others, and understand the world around us. A more literate nation is healthier, more productive, and more socially engaged. In the most recent ranking from 2016, Canada scores a mere 18th on a global ranking of children's literacy levels, down from 12th place.<sup>1</sup> This downward trend in our literacy levels could mean millions are being left behind.

Low literacy is linked to poor health outcomes, with an increased likelihood of getting sick and a prolonged length of recovery.<sup>2</sup> Median household incomes for people with the lowest levels of literacy are 41% lower than for those with high literacy levels.<sup>3</sup> In fact, low literacy could be costing the Canadian economy as much as \$80 billion in lost economic opportunity each year.<sup>4</sup>

The journey towards strong literacy skills begins at birth. Unfortunately, too many children do not have a strong start to their literacy journeys and they get left behind. Approximately 27% of children start school vulnerable in one or more areas of development.<sup>5</sup>

By Grade 10, 14% of students do not have the baseline level of reading needed to navigate society.<sup>6</sup> This carries through into adulthood with 17% of Canadian adults operating at the lowest level of literacy.<sup>7</sup>

CCLF's big ambition is that Canada's children become the most literate in the world. Our organization was established in 2017 by Canadian leaders renowned for driving meaningful change. We believe that we should work collectively to raise awareness of the importance of early literacy and to improve literacy levels for children across all of Canada's unique and varied communities.

While there are many avenues for addressing children's literacy challenges, CCLF's primary focus is on building early literacy skills from birth to age five. Starting at birth is one of the most effective ways to ensure children will achieve their full potential in school and throughout life. Research illustrates that the first five years of life are critical. From conception to age five, the brain develops more – and more rapidly – than at any other point in a person's life. Inadequate support for brain development in the early years is often difficult to address later.

Unfortunately, many families are missing the necessary information and resources to support their children in these early years.

That's why our goal at CCLF is to help address gaps and challenges to building strong early literacy skills. We believe this is where we can have the greatest impact. We do this by promoting and developing children's literacy initiatives, championing literacy partners across Canada, and supporting families to build strong literacy skills in their homes and communities. We believe this will enable Canada's children to become the most literate in the world.

# Early Literacy Matters Roundtables

A national approach to enhancing early literacy support for children and families must be rooted in the perspectives and learnings of people from across the country, including early childhood specialists, academic researchers, healthcare providers, teachers, librarians, and others who work with families with young children.

Prior to this roundtable series, CCLF conducted more than 100 consultations on how to enhance early literacy with people and organizations representing a multitude of views. We gathered information about how literacy programs across the country are developed and implemented, exciting research in brain development, and how health professionals work with families to improve literacy efforts. We are indebted to the many individuals who shared their perspectives with us.

Using this information as a basis, we embarked upon our roundtable series in early 2020. We selected a roundtable format to foster generative dialogue in order to provide insight into local context and a rich, informative experience for participants. We identified communities across the country that would offer a range of perspectives and insights, and

connected with a literacy organization in each city to co-host one of the roundtables.

The Early Literacy Matters Roundtables took place in February and March 2020 in four cities: Halifax with Read to Me, Montreal with Frontier College, Edmonton with Centre for Family Literacy, and Vancouver with Decoda Literacy Solutions. A fifth event was planned with Bookmates in Winnipeg but unfortunately it was postponed due to the outbreak of COVID-19.

We worked with local co-hosts to invite representatives from early literacy initiatives and programs, academics, and people providing support services to families in at-risk communities. A mixed format of small- and large-group sessions allowed participants to share their experiences while promoting discussion and debate about successes and challenges, and opportunities for national action.

Given CCLF's focus on knowledge exchange and dissemination, it was important that the events provide a forum for people to learn about each other's work, and an opportunity to discuss areas for inter-organizational collaboration. This was of particular value to small literacy organizations with limited resources.

CCLF considers the roundtable series to be the first of many community-based discussions to come. One of our goals for future consultations will be to ensure we are connecting with groups with relevant expertise and perspectives that do not typically participate in early literacy discussions. This will help ensure that the broadest spectrum of voices helps to inform our work and is reflected in the national conversation about early literacy.





“On behalf of literacy organizations across BC, Decoda is pleased to partner with the CCLF and literacy groups across the country to advance literacy outcomes for young children.”

**Margaret Sutherland**

Executive Director, Decoda Literacy Solutions



“We are excited to work with CCLF and are encouraged by this dialogue. Together, I believe we can bring awareness to the issue of low literacy and increase understanding of the importance of early and family literacy on a much larger scale.”

**Kim Chung**

Co-Executive Director, Programming and Training, Centre for Family Literacy

# Summary of Roundtable Findings

While each roundtable discussion was informed by specific provincial and regional contexts, common successes and challenges were identified across the four events. Likewise, there was consistency in what the participants viewed as opportunities for national action in support of their own work to advance literacy. We have summarized what we heard and provided more details about the four roundtables in the Detailed Roundtable Findings section of this document.

## PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS

- Strength through partnerships: To maximize impact, it is critical to establish and nourish strong partnerships among literacy programs, libraries, and family resource centres, and to establish cross-sector partnerships with healthcare providers and other organizations that are in close contact with families.
  - Support parents and caregivers: It is important to proactively connect with families to help build their understanding of the role of family interactions in building healthy brains in young children, and how that sets the stage for stronger literacy skills.
  - Build skills: Families should be supported through actively demonstrating how to incorporate joyful literacy-building activities into early childhood through talking, rhymes, songs, and interactive games.
- Provide accessible tools and resources: Facilitate reading at home by offering families free books, and host free community-based reading programs that help to connect families. Parents need to be linked to early screening for hearing, vision, and learning differences.

## CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

- Many families face significant barriers to participation: Families who would benefit most from early literacy programs are often the hardest to reach due to poverty, isolation, competing priorities, and cultural barriers. This can affect their capacity to engage in programs and support their children in the home environment.
- A common voice is missing: Some governments, families, and potential funders are not aware of the potential impact of low literacy on children and society. A consistent message is needed about the importance of building early literacy in babies and young children.
- Advocacy is challenging: Sustained and effective advocacy efforts require both staff and resources for material and program development. This is particularly challenging for small and regional literacy organizations and can mean they are not able to actively participate in policy conversations due to resource limitations.

- A lack of sustained funding: Limited government resources and a lack of reliable consistent funding creates many challenges for literacy organizations. Reliance by literacy organizations on project grants rather than sustained core funding results in significant instability.
- Difficult to measure success: Early literacy interventions are difficult to measure due to the limitations of research and longitudinal measurement strategies. This affects organizations in their efforts to demonstrate impact and success.

#### OPPORTUNITIES FOR NATIONAL ACTION

- Communicate a consistent message: A compelling and consistent call to action is needed to raise awareness of the importance of early literacy with families,

the public, funders and government. Currently, there is no apparent shared understanding of why we, as a society, need to invest in early literacy.

- Advocacy support for the literacy community: A greater number of vocal and high-profile early literacy champions are needed, as well as advocacy tools and resources. A shared understanding of the national and provincial policy landscape that impacts early literacy promotion could help define advocacy priorities for the literacy community. Clear policy recommendations to support early literacy promotion are also needed to secure sustained funding for literacy organizations.
- Share best practices and resources: By sharing accessible and scalable best

practices, resources, programs, and learnings from pilot projects, literacy organizations can reduce duplication, maximize resources, and enhance impact.

- Demonstrate impact of existing programs: Investments in evaluation and measurement strategies are needed to strengthen literacy programs and initiatives by demonstrating impact and developing best practices.
- Provide families with information: Knowledge and resources for families are needed to help them understand the impact they can have on their children's early literacy journey, including emphasizing joyful learning through talking, singing, and reading.

# Moving Forward

Building literacy skills in young children is one of the most effective ways to ensure they can achieve their full potential when they enter school and throughout life. Literacy opens doors to understanding, empathy, critical thinking, and the capacity for lifelong learning. A more literate Canada is healthier, happier, more productive, and socially engaged. Yet too many children in Canada are not developing the literacy skills they need. We want to help change this.

Gathering literacy leaders to discuss and debate challenges and opportunities is critical to moving our collective work forward. It builds connections and trust between organizations, many of which are in the same location but never cross paths, and it creates the opportunity to share and generate new knowledge.

With participation by 100 attendees representing 59 organizations, the Early Literacy Matters Roundtable series generated a productive dialogue about how we can strengthen our shared impact on early literacy. Together we identified what is working, the barriers that need to be tackled, and what areas can be addressed through national, coordinated efforts.

While each of the roundtable discussions was unique, they all reflected a deep commitment by participants to helping children and families in their literacy journeys and to building a more literate society. A common thread through all of the discussions was the importance of strong partnerships and collaboration within the literacy community, with families, with governments and other sectors. The co-hosts and participants were pleased to come together to share ideas and learn from each other. We hope these early discussions will evolve into new shared programs and partnerships.

Our experience and connections made through the roundtable series has reinforced our commitment to bringing together organizations with an early literacy mandate to facilitate knowledge-sharing, including best practices, resources and ideas. It has reinforced our commitment to being a national voice for children's literacy and the exploration of Canada's literacy challenges.

The roundtables also emphasized the need to expand early literacy conversations. Two areas of need include additional consultations with

representatives from communities that experience low literacy and organizations that do not have an explicit literacy mandate but have an important role to play in building literacy skills.

Our collective efforts to champion early literacy are even more pressing today as we consider our post-pandemic context. With every aspect of our lives now disrupted and the potential for long-term economic and societal impact, we need to find new paths to build respectfully on the learnings of the past, including our successes, challenges and opportunities.

CCLF is grateful for the input and information that was shared during the roundtables as well as the time and dedication of the co-hosts and participants. To help early literacy become a priority in Canada, CCLF commits to reflecting on the learnings of these roundtables and continuing to build our shared knowledge about the best ways forward.

Together we can give all of Canada's children the opportunity to reach their full potential.

# Detailed Roundtable Findings

Early Literacy Matters Roundtables were co-hosted by CCLF and local literacy organizations. Small group discussions identified successes and challenges in supporting early literacy and large group discussions focused on opportunities for national action and how CCLF could help address identified gaps and opportunities. The two-hour format maximized attendance from small organizations with few staff who could not attend a longer session.

What follows is a summary of the roundtable discussions at each site.



# Edmonton, Alberta

Date: February 25, 2020

Co-host: Centre for Family Literacy

Participants included leaders from early literacy initiatives and people working with at-risk families in Edmonton and the surrounding areas.

## LOCAL SUCCESSES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Demonstrating the success of incorporating joyful literacy-building activities such as rhymes, songs, and interactive games into early childhood education centres and the impact on building healthy brains.
- Increasing understanding among early childhood educators, parents and caregivers that literacy is more than learning letters and reading.
- Making resources such as training kits, book sales and promotional materials available through Edmonton Public Library.
- Linking literacy to other basic needs such as safe housing and access to food, and addressing these as a whole.

## PRIORITY CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

- A lack of awareness among families of how literacy develops; the importance of early literacy activities for a child's brain development (even before school starts) and the role of reading, speaking, and singing to children; and how to access resources.
- To achieve sustainable universal funding, we need a common national voice to change the conversation about the importance of literacy.

