



RURAL AND INDIGENOUS FAMILIES' SUPPORT OF YOUNG CHILDREN'S WRITING

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ABSTRACT

In this study, northern Canadian rural and Indigenous parents provided valuable information about the self-initiated writing that their two- through nine-year-old children do at home. In interview responses, participating parents told stories about the writing materials and spaces they make available to children for writing. They talked about how they support their children's writing: informally—by demonstrating that writing is important; and formally—through direct teaching of letter forms and sound-letter relationships. Parents provided examples of their children's self-initiated writing, which includes types of texts that are not usually valued in mainstream spaces such as school. They explained that the writing is usually for the purposes of expressing feelings and informing family members. Our study adds to the literature on family literacy practices by validating the knowledge and experiences that northern rural and Indigenous children bring to their formal schooling.

Recommendations for teachers include initiating conversations with parents about the writing that their children do at home, finding spaces in the classroom schedule for children to present and talk about their self-initiated writing with the class, and providing specific information about how parents can support their children's writing. A "Tips for Parents" sheet is provided.

As parent, grandparent and aunt, we are part of young children's home lives, observing the many ways in which the children communicate with others using symbols on a page. Ashley, is a non-Indigenous parent of three young children. Kathy is an Indigenous primary teacher and aunt of a six-year old. Shelley, a former primary school teacher in rural communities and now a university professor in a faculty of education, is a grandmother to an eight- year-old and a four-year old.

Children in our lives use scribbles, letter-like forms, drawings and letters to create texts. We proudly display these texts on our refrigerators and fill boxes and scrapbooks with the texts and other artifacts of the children's childhood. Like Kress (1997), we believe that young children are "experienced makers of signs in any medium that is to hand" (p. 8), using tools such as pencils, markers, chalk, paint, or keyboards. Through writing-based interactions with others (e.g., observing someone texting, writing a caption on a photo that is uploaded to a social media site, or creating a grocery list), children learn about the significance and usefulness of texts. They also learn about the ways in which words and images are organized in particular types of texts and many other social



understandings about texts (Mackenzie, 2011; Wohlwend, 2013). In the process of creating texts, whether at home or at school, children also learn concepts about print; knowledge that supports their reading, as well. Writing and reading are reciprocal literacy practices, as “writing can contribute to the building of almost every kind of inner control of literacy learning that is needed by the successful reader” (Clay, 1998, p. 130).

Ashley and Shelley (Peterson & Grimes, 2018) have written previously about specific types of writing that Ashley’s children did in their preschool and first-grade years. We categorized the purposes (e.g., to express desires and to encourage others to do something or write to create identities) of child-initiated writing created for adult family members and friends and those created for a wider audience, such as a note to puppies viewed on an animal rescue website.

Building on our first inquiry, we invited Kathy to join us to conduct a second research study based on interviews with parents in Ashley’s and Kathy’s communities: a rural agricultural-based community with a population of approximately 6000 people in the western Canadian province of Alberta and a northern urban community of approximately 120,000 people in the central Canadian province of Ontario. Our research purpose was to gain a broader picture of the kinds of writing that young children do at home in northern communities, and of non-Indigenous rural and Indigenous urban parents’ perspectives on their and teachers’ roles in supporting children’s writing. Our research was guided by these research questions:

1. What are participating parents’ writing practices at home and in their work outside the home?
2. How do parents support their children’s home writing?
3. What are the forms and purposes of children’s writing at home?
4. What is the nature of parent-teacher communication about children’s school and home writing?

We believe that results of our research will be useful to teachers who wish to enhance children’s literacy through becoming more knowledgeable about and bringing children’s out-of-school writing into their classrooms.

ROLES OF FAMILIES AND TEACHERS IN YOUNG CHILDREN’S LITERACY AND LEARNING

Our research stems from many decades of research recognizing that the foundations of children’s language, literacy and all learning lie in the rich diversity of interactions they have with family and community members (Cairney, 2003; Compton-Lilly & Greene, 2011; McTavish, 2007). Indeed, family members’ involvement in literacy practices with their children is a strong predictor of children’s later literacy achievement, regardless of parents’ and other caregivers’ socio-economic status and prior education (International Reading Association, 2002).



By inviting family members' observations and stories of their children's writing, teachers send a strong message about the important role of families in children's literacy and learning. Previous research examining parents' perspectives on their roles as teachers found that regardless of socio-economic status and whether families had a long history within the United States or were new immigrants, parents viewed themselves as teachers alongside their children's classroom teachers (Espino, 2016; Gonzalez et al., 2018).

