



Post COVID-19: The Urgency for a Summer Reading Loss Solution Mobilizing Families with Tools for Teaching at Home

Rationale

This has been a worrisome year for all of us as we watched our children struggle with uncertainties caused by COVID-19 complications. Our teachers and schools have done a heroic job of trying to accommodate new regulations to protect our children. Many parents proved to be true partners as they helped to close literacy gaps with extra home support.

As we gratefully transition to the summer of 2021, our eyes are opened but our nerves are frayed. It's a time of change, but change brings opportunity. We need to choose to act courageously to reconsider relationships with parents. We have a new opportunity to learn from the pandemic experience and reconstruct our relationship with the 'first and forever' teachers in our students' lives. We need to change the paradigm of the passive parent role to a true teaching partnership. Summer Reading is the logical place to start.

Families and Teachers: The COVID-19 Effect

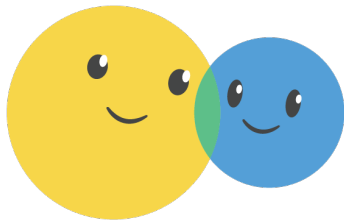
Schools and Teachers

The pandemic crisis breached all previous norms that typically confront schools. School facility closures deprived children of what is most important: physical safety, the comfort of loving adults, predictability, food security, counseling and, in many cases, their education. Schools, teachers and administrators express new respect and gratitude for parents who did their best to cooperate and support students and teachers at home. Teachers have always served with passion and professionalism – through wars, floods, and famines. Although the pandemic presented a novel and unforeseen challenge, teachers met it with typical courage and innovation.



Parents

Parents put their fingers in the proverbial 'dike' with no advance notice, no training, few resources and confusing technology expectations. Parents developed new respect and gratitude for the role that schools play in their lives as they coped with remote learning demands; coached children who grieved for the loss of peer friendships and for their teachers who struggled with unfamiliar technologies while trying to maintain careers. They managed this from home while socially isolated, fearful of the unknown and worried about the educational struggles they were unequipped to manage.



Popular journalist Nicole Wallace of MSNBC, appeared frustrated and embarrassed as she arrived late at her national news show, explaining that she was late because she was trying to help her child with his remote learning. She threw her hands up: "I don't know how to teach!" We expect parents to monitor homework, encourage study skills, and help provide children with extra practice but no one was prepared for school closures, remote learning and social isolation.

The Urgency of this New Opportunity

Recent research released this past month predicts that many children will have suffered significant learning gaps. Researchers predict that in September some children will be as much as seven grade levels apart (www.the74million.org). Summer is upon us and we know that every summer children, on average, lose 30% of learning in the previous ten months (Allington 2013). Unfortunately, researchers also predict that the most significant losses will be early learners who, because of COVID-19 closures, may never catch up!

Research is critical to informing us about how we mitigate literacy losses. The NELP (*National Early Literacy Panel Report* (2009) is a reliable synthesis of scientific research which identifies the five factors that have the greatest positive impact on future literacy success. Family participation is one of those top five factors (along with knowledge about the alphabet, phonological awareness, sight word mastery and shared reading and writing).



Mobilizing Family Summer Literacy Programs

Our *Joyful Literacy Intervention Team* is taking up the challenge as are many others across the nation. With a sense of urgency, we designed and created our new *Family Summer Literacy Boost Program (K to 3)* so that it would be ready for summer (2021).

Our resource achieves three goals:

1. It provides parents with an understanding of the research that guides our instructional practices so that when they practice skills with children, they know why their efforts to support learning at home are important.
2. It provides them with instructions and ideas for practicing early learning skills with children. The emphasis in all strategies is integrating skill practice with play, joy and celebrations as follows in these abbreviated descriptions:
 - Hide alphabet letters in the back yard; hold a treasure hunt. Call out the names and sounds together as they find the letters.
 - Make letters with sticks, stones and pinecones while on a walk.
 - Find letters in the environment in signs, tree shapes, buildings and artwork.
 - Draw letters in sand, shaving cream or Jell-O powder.
 - Find letters in any newspaper and circle them in different colours.
 - Tie scarfs around their heads. Let them 'ninja' their way along the fence or hallway where letters are posted.
 - Print letters on balloons; when they name the letter and sound break the balloons to celebrate. (Try water balloons if you feel brave.)
 - Engage Grandma, big brother and Auntie. Make it a family mission.
3. It focuses on the foundational skills as prioritized in the NELP (National Early Learning Panel) 2009. The featured skills are alphabet knowledge, Phonemic Awareness, Sight Words (RAN), Shared Reading and Writing, and Family Involvement.

The Video and Handout Series addresses the top five Foundational Skills:



1. Alphabet Crazy Fun 1: My Family Teaches Me My ABC's
2. Alphabet Crazy Fun 2: Games, Practice and Celebrations
3. Phonemic Play 1: Learning to read in the dark?
4. Phonemic Play 2: Tricking Our Ears!
5. Superpower Sight Words 1: One Two Three - READ!!!
6. Superpower Sight Words 2: Practice, Play and Performance
7. Come-alive Reading: It's party-time reading in my home.
8. Echo and Repeated Reading: I read just like you.
9. Reading Buddies: Teaching Me, Loving Me and Reading With Me
10. Writing Buddies: My Pen, Your Pen, Our Pen

We invite you to explore the complete resource – The Family Summer Literacy Boost Program at our web site JoyfulLiteracyOnline.com

If we can be of direct assistance you can reach us by email at JoyfulLiteracy2020@shaw.ca

The Challenge for Educators

We need to embrace the belief that we can prepare parents to teach side-by-side with us. We need to step aside from the old notion that we are the most important teachers in a child's life. We need to acknowledge and embrace parents in an equally important instructional role – not just in a deadly pandemic but annually. *Summer Reading Loss* is the perfect target for implementing new and more meaningful partnerships with parents. They helped us achieve our goals this past year: Let's help them now by providing them with skills and resources they need to be more effective as 'first and forever' teachers.



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All books are available at Amazon.