"Raising all children to be literate, no matter their circumstances or innate ability, requires the concerted effort of all organizations that support children and families. Events like the Early Literacy Matters Roundtable are important for advancing literacy because they bring literacy organizations together to refocus on the core problem. These events allow us to reflect, revisit approaches, learn from each other and go back to our own organizations with refreshed perspectives and resolve. It is heartening to see the dedication of others working to achieve similar aims and helpful to have the opportunity to strengthen connections that aid our collective impact."

### Elaine Jones

Manager, Youth Services  
Edmonton Public Library

- A perceived lack of awareness among the general public, funders, and government of the importance of early literacy and how literacy develops.
- Low awareness of literacy as a critical human rights issue and how literacy is connected to other challenges such as poverty.
- A lack of consistent government support and continuity of funding for literacy programs.
- The need for longitudinal measurement and long-term evaluation strategies to identify best practices for building early literacy skills.
- The need for a common voice about the benefits of building early literacy skills and the challenges of not building early literacy skills.

#### OTHER CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED BY THE GROUP

- A lack of structured literacy-building support for the 0 to 5 age range and need for a central location or a hub for families to access supports and find programs.
- The need to address significant barriers to parental engagement, including: prioritizing basic needs (food, housing, financial security); mental and other health challenges; program scheduling

and location; and stigma of parental low literacy levels.

- The importance of working with First Nations, Inuit and Métis governments, organizations and communities to build authentic relationships and co-create culturally relevant programs.
- Challenges in ensuring availability of high-quality, multilingual, culturally appropriate materials and resources.
- Connecting with newcomers to address potential cultural barriers in developing early literacy skills.
- The need to empower families to become engaged in early literacy activities and a lack of understanding of the impact of screen usage on children's brains.
- The belief by many people that literacy is developed at school or is the sole responsibility of the family rather than a societal concern and responsibility.
- Challenges created by structural issues within the broader policy landscape.
- A lack of recognition that the process of building literacy skills is different for those who need to learn languages such as braille or sign language.

#### OPPORTUNITIES FOR NATIONAL ACTION

- "Change the conversation" so that the critical role of strong literacy skills for individuals and society is better recognized and understood by families, the public, potential funders and governments.
- Help to build a broad base of support across the country for literacy programs so funding and programs are not impacted when there is a change in regional or provincial government or strategy.
- Drive the development of a national literacy strategy to support organizations and literacy advocates with a common message and framework.
- Support advocacy efforts to help bring a spotlight to literacy as a human right and the importance of focusing on children ages 0 to 5, and provide advocacy tools for shared use by literacy advocates.
- Lead longitudinal measurement and long-term evaluation strategies to identify best practices for building early literacy skills.



# Vancouver, British Columbia

Date: February 27, 2020

Co-host: Decoda Literacy Solutions

Participants included representatives from university literacy research initiatives and community literacy programs that work with families and newcomers to Canada.

## LOCAL SUCCESSES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Supporting families to access library services including library memberships.
- Availability of library-based story time for ages 0 to 5 organized by professional staff and based on early learning and development research. These programs offer social and community connections, and also encourage families to read, talk, write and play at home.
- Working to augment the availability of, and access to, digital stories in multiple languages through portals such as the Global Story Books projects.<sup>8</sup>
- Providing families with free books and kits containing tools that support early literacy.
- Ensuring that families are able to access early childhood education and childcare across the province.
- Providing workshops and orientation sessions in communities across the province that share with families the importance of language development and literacy in children's lives.
- Collaborating with literacy organizations in other provinces to share best practices.

"As literacy researchers, it was great to be able to share our research and listen to community-based practitioners talk about their experiences. Interactions like these are critical for ensuring that academic researchers and community-based literacy practitioners are working together to increase literacy for all Canadians."

### **Carla L. Hudson Kam**

Professor

Canada Research Chair in Language Acquisition, Department of Linguistics, University of British Columbia

and

### **Guofang Li**

Professor

Canada Research Chair in Transnational/Global Perspectives of Language and Literacy Education of Children and Youth, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia



## PRIORITY CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

- Recognizing high-quality programs are expensive to develop and run, it is necessary to advocate for increased funding for literacy initiatives so that programs are available and affordable.
- As literacy organizations operate independently, this limits the ability for great programs to be scaled up within communities or across provinces.
- Finding a way to promote and share best practices and programs using consistent messaging would help raise awareness and uptake. Participants specifically noted the Centre for Family Literacy curriculum and the Decoda Literacy Library as being programs that would be of value to others.
- There is a need to augment the broader awareness of the importance of early literacy programs and their perceived value. This could help empower the literacy community to deliver programs and help instill pride in their work and contribute to the overall success.

## OTHER CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED BY THE GROUP

- There is limited access to print and electronic resources in different

languages and that reflect different cultural backgrounds and experiences.

- There is a lack of consistent training and remuneration for individuals involved in literacy-based education including Early Childhood Educators.
- There are many barriers facing families in accessing literacy programs (e.g., poverty, low-education, housing, unemployment, transportation, food, as well as attitudes towards reading and literacy). The impact of these barriers needs to be understood and addressed.
- There is a need to recognize the difference between family literacy programs that are intended to help all members of a family increase their literacy skills and children's literacy programs that are primarily focused on increasing the children's literacy skills.
- Families of children with special needs must be supported to help them access resources and assessment tools tailored to their needs.
- There is a lack of program evaluation and research into optimal family literacy programs. Research is needed to help inform program development and support uptake within communities.