Researchers have shown that parents support their children's writing through a wide range of everyday informal interactions involving print (e.g., Cairney, 2003; Compton Lilly & Greene, 2011). Yet, much of the research on parent support of their children's writing takes up a view that parents can best assist their children by following teachers' guidelines on how to support the types of writing that are valued by the school. Zurcher (2016), for example, offers workshops that provide tips for parents to coach their children as they write at home. These include: focusing on meaning, rather than writing conventions; waiting for children to request help; and extending children's learning in one or two ways, rather than overwhelming children. Kolodziej and Columba (2005) advise teachers to inform parents about the developmental benefits of encouraging young children's invented spelling. They provide research-informed responses to questions that parents often ask about invented spelling.

PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION

Dialogue between teachers and parents/guardians and a true sense of partnership would help teachers to build on children's out-of-school literacy practices. At the same time, parents and other family members would become better informed about how they might support their children's school literacies. School literacies are representative of the dominant literacies that enable students to take up powerful positions in broader society (Cairney, 2003; Compton-Lilly & Greene, 2011).

Because parent-teacher communication is our research focus, our review of the literature also involved examining software designed to facilitate this communication. We only found software that enabled one-way communication coming from teachers. Of the software that is readily available (e.g., Classting, Bloomz, Parent Square, Talking Points and SeeSaw), parents provide input in the form of RSVPs to invitations to school events and participating in polls in Parent Square. Parents can comment on the messages and student work that is sent from the teacher through SeeSaw, but nowhere on the website is there mention of parents contacting teachers with samples of or stories about the writing and other literacy practices of children at home.

In the following section, we detail our methods for gathering information about northern rural and Indigenous parents' and their children's writing at home.



RESEARCH METHODS

RESEARCH CONTEXTS

Ashley interviewed nine parents of children 9-years-old and younger who live in and around her community. Eight of the Alberta participants are mothers and one is a father. Her recruitment practices involved putting up posters at a family-owned coffeeshop, at the public library, the town's daycare, and at the two elementary schools in the community. In some cases, parents who contacted Ashley then told their friends that they should contact her, too. Ashley gave participating parents a gift certificate for the family-owned coffee shop to show appreciation for their participation.

Kathy interviewed nine Indigenous mothers (one was accompanied by her partner) of children 8-years-old and younger who live in her city. Her recruitment procedures included putting up posters in two public schools in the community. There was no response from any parents of children in these two schools, so Kathy sent a poster to six Aboriginal organizations in the community. One parent who showed interest was not able to complete the interview. Kathy then asked Indigenous acquaintances and friends if they were aware of any parents who would be willing to participate in interviews. All nine interview participants were recruited through this process. She provided a gift certificate for a local coffee shop to express appreciation to the participants for contributing to our study.

INTERVIEWS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Ashley and Kathy initially conducted a trial run of the interview process with a relative or friend. This experience provided them with practice in interviewing. After reviewing the transcripts of these initial interviews with Shelley, we determined that Ashley and Kathy might need to add follow-up questions to the interview protocol in order to gather the needed information about participants' writing at home and at work. The final interview protocol can be found in Appendix A.

Many of the interviews, which ranged from 10-45 minutes, took place in participants' kitchens or living rooms where their children were present. Two interviews took place in participants' vehicles during their lunch break, one was at the coffee shop, and two were in participants' workplaces.

Parents of children who were six-years-old and younger observed that their children initiate drawing, scribbles, and print whenever they have quiet time at home. For some children this means that they write on a daily basis. As a result, it was possible to gather samples of children's writing. With parents' permission, Ashley and Kathy took photographs of writing created by at least one of each participant's children. They asked the parent to provide information about the context for creating the text (e.g., who it was for, what the child intended to do with the writing). Participating parents provided us with children's drawings, many of which have scribbled, dictated, or child-



written captions indicating who is in the picture. Girls and boys of all ages created these types of texts.

Two 6-year-old girls wrote letters to their parents. Three 6-to-9-year-old boys created a range of forms: instructions on how to draw Captain America's shield, a cartoon, and a description of a pet.

