NOTE TO USERS

This reproduction is the best copy available.

UMI®



Université d'Ottawa · University of Ottawa

Université d'Ottawa · University of Ottawa

FACULTÉ DE ÉTUDES SUPÉRIEURES ET POSTDOCTORALES

FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

Rhonda RUBIN

AUTEUR DE LA THÈSE - AUTHOR OF THESIS

Ph. D (Education)

GRADE - DEGREE

Faculty of Education

FACULTÉ, ÉCOLE, DÉPARTEMENT - FACULTY, SCHOOL, DEPARTMENT

TITRE DE LA THÈSE - TITLE OF THE THESIS

Voices from the Hearth : A Case Study of Family Literacy in one Low-Incomes Community in New-Brunswick

M. Taylor

DIRECTEUR DE LA THÈSE - THESIS SUPERVISOR

CO-DIRECTEUR DE LA THÈSE - THESIS CO-SUPERVISOR

EXAMINATEURS DE LA THÈSE - THESIS EXAMINERS

R. Darville

C. Duquette

C. Morawski

J. Robertson

J.-M. De Koninck, Ph.D.

LE DOYEN DE LA FACULTÉ DES ÉTUDES SUPÉRIEURES ET POSTDOCTORALES

DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

Voices From the Heart:
A Case Study of Family Literacy Practices
in One Low-Income Community in New Brunswick

Rhonda L. Rubin

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Education
University of Ottawa

August 30, 2004

© Rhonda L. Rubin, Ottawa, Canada

Library and Archives Canada

Published Heritage Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque et Archives Canada

Direction du Patrimoine de l'édition

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 0-494-01754-6
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 0-494-01754-6

NOTICE:
The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:
L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

Canada

Abstract

Voices from the Heart: A Case Study of Family Literacy Practices

In One Low-Income Community in New Brunswick

Increasing awareness of the value of home literacy experiences, combined with a recognition of the importance of the family, has contributed to growth in the number of family literacy programs. These, however, lack theoretical underpinnings. Further, there is a paucity of studies in family literacy practices with school age children. This study uncovers the interplay of family literacy practices in one low-income neighbourhood. To address sociocultural factors that affect literacy, societal circumstances and issues which enable or constrain literacy events were explored. By entering into the life-worlds of participants to portray lived dimensions of enculturation and family literacy this study employs critical theory to expand research in family literacy.

The following questions guided my inquiry into the literacy-related practices and perceptions of low-income families: how family literacy practices unfold, how literacy is embedded in the social practices and relationships between school and home, and what conditions and factors within the family contribute to family literacy practices and children's enculturation into these practices?

Eight families were purposively selected for this exploratory case study. Data collection included observations at school, parent interviews, questionnaires, journal entries, parent-child interactions and field notes. The findings uncover the ways that low-income families use and perceive literacy in their homes and serve to challenge assumptions, namely that we live in an egalitarian society and that schools do not

privilege particular ways of thinking. The tragedy of living in poverty with its inherent barriers to equitable access and participation is presented as a key factor in limiting educational opportunities for low-income children.

Emergent themes include: conflicting time orientation of low-income families; cultural mismatch between teachers and students; importance of the social environment and families as powerful social conduits for culture and identity formation; and limitation in household resources to support educational pursuits. These were analyzed for discourses of hope, invasion, time, space, female body and maternity that they frame in the women's lives. Implications for shaping current practice, future research, teacher education, and public policy are discussed. The significance of this study for the family literacy field inheres in offering an interactive model of literacy practices for educators.

Dedication

To my parents, Adelle and the late Norman Rubin, who taught me:

Everyone should carefully observe

which way his/her heart draws him/her,

and then choose that way

with all his/her strength.

- Hasidic saying

To my study participants who taught me:

It is the heart that makes a wo/man rich.

S/he is rich according to what s/he is,

not according to what s/he has

- Henry Ward Beecher

To Julie Beth, Lynne Michelle, Natalie Jill, Andrea Jane, Steven Rubin (Stephanie Robin), Colson Rubin (Kelsey Robert) and Tess Amira, my nieces and nephews and Jean (John), Doug, and Allen educators who inspired me to pursue my studies in education, and whose names I borrowed or modified slightly to use as pseudonyms for my participants, and who taught me:

Never take a path that has no heart in it.