- Many caregivers and those involved in home-based daycares may feel alone and marginalized, which can result in low confidence and engagement.
- People who work in literacy are not well represented in government and policy-making bodies. Elevating the profile of early childhood literacy as a sector will help improve funding, support and enthusiasm for literacy initiatives.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR NATIONAL ACTION

- Provide support for advocacy efforts by developing common messages for consistent funding for early and family literacy.
- Promote and share best practices and resources and small programs or pilots that are scalable or accessible by other provinces (examples Centre for Family Literacy curriculum and Decoda Library).
- Champion the delivery by literacy organizations of high-quality programs and help instill pride in the work.
- Support literacy advocates across the country to tell a consistent indisputable story that helps raise awareness of the importance of early literacy.



# Halifax, Nova Scotia

Date: March 10, 2020

Co-host: Read to Me

Participants attended from Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick and included representatives from the public sector, public libraries, literacy programs, and speech and language services.

## LOCAL SUCCESSES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Providing families with access to free reading materials and sessions at local libraries.
- Embedding adult-literacy tools into adult education and training programs to increase awareness among families of the value of reading. This also includes enhancing materials available at family resource and cultural centres.
- Enhancing the value of a holistic approach to literacy by introducing play and music tools into early childhood education settings.
- Building strong partnerships within the community, such as the partnership between Read to Me, hospitals and local libraries, and providing free resources and guidance for developing early literacy skills from birth.
- Enhancing educator understanding of the value of literacy by supporting professional development initiatives focused on early childhood literacy.
- Supporting existing government-funded school-based initiatives within each province such as the Nova Scotia Early Learning

Curriculum Framework and New Brunswick's Early Childhood Curriculum Framework to enhance literacy-based opportunities for pre-school and kindergarten-age children.

### PRIORITY CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

- There are many challenges in reaching families who are most in need of support and resources either because their ability to access services is limited or they do not understand the value of play and reading in early years.
- It is difficult to measure success of early literacy interventions due to the lack of useful and well-understood measurement tools.
- There is lack of a coordinated national or regional strategy to supporting early intervention. Resources and funding are often ad-hoc or time-limited, which impedes the development and implementation of long-term intervention strategies.

### OTHER CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED BY THE GROUP

- There is a lack of parental knowledge about programs and resources (e.g., affordable or free options) and of the value and necessary frequency of

reading and play for optimal childhood development.

- Families face many challenges accessing programs or resources either because programs do not exist or competing commitments impact the ability of families to participate in available programs.
- There is a lack of awareness among literacy-based organizations of other literacy activities within the community and a need to provide a more coordinated approach to reinforce the importance of early literacy.
- Many people cannot access resources and programs in their preferred language and there is low awareness of what materials are available.
- Adults experiencing trauma and low literacy can struggle to support their children's literacy development.
- Smartphones and other devices distract parents and pull attention away from children.
- Cuts in government funding for programs and resources negatively affect the ability of organizations to reach under-served groups.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR NATIONAL ACTION

- Building awareness among government, educators, and families of the value of a play-based curriculum for child development, and how play, reading, speaking and singing increases school readiness.
- Helping develop evaluation and measurement strategies to identify best practices for building early literacy skills.
- Supporting collaboration among literacy researchers, program developers and implementers.
- Coordinating and convening literacy-based organizations to support consistent messaging regarding the importance of literacy skill development in young children. This may include providing solutions to reaching under-served groups.
- Supporting the development of a national literacy strategy to help bring alignment to organizations and literacy advocates.



# Montreal, Quebec

Date: March 12, 2020

Co-host: Frontier College

Participants included representatives from early literacy initiatives, academics, and people working with at-risk families in Montreal and the surrounding area. This was a bilingual event.

## LOCAL SUCCESSES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Connecting and communicating with families through workshops about the importance of a well-rounded approach to literacy that is integrated with play.
- School boards, including Lester B Pearson, implementing a new pre-kindergarten program for four-year-old children, which enabled the board to reach disadvantaged populations within the English-speaking community.
- Integrating a focus on early literacy into Montreal Children's Hospital (a McGill University Health Centre), is supporting the intersection of healthcare and early literacy, and the successful linking of early brain development and early literacy (beyond just reading), which helps families understand the importance of early literacy efforts.
- Community workers offering literacy programs and babysitting in community-housing apartments helps to make literacy programs more accessible.

## PRIORITY CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

- The need for more awareness among the public, families, funders and government about the importance of building early literacy.
- There is fragmented messaging related to the importance of building early literacy skills; many families (and the general public) do not connect the development of literacy with talking to young children.
- Parents and caregivers may not understand why and how to read with little ones, and the connection to early brain development. Parents, caregivers, and others may need training on techniques to read to children ages 0 to 5.
- Many people are not aware of the importance of using a family's primary language when helping children develop literacy skills. This is particularly an issue for newcomers who may want to encourage children to learn French or English.
- There is a need to share existing resources to avoid duplication.
- It can be challenging to reach more vulnerable families. They face unique barriers, such as distance and cost of

travel, living in isolated locations, language and cultural barriers, and competing priorities within the household.

## OTHER CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED BY THE GROUP

- Messaging about early literacy and its impact on a child's development is not always understood. The "L word" (literacy) can be confusing to families.
- There is an absence of an integrated approach to literacy development in a child's first five years.
- Collaboration is needed among literacy initiatives and governments, healthcare providers and educators to ensure adequate buy-in and mobilization of families.
- There is a lack of recognition of unique needs and challenges of English-speaking minorities and other non-French speaking communities (e.g., availability of material and programming outside Montreal).
- There is a need for a standardized program or toolkit for distribution to families. This will help ensure consistency and address the high cost of developing and delivering good quality programs and resources.