We analyzed interview responses inductively (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), allowing patterns to emerge in terms of our research questions. To analyze the writing, we drew on Cairney and Ruge's (1998) practice of inferring the child's intended purpose and intended audience (e.g., creating cards for relatives or friends to establish or maintain relationships; writing a caption for a drawing of family members to inform others about their family; and writing the alphabet for skills development) to categorize literacy practices. This analysis reflects children's intentionality—the understanding that written language is a meaning-laden symbol system (McTavish, 2007; Rowe, 2010).

To ensure that our interpretations represented what participating parents intended, we conducted a member check, emailing participating parents a draft of this paper and inviting their comments and questions.

FINDINGS

In the following section, we summarize findings from our analysis of the interviews and the children's writing, organizing our findings in terms of our research questions. Specifically, we will examine participating parents' writing practices at home and in their work outside the home; parents' support for children's writing at home; purposes of children's home writing; communication between parents and teachers about children's writing at home and at school.

WRITING IS IMPORTANT TO PARENTS AT WORK AND AT HOME

Occupations of Ontario participants include: stay-at-home mother, university student, General Equivalency Diploma (GED) student, and chauffeur for out-of-town patients to get to their medical appointments. Occupations of Alberta participants are: stay-at-home mother, health and safety advisor, administrative assistant, summer Bible camp manager, carpenter, financial assistant, and teacher. Participants use various forms of writing in their jobs for a range of purposes: lists to organize activities at a camp; hazard assessment spreadsheets; passenger names and kilometers driven; letters/email; invoices; electronic documents; and meeting notes.

Participating parents gave examples of ways in which writing was an integral part of their lives at home. Writing to communicate with others and to "keep track of things," as one Ontario parent explained, is part of their everyday activities at home. Communication takes the form of notes written to family members and text messages on cell phones. Some participants write birthday and Christmas cards to family and friends. Lists of family activities and groceries to buy at the store are the written forms used to help participants keep track of and remember information. Writing is a



form of personal expression for two Indigenous parents. Both parents keep a journal and one parent also writes poetry. Poetry and journal writing were her mother's home literacy practices.

PARENTS' SUPPORT

SHOWING THAT THEY VALUE THEIR CHILDREN'S WRITING

Participating parents' sense of the importance of writing in their lives was communicated to their children in four ways: through providing materials and space for writing; through praising children's writing; through displaying and keeping the writing; and through following children's lead on what and how they want to write.

All participating parents have many writing materials available (e.g., pencils, paper, pencil crayons, and in some cases, dry-erase or chalkboards and magnetic letters on the refrigerator). They told us stories about writing that their children initiate at home using these materials. Many parents said that their child "sees the pencils and paper and starts writing and drawing." A few parents of children under three years of age laughed as they talked about their children writing and drawing on walls. It appears that every available surface is seen by children as an invitation to express themselves symbolically.

Parent-child interactions involving children's writing always start with praise and expressions of pride in what the children have written. Parents encourage their children to write, scribble or draw, and show that they value children's texts by posting them on the refrigerator or a bulletin board.

In the text in Figure 1, five-year-old Devon has drawn a Christmas tree and then dictated a label for it (written in the upper right-hand corner of the text). Devon's parents show how much they value his texts by displaying it on the refrigerator. They also demonstrate the importance of writing by having magnetic letters available for Devon and all family members to create messages on the refrigerator itself.

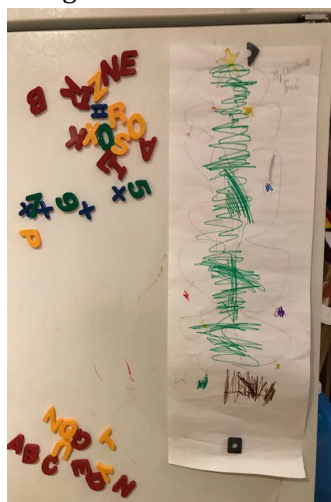


Figure 1. Five-year-old Devon's Christmas Tree text on the refrigerator.



Many participants talked about keeping a drawer, folder, or trunk of treasured “keepsakes” that include their children’s writing, drawing, and scribbling. It is common for parents to “rotate” the texts in these repositories, replacing some of the older texts with newer ones because of the large volume of writing and shortage of space.

Three parents explained how important it is to follow their children’s lead in terms of what they want to write and how they want to communicate their message. Georgia, a mother of a three-year-old boy, said that it is important to “encourage them, answer their questions if they ask, but do not push writing on them.” She went on to explain that the reason her son enjoys writing is because she has “treated it as a game, rather than something that he has to do.”