You can't lose if your heart is in your work,

but you can't win if your heart is not in it.

- Carlos Castanada

Prologue

"....we live the mythology of a classless society. We believe our society provides equal opportunities for all and promises success to those who work hard to achieve it. We believe the key to achievement is education, and we believe the heart of education is literacy. In a society bound by such a mythology, our views about literacy are our views about political economy and social opportunity.....Yet literacy remains a human invention contained by social contract, and the maintenance of that contract in education betrays our ideas of humanity as surely as our use of literacy enforces them..."[1]

[1] from: Stuckey, J. E. (1991). *The violence of literacy* (pp. vii-viii). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann-Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc.

Table of Contents

Abstract i

Dedication iii

Prologue iv

Table of Contents v

List of Tables xv

List of Figures xvi

Chapter 1 - Introduction 1

Background to the Problem 1

Literacy in New Brunswick 6

Poverty and Literacy 11

Purposes of the Study 15

Research Questions 16

Significance of the Study 18

Assumptions and Presuppositions 21

Family Heritage 22

Work Experience 23

Research Foundation 24

Definition of Terms 26

Literacy 27

Literacy Practices and Literacy Events 31

Family Literacy 32

Other Terms 33

Plan of Presentation 34

Chapter 2 - Review of the Literature 38

Introduction 38

Background 38

Family Literacy 43

Historical Review of Family Literacy 44

Program Approaches to Family Literacy 49

Sociocultural Contexts for Literacy Learning 52

Home Environment 52

School and Community Context 54

Auerbach's Socio-Contextual Family Literacy Model 54

Related Research on Family Literacy 56

Studies on Culture and Education 57

Other Studies 62

Influences from childhood 62

Social networks 63

Identity formation 64

Critique of the Research on Family Literacy 67

Conceptual Context 69

Critical Theory and the Frankfurt School 69

Bourdieu's Sociological Theory 76

Social Reproduction Theory 76

Cultural Capital 77

Habitus 80

Conclusion 80

Towards a Developing Framework of Family Literacy 81

Introduction 81

Individual 82

Sociocultural Context 84

Engagement and Family Literacy Learning 89

Conclusion 90

Summary 91

Chapter 3 - Methods 93

Introduction 93

Qualitative Research Paradigm 93

Case Study Design 95

Description 95

Pilot Study 96

Gaining Entry 97

Procedures 101

Family Participants 103

Parkview School 103

Physical Characteristics 103

Staff 104

School Goals 105
Data Collection Methods 106
Parent Participation 106
Semi Structured Interviews 108
Interview 1 110
Interview 2 113
Interview 3 116
School Data 117
Becoming Familiar with the School 117
Classroom Observations 118
Additional Volunteer Participation 119
Data Analysis Procedures 120
Coding 120
Constant Comparative Method 121
Trustworthiness of the Study 123
Credibility 123
Confirmability 125
Dependability 125
Transferability 126
Summary of the Study Methods 126
Chapter 4 - Presentation of Findings 128
Introduction 128