- Early literacy education needs to be included in teacher and medical training to help improve an understanding of the value of early childhood education.
- Literacy organizations with few staff face challenges in delivering programs and creating materials.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR NATIONAL ACTION

- Developing consistent messaging and a toolkit to help build awareness with the government, the general public and funders of the importance of early literacy.
- Helping to minimize barriers between institutions and vulnerable families and increasing the engagement with families to help build an understanding of the importance of reading to young children.
- Serving as a forum to share resources and best practices to reduce duplication of effort.

# About the Roundtable Co-Hosts

## Bookmates

Bookmates is a Manitoba-based not-for-profit organization, established in 1984, that supports parents and caregivers in their roles as children's first teachers and helps to prepare children for success as they enter school. Bookmates develops, delivers and offers training in a variety of inter-generational early literacy programs to enhance the learning of both children and adults. Programs are ideal for use in schools, child care and family resource centres, libraries, and other organizations that support families with young children.

## Decoda Literacy Solutions

Decoda Literacy Solutions is the only province-wide, nonprofit, literacy organization in British Columbia. It works to increase the literacy and learning skills of children and families, youth, adults, and seniors to improve their quality of life at home, at work and in the community. Decoda's vision is a BC where everyone has the literacy skills they need.

## Centre for Family Literacy

Centre for Family Literacy recently celebrated 40 years in Edmonton. Originally known as Prospects Literacy, the Centre for Family Literacy is a charitable organization that develops and delivers family and adult literacy programs in the Edmonton region. It builds capacity in organizations and professionals throughout Alberta and Canada by providing family literacy training and resources. It is dedicated to working collaboratively to help families, adults, and children, and raising awareness of the literacy issue.

## Frontier College

Frontier College is a national charitable literacy organization. It believes literacy is a right and works with volunteers and community partners to give people the skills and confidence they need to reach their potential and to fully contribute to society. From coast to coast to coast, Frontier College is dedicated to improving the lives of children, youth, and adults by setting up and delivering innovative literacy programs.

## Read to Me

Read to Me is a non-profit, province-wide early reading promotion program that provides free books and reading resources to every baby born in Nova Scotia. A bag of these resources is delivered at the hospital bedside by a Read to Me representative. Families receive information on how to use the books and resources to support their baby's early literacy development and are encouraged to read, talk and sing to their baby every day. Launched in 2002, the program delivers more than 9,000 Read to Me bags in nine hospitals every year. The IWK Health Centre is the host organization for Read to Me.

# Literacy Programs and Initiatives

Early Literacy Matters Roundtable participants were asked to identify successful or note-worthy programs and initiatives, and we have included them here, organized by province with pan-Canadian and international programs clustered separately. This is not intended to be a comprehensive list of all early literacy programs in Canada or elsewhere. Inclusion in this list does not reflect endorsement by the CCLF or any of the partners.

## National

ABC Life Literacy Canada – Family Resources  
[abclifeliteracy.ca/family-literacy/](http://abclifeliteracy.ca/family-literacy/)

CNIB Foundation's Education and Literacy  
'Learn' Programs  
[www.cnib.ca/en/programs-and-services/learn](http://www.cnib.ca/en/programs-and-services/learn)

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library of Canada  
[imaginationlibrary.com/ca/](http://imaginationlibrary.com/ca/)

Family Resource Centres  
[familiescanada.ca/find-family-resource-centre/](http://familiescanada.ca/find-family-resource-centre/)

First Book Canada  
[www.firstbookcanada.org](http://www.firstbookcanada.org)

Frontier College  
[www.frontiercollege.ca](http://www.frontiercollege.ca)

Kids First, Parent Association of Canada  
[www.kidsfirstcanada.org](http://www.kidsfirstcanada.org)

LENA  
[www.lena.org](http://www.lena.org)

minibiblioPLUS  
<https://minibiblioplus.org/index.php/en/>

Mothers Matter Centre – Home Instruction for  
Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPIY)  
[www.mothersmattercentre.ca](http://www.mothersmattercentre.ca)

Storybooks Canada  
[www.storybookscanada.ca](http://www.storybookscanada.ca)

Indigenous Storybooks  
[indigenoustorybooks.ca](http://indigenoustorybooks.ca)

Global Storybooks Portal  
[globalstorybooks.net](http://globalstorybooks.net)

Strong Start  
[www.strongstart.ca](http://www.strongstart.ca)

The Hanen Centre  
[www.hanen.org/Home.aspx](http://www.hanen.org/Home.aspx)

The Parent-Child Mother Goose Program  
[nationalpcmgp.ca](http://nationalpcmgp.ca)

United Way Centraide Canada  
[www.unitedway.ca/](http://www.unitedway.ca/)

## International

Accelerated Reader Bookfinder  
[www.arbookfind.com/UserType.aspx?RedirectURL=%2fdefault.aspx](http://www.arbookfind.com/UserType.aspx?RedirectURL=%2fdefault.aspx)

Every Child Ready to Read (American Library  
Association)  
[everychildreadytoread.org](http://everychildreadytoread.org)

VROOM  
[www.vroom.org](http://www.vroom.org)

# Provincial Programs – East to West

## NOVA SCOTIA

Bedford Sackville Centre for Early Intervention /  
Nova Scotia Early Childhood Development  
Intervention Services (NSECDIS)

[www.nsecdis.ca](http://www.nsecdis.ca)

Équipe d'alphabétisation de la Nouvelle-  
Écosse

[www.eane.ca](http://www.eane.ca)