INFORMAL AND FORMAL TEACHING

Participating parents talked about informal teaching, such as modeling the importance of writing at home. They also gave examples of their direct teaching of writing, as they demonstrated how to write letters and helped children sound out and match letters to sounds in words they wanted to write.

Indigenous parents who are students observed that in the process of writing at home for their course work, they are serving as models for their children. By devoting extensive periods of time to writing, they demonstrate the value of writing.

Sebastian, a four-year-old boy, wrote a message using letter-like shapes and scribbles on a piece of paper (see Figure 2). Sebastian’s father observed that his son was “mimicking Mom and Dad in an office type of way,” when Sebastian filed his writing in the drawer of his desk, imitating his parents as they did office “paper work.”

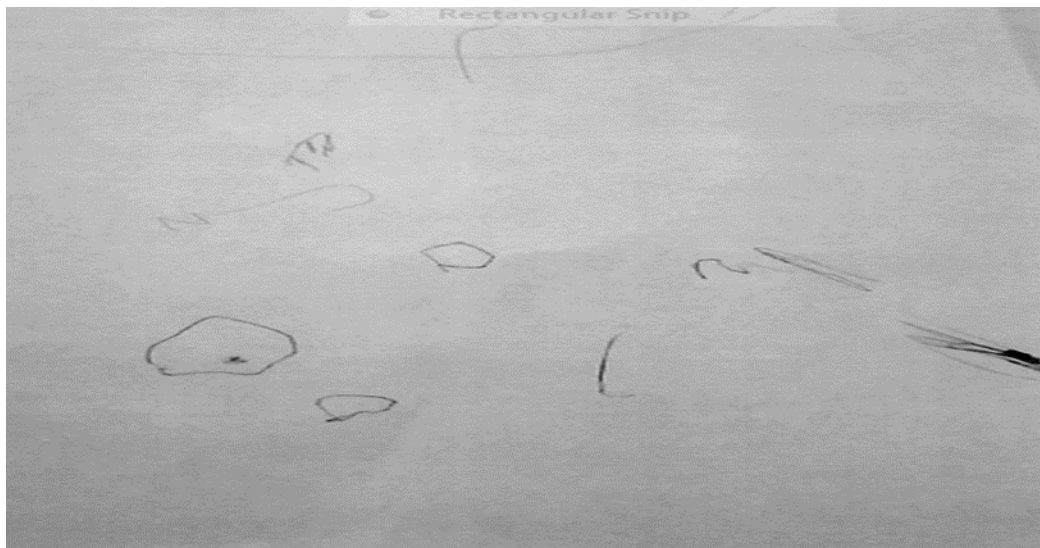


Figure 2. Four-year-old Sebastian’s “Paper Work” filed in the office desk drawer at home.



Through demonstration and through ensuring that the written names are “familiar around the house,” as an Indigenous mother explained, participants teach their children to write their names. Direct teaching also includes providing commercially-created books or writing letters with dotted lines for children to trace. Parents give feedback about their children’s formation of letters and demonstrate how to form letters correctly. In addition to teaching letter formation, parent scaffolding generally involves helping their children to sound out words that they want to write. Participating parents said that when their children request assistance with writing, they usually ask for help in identifying or in forming the letter(s) for intended words.

AUDIENCES AND PURPOSES OF CHILDREN’S WRITING AT HOME

Audiences for children’s writing are usually family members, most frequently their mother. Siblings, friends, and extended family members, such as their kokum (grandmother), are also intended readers of the texts.

The purposes of children’s writing at home, as explained by their parents, are primarily to express feelings and a sense of affiliation with their audience. Participating parents explained that their children create cards and letters, as well as captions for pictures that depict family members, an object or a significant event in the child’s life. An Indigenous mother observed that her five-year-old daughter creates texts involving drawings and print to “help her keep calm” and also “to cheer people up.” The text in Figure 3, created by Avery, a 6-year-old girl, is a letter that is illustrative of the affiliative purposes of children’s writing at home. The letter contains a picture of Avery’s family and a message expressing her love for her mother. The pictures and the text follow the conventional letter format, as there is an introduction that addresses the audience by name (e.g., To Mom), a message (e.g., I love you Mommy) and a closing (e.g., From Avery).