Profile of the Participants 131

Family Participants 131

Parkview School Participants 139

Literacy Experiences at Home 145

Interpersonal Interactions 146

Value Education 147

Support for homework 147

Reading practices 152

Summary 154

Use Personal Resources to Support Learning 155

Support for literacy skills 156

Establish good health routines 160

Summary 164

Extend Literacy Activities 165

Read and talk together 165

Share in play activities 170

Use literacy in daily routines 174

Model literate behaviours 177

Summary 180

Discussion 180

Organizing the Physical Environment 183

Present Neighbourhood and Past Locations 184

Homes 187

Personal Health Practices and Coping 190

Resources to Support Educational Pursuits 192

Resources for writing and artwork 194

Resources for reading 196

Computers and education-oriented resources 201

Affordable transportation 202

Discussion 205

Emotional and Motivational Climate for Learning 208

Stress from Financial and Family Needs 209

Impact of Health Conditions and Behaviours on

Family Members 215

Parents 217

Children 223

Present Time Orientation 226

Parental Attitudes 230

Affiliation Needs 236

Family structural composition 236

Spirituality 238

Discussion 242

Pedagogical Influences on Literacy Development 242

Social Organization of the School 245

Curriculum 245
School Environment 248
Teaching 250
Culture of Power 251
Enacting Power Issues in Classrooms 252
Learning the Code for the Culture of Power 255
Defining the Rules of the Culture of Power 257
Acquiring Power 259
Recognizing the Power 261
Discussion 263
Children's Enculturation into Literacy Practices 266
Growing Up in Poverty 266
Learning to be Impoverished 269
Schooling for Poverty 272
Summary 273
Chapter 5 – Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations 276
Introduction 276
Summary of the Research 277
Discussion of the Findings 281
Research Question 1 281
Recollections of Early Years 283
High Aspirations 286

Reduced Opportunities 286

Modeling Literate Behaviours 287

Positive Attitudes 291

Research Question 2 293

Incongruency in Practices 293

Gender and Class Issues 295

Unwritten Rules 297

Home-School Connections 298

Parent Involvement 299

Curriculum 302

Research Question 3 303

Gender 303

Family Composition and Child Rearing Practices 304

Educational Background of Family Members 304

Health Issues 305

Identity 306

Emergent Themes 309

Conflicting Time Orientation of the Low-Income Families 309

Cultural Mismatch Between Teachers and Students 309

Importance of the Social Environment 310

Limitations in Household Resources to Support Educational Pursuits 311

Discourses 312

Discourses of Hope 313

Discourses of Invasion 314

Discourses of Time 315

Discourses of Space and Mobility 316

Discourses of the Female Body 317

Discourses of Maternity 318

Summary 319

An Interactive Model for Family Literacy 319

Contributions to Theory 322

Looking at Family Literacy through a Kaleidoscope Metaphor 324

Implications for Practice 328

Literacy Practitioners and Teachers 328

Preservice Teacher Education 333

Implications for Policy 335

Limitations of the Study 340

Areas for Further Research 342

Family Participants 342

School Aspect 344

Conclusions 346

References 352

Appendixes 382

Appendix A: Letter to Director of Education 382

Appendix B: Consent Forms 383

Informed Consent for School and Day Care Staff 383

Informed Consent for Parent Participant 384

Assent for Children Forms 385

Appendix C: Interview Schedule for School and Day Care Staff 386

Appendix D: Resource Teacher's Overview of the Study 387

Appendix E: Interview Guide: Family Literacy Practices 388

Appendix F: Parent Questionnaire 389

Appendix G: Guidelines for Journal Entries 391

Appendix H: Analysis of Shared Book Reading 392

Acknowledgements 393

List of Tables

Table 1: Classification of Family Literacy Program Approaches 51

Table 2: Family Composition by Gender and Educational Attainment 100

Table 3: Activities Chosen by Parents for Parent-Child Interactions 115

Table 4: Home Literacy Activities Reported or Observed 166

Table 5: Perceived Support and Limitations of Low-Income Parents in Providing for Literacy Experiences in the Home 181

Table 6: Availability of Household Resources to Support Children's Literacy Pursuits 193

Table 7: Print Media Used at Home by Adults 199

Table 8: Perceived Factors in the Physical Environment Impacting on Literacy of Low-Income Children 206

Table 9: Prevalence of Health Conditions and Behaviors in Families 216

Table 10: Stressors in the Emotional and Motivational Climate for Learning Perceived to Impact on Literacy Development in Low-Income Families 243

Table 11: Pedagogical Influences on Literacy Development 264

Table 12: Factors that Influence the Process of Children's Enculturation into Literacy Practices 274

Table 13: Cairney and Ruge's (1998) Classification of Literacy Practices and Home Literacy Events 282

List of Figures

Figure 1: History of the Family Literacy Movement, 1967-1997 45

Figure 2: A Broad Conceptualization of Family Literacy Learning 83

Figure 3: Summary of Data Collection Methods 107

Figure 4: An Interactive Model for Family Literacy 320

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When we look into our own hearts and begin to discover what is confused and what is brilliant, what is bitter and what is sweet, it isn't just ourselves that we're discovering. We're discovering the universe.