Fairview United Family Resource Centre (FFC)

[www.ffcns.ca](http://www.ffcns.ca)

Frontier College Halifax

[www.frontiercollege.ca/Programs/By-Location/  
Nova-Scotia/Halifax](http://www.frontiercollege.ca/Programs/By-Location/Nova-Scotia/Halifax)

Get Reading: Adopt-A-Library Literacy  
Program, in partnership with Pictou Antigonish  
Regional Library

[county.pictou.ns.ca/community/community-  
news/get-reading-adopt-a-library-literacy-  
program-still-going-strong-after-20-years/](http://county.pictou.ns.ca/community/community-news/get-reading-adopt-a-library-literacy-program-still-going-strong-after-20-years/)

Halifax Public Libraries

[www.halifaxpubliclibraries.ca](http://www.halifaxpubliclibraries.ca)

Halifax Regional Centre for Education (HRCE)

[www.hrce.ca/about-our-schools/parents/  
pre-primary-program](http://www.hrce.ca/about-our-schools/parents/pre-primary-program)

Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia  
(ISANS)

[www.isans.ca](http://www.isans.ca)

Maggie's Place Family Resource Centre, Truro/  
Amherst NS

[maggiesplace.ca](http://maggiesplace.ca)

Mi'kmaq Family Resource Centre (Mi'kmaw  
Native Friendship Centre)

[mymnfc.com](http://mymnfc.com)

Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK)

[kinu.ca](http://kinu.ca)

Nova Scotia Provincial Library Canada

[library.novascotia.ca](http://library.novascotia.ca)

Nova Scotia Department of Early Childhood  
Development programs

African Canadian Services Branch

[www.ednet.ns.ca/acs/our-objectives](http://www.ednet.ns.ca/acs/our-objectives)

Pre-Primary Programs

[www.ednet.ns.ca/pre-primary](http://www.ednet.ns.ca/pre-primary)

Read to Me

[www.readtome.ca](http://www.readtome.ca)

Squiggle Park

[www.squigglepark.com](http://www.squigglepark.com)

Words By The Sea – Speech and Language  
Services, Dartmouth, NS

[www.wordsbythesea.ca](http://www.wordsbythesea.ca)

## PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Family Place, Summerside PEI

[www.familyplacepei.com/about](http://www.familyplacepei.com/about)

Learning Partnership/Mi'kmaq Confederacy of  
PEI- New Paths

[mcpei.ca](http://mcpei.ca)

PEI Public Libraries

[www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/  
education-and-lifelong-learning/public-  
libraries-locations-and-hours](http://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/education-and-lifelong-learning/public-libraries-locations-and-hours)

PEI Public Library Service/PEI Public Health  
Partnership: Early Childhood Literacy: Born to  
Read and Little Ones Read

[www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/  
education-early-learning-and-culture/early-  
childhood-literacy-born-read-and-little-ones](http://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/education-early-learning-and-culture/early-childhood-literacy-born-read-and-little-ones)

## NEW BRUNSWICK

Frontier College Fredericton

[www.frontiercollege.ca/Programs/By-Location/  
New-Brunswick/Fredericton](http://www.frontiercollege.ca/Programs/By-Location/New-Brunswick/Fredericton)

Frontier College Moncton

[www.frontiercollege.ca/Programs/By-Location/  
New-Brunswick/Moncton](http://www.frontiercollege.ca/Programs/By-Location/New-Brunswick/Moncton)

Living Saint-John, Cradle to Career

[sjinfoc2c.com/about.php](http://sjinfoc2c.com/about.php)

New Brunswick Public Library Service

[www1.gnb.ca/0003/pages/en/alpha-e.asp](http://www1.gnb.ca/0003/pages/en/alpha-e.asp)



Talk With Me/Parle-Moi  
[asd-n.nbed.nb.ca/other/talk-me](http://asd-n.nbed.nb.ca/other/talk-me)

## PAN-MARITIME

Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA)  
[www.apsea.ca](http://www.apsea.ca)

## QUEBEC

BANQ Bibliothèque Archive Nationale de Québec  
[www.banq.qc.ca/accueil/](http://www.banq.qc.ca/accueil/)

Bibliothèques Montréal  
[bibliomontreal.com](http://bibliomontreal.com)

Collège Frontière Montréal  
[www.collegefrontiere.ca/Programs/By-Location/Quebec/Montreal](http://www.collegefrontiere.ca/Programs/By-Location/Quebec/Montreal)

Frontier College Montréal  
[www.frontiercollege.ca/Programs/By-Location/Quebec/Montreal](http://www.frontiercollege.ca/Programs/By-Location/Quebec/Montreal)

Fondation pour l'alphabétisation  
[www.fondationalphabetisation.org](http://www.fondationalphabetisation.org)

Literacy Foundation  
[www.fondationalphabetisation.org/en/](http://www.fondationalphabetisation.org/en/)

Hôpital de Montréal pour Enfants, Centre universitaire de santé McGill  
[www.hopitalpourenfants.com](http://www.hopitalpourenfants.com)

Montreal Children's Hospital, McGill University Health Centre  
[www.thechildren.com](http://www.thechildren.com)

JAME: Jumelages et Apprentissage Mission: Éducation  
[www.jame-mtl.org](http://www.jame-mtl.org)

TLC Daycare  
[www.tlclasalle.org](http://www.tlclasalle.org)

## ALBERTA

ABC Headstarts  
[www.abcheadstart.org](http://www.abcheadstart.org)

Aboriginal Head Start Edmonton  
[aboriginalheadstart.com](http://aboriginalheadstart.com)