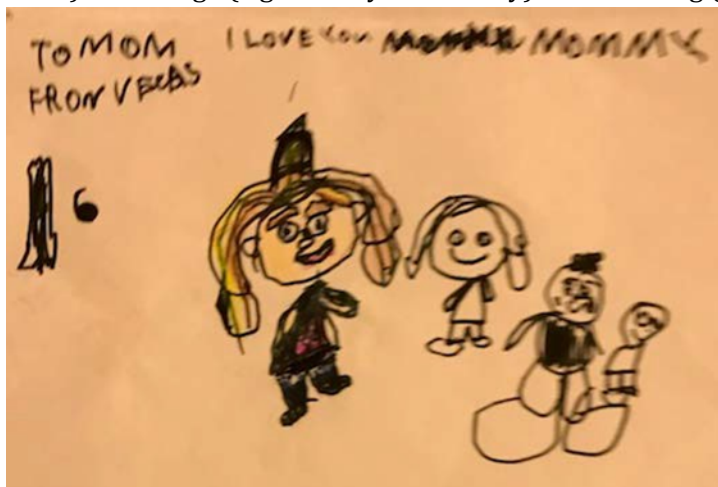


Figure 3. Six-year-old Avery’s letter created at home.

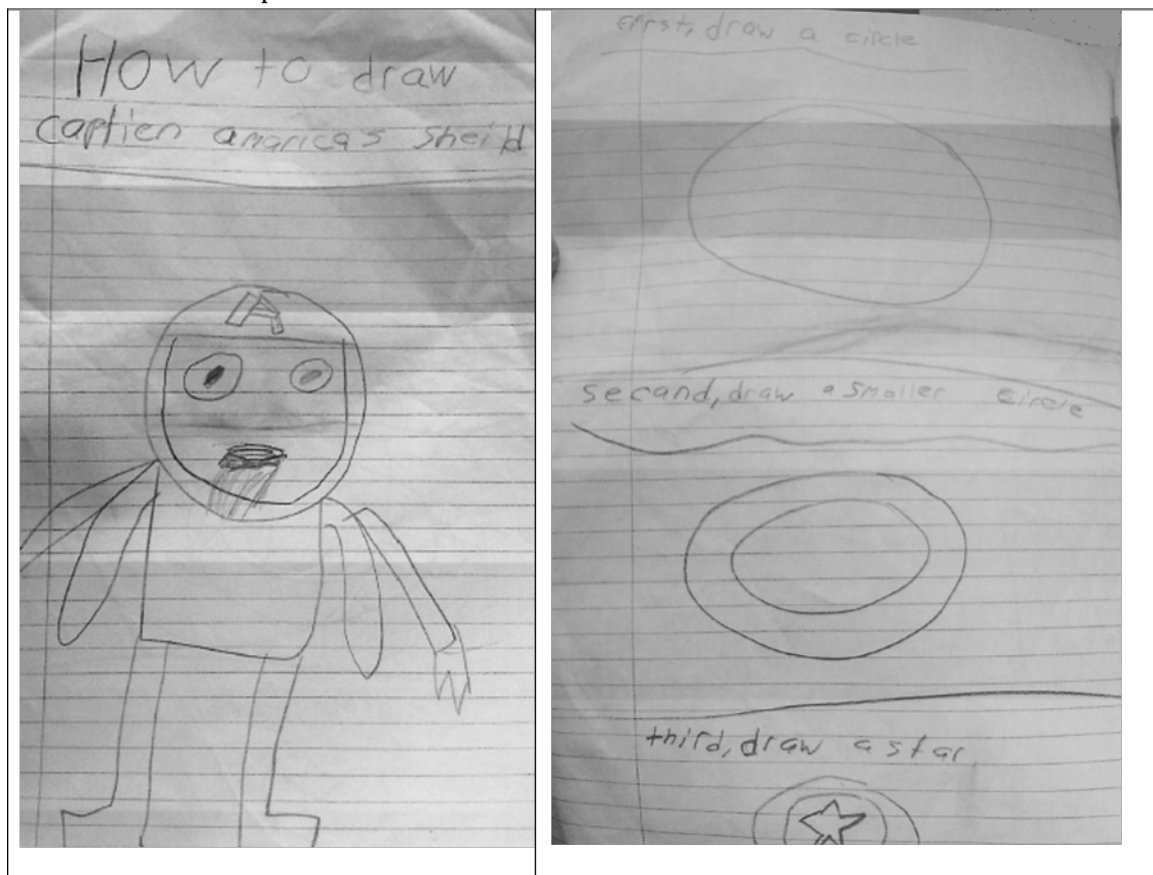
Some of the children’s texts are created for the purpose of entertaining an audience. One participant’s nine-year-old son creates comics for families and friends when at home. Another



participant said that her nine-year-old daughter “likes to make up stories and create posters because she likes to put on shows with her siblings.”

The children also write to provide information and help them remember, creating lists of upcoming family and school events and activities and writing notes to family members. One mother told a story of her five-year-old daughter creating a grocery list for the family “to make sure we get the right groceries. Number one on the list was chips because we had just signed up to bring chips to the Halloween party.”

The text in Figure 4, created by Darien, a nine-year-old boy, is an example of an informational text created at home. Darien’s text instructs others how to draw Captain America’s shield, something important to him. Darien shows a wealth of knowledge about the conventions of instructional texts. The first page has a title explaining what readers will learn. In the illustration, Captain America has no shield—indicating a need to read further to find out how to draw it. The second page uses ordinal language (first, second, third) and the implied you to direct readers to draw the various parts of Captain America’s shield. He shows an awareness of his audience with cumulative illustrations of each part of the shield.



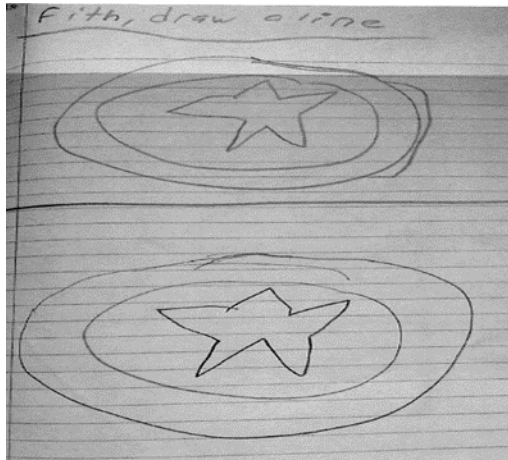


Figure 4. Darien's Instructions for drawing a Captain America shield (please note that if Darien created a step four, he chose not to provide it to us).

In these examples and in the other writing that participating parents shared with us, children clearly showed that they see the creation of written texts (which include drawings, scribbles, and print), as useful in their home lives. They demonstrate intentionality—an understanding that print is meaningful and helps text-creators achieve a wide range of social purposes (Clay, 1998; McTavish, 2007; Rowe, 2010). This understanding, together with children's enthusiasm for creating texts that they can use for various purposes, provides a strong foundation for children's lifelong literacy.

In the following section, we report on parents' experiences and wishes regarding communication with their children's teachers.

PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION: FOCUS ON WAYS PARENTS CAN HELP

Some participating parents talked about the frequent opportunities they had to talk with their children's early childhood educators and teachers. Other parents explained that they do not know what kind of writing their children do in their classrooms or early learning centers. For the most part, parents were satisfied to receive reports of their children's progress, especially in terms of the expectations for the child's grade or developmental level.

They wanted to know if their children were having difficulties that parents could help to ameliorate at home. Participants also wanted to know how they could reinforce what their children were learning in school through parent-child writing activities.

Participants would like teachers to ask them about their children's interests in terms of topics and types of writing.



PARENTS AND TEACHERS AS PARTNERS SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S WRITING

Regardless of whether participating northern rural and Indigenous parents work outdoors, in offices or at home, or are postsecondary students, writing plays a role in their work lives. Written texts fulfill purposes in their home lives, as well, whether to help keep track or remember items and activities, for interpersonal communication with others who are important in their lives, or for personal reflection.

Participating parents recognized and valued their children's scribbles, shapes, letters, and words as writing. They supported their children's writing by providing materials and space for writing, displaying and storing the writing in special places, providing some direct teaching, respecting the children's interests and intentions, and by following children's leads on what and how they wanted to write. As a result, their children, aged two- through nine-years-old, wrote frequently and for a range of purposes: expressing feelings, informing, and entertaining.