Alberta Reads Network  
[cayley.fsd38.ab.ca/view.php?action=object&id=725&stream=News](http://cayley.fsd38.ab.ca/view.php?action=object&id=725&stream=News)

Ben Calf Robe Society  
[www.bcrsociety.ab.ca](http://www.bcrsociety.ab.ca)

Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society  
[bentarrow.ca](http://bentarrow.ca)

Bissell Centre  
[bissellcentre.org](http://bissellcentre.org)

Calgary Reads  
[calgaryreads.com](http://calgaryreads.com)

Wee Read Children's Program  
[calgaryreads.com/programs/wee-read/](http://calgaryreads.com/programs/wee-read/)

Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), 211, Resource List for Children  
[edmonton.cmha.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/2019-11\\_211\\_ResourceList\\_Children.pdf](http://edmonton.cmha.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/2019-11_211_ResourceList_Children.pdf)

Candora Society  
[www.candora.ca](http://www.candora.ca)

Centre for Family Literacy  
[www.familit.ca](http://www.familit.ca)

Books for Babies  
[www.familit.ca/programs\\_and\\_projects/programs/babies.shtml](http://www.familit.ca/programs_and_projects/programs/babies.shtml)

Rhymes That Bind and Multicultural Rhymes That Bind  
[www.familit.ca/programs\\_and\\_projects/programs/rhymes.shtml](http://www.familit.ca/programs_and_projects/programs/rhymes.shtml)

Learn Together Grow Together  
[www.familit.ca/programs\\_and\\_projects/programs/learn-GT.shtml](http://www.familit.ca/programs_and_projects/programs/learn-GT.shtml)

C.O.W. Bus (Classroom on Wheels Bus)  
[www.familit.ca/programs\\_and\\_projects/programs/cow.shtml](http://www.familit.ca/programs_and_projects/programs/cow.shtml)

Literacy Links  
[www.familit.ca/training/lit-links.shtml](http://www.familit.ca/training/lit-links.shtml)

321 Fun  
[www.familit.ca/programs\\_and\\_projects/programs/321.shtml](http://www.familit.ca/programs_and_projects/programs/321.shtml)

Family Literacy App and Resources  
[www.familit.ca/resources/resources\\_p.shtml](http://www.familit.ca/resources/resources_p.shtml)

Connect Society  
[connectsociety.org](http://connectsociety.org)

Early Childhood Coalitions Alberta (ECCA)  
[ecdcoalitions.org](http://ecdcoalitions.org)

Early Learning and Childcare Centres (ELCC)  
Family Support  
[www.alberta.ca/early-learning-child-care-centre-locations.aspx](http://www.alberta.ca/early-learning-child-care-centre-locations.aspx)

ECALA  
[www.ecala.org](http://www.ecala.org)

Edmonton Catholic Schools  
[www.ecsd.net](http://www.ecsd.net)

Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers  
[www.emcn.ab.ca](http://www.emcn.ab.ca)

Edmonton Early Years Coalitions (EEYC)  
[www.earlychildhoodedm.ca](http://www.earlychildhoodedm.ca)

Edmonton Garrison Military Family Resource Centre  
[www.cafconnection.ca/Edmonton/Contact-Us/Military-Family-Resource-Centre.aspx](http://www.cafconnection.ca/Edmonton/Contact-Us/Military-Family-Resource-Centre.aspx)

Edmonton Public Library (EPL)  
[www.epl.ca](http://www.epl.ca)

E4C  
[e4calberta.org](http://e4calberta.org)

End Poverty Edmonton  
[www.endpovertyedmonton.ca](http://www.endpovertyedmonton.ca)

Family Resource Network (formally known as Parent Link Centres)  
[www.alberta.ca/parent-link-centres.aspx](http://www.alberta.ca/parent-link-centres.aspx)

Family Centre  
[www.famcentre.ca/partners/lethbridge-early-years-coalition/](http://www.famcentre.ca/partners/lethbridge-early-years-coalition/)

Parents as Teachers Program  
[www.famcentre.ca/partners/parents-as-teachers/](http://www.famcentre.ca/partners/parents-as-teachers/)

Families First Society Fort Saskatchewan  
[familiesfirstsociety.ca](http://familiesfirstsociety.ca)

Family Futures Resource Network  
[www.familyfutures.ca/programs\\_servicesmain/calendars/child-youth/](http://www.familyfutures.ca/programs_servicesmain/calendars/child-youth/)

Frontier College Edmonton  
[www.frontiercollege.ca/Programs/By-Location/Alberta/Edmonton](http://www.frontiercollege.ca/Programs/By-Location/Alberta/Edmonton)

Jasper Place Child and Family Resource Centre  
[jasperplace-cfrc.com](http://jasperplace-cfrc.com)

Kara Family Resource Centre  
[www.kara-frc.com/about-kara/](http://www.kara-frc.com/about-kara/)

Multicultural Family Resource Society  
[www.mfrsedmonton.org](http://www.mfrsedmonton.org)

Norwood Child and Family Resource Centre  
[www.norwoodcentre.com](http://www.norwoodcentre.com)

Primrose Family Resource Centre  
[www.primroseplace.org/family-resource-centre/](http://www.primroseplace.org/family-resource-centre/)

## BRITISH COLUMBIA

Best for Babies  
[archway.ca/program/best-for-babies/](http://archway.ca/program/best-for-babies/)

Books For Me  
[www.booksformevancover.org](http://www.booksformevancover.org)

Canadian College of English Language (CCEL),  
English Language Learning  
[www.canada-english.com](http://www.canada-english.com)

CCEL  
[www.canada-english.com/fr/](http://www.canada-english.com/fr/)