Our study highlights the many literacies of participating northern rural and Indigenous parents' work and home lives, the rich, self-initiated texts that their children created at home and parents' support of their children's writing. We acknowledge that the literacies described by participating Indigenous parents are those of mainstream society. A limitation of our research is the absence of interview questions about Indigenous literacies practiced in participants' homes with their children. Participating Indigenous parents' observations and experiences do, however, contradict deficit perspectives on Indigenous literacies and knowledge that stem from a history of colonization and oppression of Indigenous peoples by non-Indigenous peoples (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Similarly, participating non-Indigenous rural parents' experiences and perspectives counter the cultural constructions of "rural" as inferior to "urban" that have been perpetuated in the media and in academia (Donehower, 2007).

Previous research on family support of children's home literacies has predominantly been urban-centered (Espino, 2016; Gonzalez et al., 2018), identifying diversity in terms of cultural, linguistic and ethnic dimensions. We believe that it is important to add perspectives and practices of children and families living in places that are considered as "other" to the dominant urban research landscape to this body of research. As such, our study adds an important "dimension of diversity" (Wood, 2014, p. 149) to research-informed views of parent/family support of young children's writing.

Introducing northern rural and Indigenous parents' voices to the multi-voiced chorus of research on multicultural urban families' literacies helps us to address an important gap: a lack of understanding and a need to validate rural and Indigenous families' literacy practices and knowledge (Battiste, 2008; Donehower, 2007; Hare, 2012).



CLASSROOM IMPLICATIONS

Based on what we have learned from interviews with participating Indigenous and rural parents, we offer the following suggestions for classroom practice. Recognizing the influence of culture and place on literacy practices, we hope that our recommendations are sufficiently open-ended to allow for easy adaptations to teachers' particular contexts.

INITIATE TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION THROUGH ASKING QUESTIONS

We propose that teachers use parent-teacher conferences as an opportunity to ask parents about the writing that children do at home and how parents support the writing. We found that the questions asked of participating parents provided an opening for a dialogue about children's writing. What we learned about how participating parents are supporting their children's writing at home would be valuable to teachers when they are developing culturally-appropriate literacy instruction. We believe it is important for teachers to engage in two-way communication with parents and families in order to learn about their students' writing and other literacies at home.

The conversations about children's writing at home can be educational to parents. Parents told us that participating in our research interview conversations opened up their awareness of what they were doing to support their children's literacy and provoked their thinking about what they could do further. As an example, Sebastian's father reflected on his and his wife's interactions with his four-year-old son at home, saying: "We do a lot of reading but not a lot of writing in front of him or with him." He appreciated the opportunity to talk about the family's role in supporting his son's literacy.

PROVIDE SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS

There is no question that the parent-teacher partnership should include teachers sharing information and advice on how parents might support their children's writing at home. Participating parents said that they would welcome information, such as that provided by previous researchers (e.g., Kolodziej & Columba, 2005; Zurcher, 2016), to help them support their children in gaining access to powerful school literacy practices. If teachers find, as we did in our research, that parents' scaffolding practices are often focused on letter formation and spelling using letter-sound knowledge, recommendations focusing on the purposes and considerations of audience of children's home writing would be beneficial. In Appendix B, for example, we share a handout with specific examples that we created for parents as a way of thanking them for participating in our research. Teachers may include the handout, or a modified version, with other materials sent home as part of their communication with parents. They may use it as a starting point for a workshop for parents, as well.

INVITE STUDENTS TO BRING HOME WRITING TO SCHOOL

Teachers might also invite their students to bring writing from home into the classroom. Students might tell the class the story of how and why they created their texts, and then have the texts



available in the class library for peers to read. Whole- class conversations could center on the ways in which children use the writing to do something that is important to them. Together with information from parents, as described in the opening paragraph of this section, children's stories about their home writing would complement classroom-based observations and assessment information that teachers gather about each child. Teachers would learn more about children's knowledge about communicating through print and visual images, as well as about their interests, and views of themselves as writers. Teachers might also gain ideas for classroom writing projects from their students' out-of-school writing.

By bringing children's self-initiated writing from home into classrooms and asking parents about their scaffolding practices at home, teachers communicate to children that out-of-school writing created for authentic purposes is important, and show parents that they are valued as partners in supporting their children's literacy.

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APPS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH STUDENTS’ FAMILIES

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Acknowledgements: We are very grateful to participating parents and children. We thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding our research through a Partnership Grant.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are the ages and gender of your children?
2. How does writing fit into the work that you do? What kind of writing do you do at home (e.g., texting, grocery lists, Christmas cards, etc.)?
3. What types of materials do you have at home for children to write with? Do they show interest in these materials? How do they use them?
4. If we say that when children scribble/make marks as well as letters to communicate with others is writing, are there times when your children have done some writing at home? What are the circumstances – what type of writing did they do (e.g., a list, sign) and who were they writing to or for?
5. Would it be possible to take a picture of the writing that they do?
6. If your children do write at home, do they show it to you? If so, what do you usually do in response or what do you often say to them about their writing?
7. Do you keep the writing that your children do at home? If so, where?
8. Do your children ask you for help when they write? What kind of help do they usually ask for?
9. How do you think parents should help their children with writing?
10. What questions do you wish your children's teachers would ask you about the writing that your children do at home?
11. What questions would you like to ask them about your children's writing?



APPENDIX B: TIPS FOR PARENTS

TIPS FOR PARENTS TO SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN'S WRITING

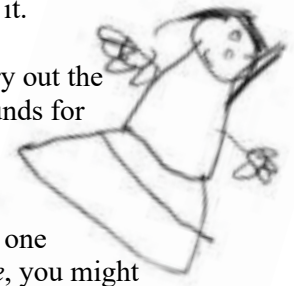
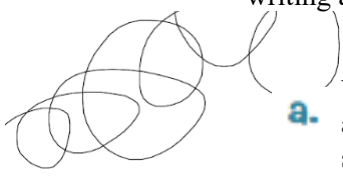
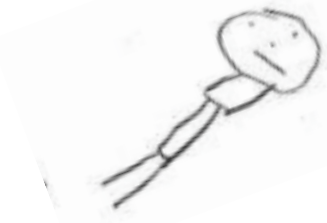
We greatly appreciate that you shared your children's writing and talked about how you help your children with their writing. To say thank you, we offer these tips that can go hand-in-hand with all the great things that you already do.

1. It is important for young children to write from a very young age—this includes scribbling and making letter-like shapes. When you help your children with writing, you are also helping them to read. Writing gives your children an opportunity to try out what they know about letters and sounds, and about meanings in print. This is the knowledge that they use as they read, as well.
2. You are teaching your children when you write and read with them at home. They might write tags or captions for the pictures that you upload to Facebook, Instagram and other social media. You might also write messages to each other. You could have an “in basket” and an “out basket” in your kitchen, or you might have a bulletin board, white board or calendar for messages between you and your children.
3. When you display your children's writing on the refrigerator or in some other place in your home, you are telling your children that their writing is important and raising their self-esteem. To make the writing seem even more important, you might frame the writing when you display it.
4. Instead of writing what your children dictate or giving them words to copy, let them try out the spelling of the word. This will greatly help your children to think about letters and sounds for writing and reading, and will give them confidence to write.

a. You might say the word slowly, emphasizing the beginning sound and maybe one additional sound in the word. For example, if your children want to write, *love*, you might say the word, emphasizing the *l* and the *v*, inviting them to write the letters for the sounds they hear.

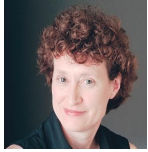
b. If your children have trouble thinking of the letter, perhaps show them examples of the letter. For example, if they cannot figure out how to write the letter for the *l* sound, you might show them words on your cell phone or on a cereal box that have *l* in them, and read the words, so that they can associate the letter *l* with the sound. Or, you can write for them on scrap paper another word, such as *like*, that has *l* in it, saying the word to emphasize the *l* sound as you write the *l*.

We recommend that you celebrate whatever your children write—whether it is a letter-like shape, a letter or whole words. The important thing is that they are trying out what they know about letters, sounds and words.





ABOUT THE AUTHORS



A former elementary teacher, **Shelley Stagg Peterson** is a professor in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the University of Toronto, Canada. As Project Director of the Northern Oral language and Writing through Play (NOW Play) partnership project, Shelley conducts collaborative action research with teachers, early childhood educators and parents in remote northern Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities with the goal of supporting children's language and literacy.



Ashley Grimes is a mother of three who resides in Central Alberta. She attends a full-time University program where she is in her third year of obtaining a BComm Degree in Finance. Ashley is training to become a financial advisor at a local investment office.



Kathy Sky is a former elementary school teacher who is an advocate of education and is an ardent learner of different educational experiences. Teaching has taken me on different paths and I now teach culture to adult individuals from different backgrounds. This opportunity provides everyone to learn and share their own knowledge. Every day is an opportunity to learn.