Chilliwack Gateway for Family program  
[central.sd33.bc.ca/gateway-families-programs](http://central.sd33.bc.ca/gateway-families-programs)

Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy (CBAL)  
[www.cbal.org](http://www.cbal.org)

Decoda Literacy Solutions  
[www.decoda.ca](http://www.decoda.ca)

PALS and ABPALS: Parents as Literacy Supporters and Aboriginal Parents as Literacy Supporters  
[www.decoda.ca/practitioners/professional-development-community-literacy/pals/](http://www.decoda.ca/practitioners/professional-development-community-literacy/pals/)

Raise-a-Reader Program, Early Literacy Support Program  
[www.decoda.ca/support-us/events/raise-a-reader-month/](http://www.decoda.ca/support-us/events/raise-a-reader-month/)

Frontier College Vancouver  
[www.frontiercollege.ca/Programs/By-Location/British-Columbia/Lower-Mainland](http://www.frontiercollege.ca/Programs/By-Location/British-Columbia/Lower-Mainland)

Government of British Columbia

Childcare BC  
[www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/caring-for-young-children](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/caring-for-young-children)

Strong Start  
[www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/early-learning/support/programs/strongstart-bc](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/early-learning/support/programs/strongstart-bc)

Immigrant Parents as Literary Supporters (IPALS)  
[www.decoda.ca](http://www.decoda.ca)

Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia (ISSofBC)  
[issbc.org/service-types/linc-language-instruction-for-newcomers-to-canada](http://issbc.org/service-types/linc-language-instruction-for-newcomers-to-canada)

Mom2Mom  
[www.m2mcharity.ca](http://www.m2mcharity.ca)

Mosaic  
[www.mosaicbc.org](http://www.mosaicbc.org)

Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House (MPNH), Family Literacy Outreach Program, Association of Neighbourhood Houses BC  
[mpnh.org/our-programs/literacy/family-literacy-outreach/](http://mpnh.org/our-programs/literacy/family-literacy-outreach/)

Literacy Central Vancouver Island (LCVI)  
[www.literacycentralvi.org](http://www.literacycentralvi.org)

ONE TO ONE, A Children's Literacy Program  
[one-to-one.ca/about-us/](http://one-to-one.ca/about-us/)

Project Literacy. Central Okanagan Society, Kelowna  
[dosomegood.ca/organization/project-literacy-kelowna-society-348681](http://dosomegood.ca/organization/project-literacy-kelowna-society-348681)

Sheway, A Community Program for Women and Children, Vancouver Coastal Health  
[www.vch.ca/locations-services/result?res\\_id=900](http://www.vch.ca/locations-services/result?res_id=900)

Smart Learning, By Susan Close  
[www.smartlearning.ca/smart\\_learning\\_founder.shtml](http://www.smartlearning.ca/smart_learning_founder.shtml)

South Vancouver Family Place - Parenting Education & Literacy Programs  
[www.southvancouverfamilyplace.org/parenting-and-other-programs/](http://www.southvancouverfamilyplace.org/parenting-and-other-programs/)

Surrey Libraries  
[www.surreylibraries.ca/support-your-library/read-baby](http://www.surreylibraries.ca/support-your-library/read-baby)

The University of British Columbia (UBC)  
[www.ubc.ca](http://www.ubc.ca)

Train the Trainer for Early Childcare Providers  
[www.vcc.ca/programs/train-the-trainer/](http://www.vcc.ca/programs/train-the-trainer/)

Vancouver Public Library (VPL)  
[www.vpl.ca](http://www.vpl.ca)

"Storytime"  
[www.vpl.ca/program/storytime](http://www.vpl.ca/program/storytime)

West Coast Childcare and Resource Centre (WCCRC)  
[www.wstcoast.org](http://www.wstcoast.org)

# End Notes

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<http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/pirls2016/international-results/pirls/performance-at-international-benchmarks/achievement-at-the-international-benchmarks/> ;  
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[https://timssandpirls.bc.edu/pirls2011/reports/downloads/P11\\_IR\\_Chapter2.pdf](https://timssandpirls.bc.edu/pirls2011/reports/downloads/P11_IR_Chapter2.pdf)
- <sup>2</sup> The Canadian Council on Learning. (2008). "Reading the Future: Planning to Meet Canada's Future Literacy Needs." Canadian Council on Learning and the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education. <http://www.en.copian.ca/library/research/ccl/future/future.pdf> (p. 9); R. Rudd, I. Kirsch and K. Yamamoto, Health Literacy in America (Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 2004).
- <sup>3</sup> Heisz, A., Notten, G., & Situ, J. (2016). "The association between skills and low income." Insights on Canadian Society. Issue Number 2016001. Statistics Canada Catalogue 75-006-X201600114322.  
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2016001/article/14322-eng.pdf> (p.1)
- <sup>4</sup> TD Financial Group. (2007). "Literacy Matters: A Call for Action"  
<http://en.copian.ca/library/research/litmat/litmat.pdf>
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[https://edi-offordcentre.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2019/10/Early-Childhood-Development-in-Canada\\_EN\\_20190918.pdf](https://edi-offordcentre.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2019/10/Early-Childhood-Development-in-Canada_EN_20190918.pdf) (p. 28)
- <sup>6</sup> OECD. (2018). "Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Results from PISA 2018. Country Note: Canada."  
[https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018\\_CN\\_CAN.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_CAN.pdf)
- <sup>7</sup> Statistics Canada. (2013). "Skills in Canada: First Results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)."  
<http://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/315/Canadian-PIAAC-Report.EN.pdf>
- <sup>8</sup> The Global Story Books Portal <https://globalstorybooks.net/>