- Pema Chodron

Background to the Problem

The subject of literacy, which involves much more than the conventional school-based skills of reading and writing, has been viewed as problematic in Canada and, in particular, in the province of New Brunswick for at least the past decade. Literacy is defined in the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) in a broad sense as, "the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities at home, at work, and in the community - to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential" (Statistics Canada, 1996a, p. 2). Corbett (1982) points out the destructive role of the media in convincing the masses that there is an appalling illiteracy rate in adults that simply cannot be explained in the United States [or by extension in Canada] where there has been a long standing system of universal public education. Meanwhile, illiteracy has come to be associated with shame and pity and the adoption of a negative image of low-literate individuals as helpless, hopeless, and disinterested in changing their situation (Fagan, 1998).

Results of various surveys, which purportedly evaluate reading skills, serve to reinforce the impression that we have a serious literacy crisis on our hands. Yet, it is unknown if these measures are even valid indicators of literacy (Corbett, 1982). This is not to imply that literacy is not important, because as D'Angelo (1982) points out in looking at the cognitive consequences of reading and writing, literacy allows a kind of abstract conceptual thinking. He stresses that this type of cognition is necessary in a technological society to enable people to go beyond the here and now to draw inferences and work out relationships that otherwise would not be possible.

More than fifteen years ago, the first direct assessment of adult literacy abilities in Canada was conducted. The *Southam Literacy Report*, a benchmark literacy survey, revealed in 1987 that five million Canadians did not have a sufficient literacy skill level to allow them to perform daily tasks such as writing letters, filling out forms, understanding prescriptions, reading a newspaper or following directions in a manual (Calamai, 1987).

The Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities (LSUDA), a study of 9,455 Canadian citizens between the ages of 16 to 69 years, was subsequently commissioned in 1989 by Statistics Canada, Special Surveys. The results of this study lend support to Calamai's (1987) findings of a significant number of adult Canadians with limited literacy (Statistics Canada, 1990). Around this same time, the Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy (1988) estimated that low levels of literacy cost Canadian businesses four billion dollars annually due to problems arising from staff learning to use new technology or from their inability to follow workplace health and safety guidelines.

Declaration of the International Year of Literacy in 1990 by the General Assembly of the United Nations served as the impetus for the literacy thrust by placing worldwide emphasis on literacy issues and improving literacy skills. September 8th was established as International Literacy Day and is now celebrated annually. Canada joined other nations in a concerted effort to not only recognize, but also to promote literacy as a basic human right. Concerns about levels of literacy skills were brought to the limelight and in the ensuing period of the 1990s the public took a much greater interest in literacy.

An unprecedented amount of federal government funding was channeled into literacy research and the creation of a variety of pilot projects and new initiatives across the nation. For example, in 1993, the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS)[2] commissioned a policy paper on *Literacy Initiatives in Canadian Municipalities* (Nutter, 1993). This was followed in 1994, by the NLS's approval of a proposal from the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators for a two year project to build commitments to workforce literacy in Canadian municipal governments (Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators, 2004).

Growing interest in literacy was also reflected in the media; popular Canadian family magazines, such as *Canadian Living*, which had only given passing attention to the topic of literacy, began featuring a series of articles on literacy topics. This consumer magazine, along with other Canadian magazines such as *TV Guide*, *Macleans*, *Chatelaine*

[2] The National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) works with the provinces and territories, government departments, businesses, volunteers, and non-governmental organizations to promote and build capacity for literacy opportunities across Canada through development of materials, improving access, promotion and public awareness, coordination, and research (National Literacy Secretariat, 2004).

and *l'Actualité*, made a commitment to donate advertising space to promote literacy awareness (Brown, 1999). Likewise, the Canadian Community Newspapers Association and the Canadian Cable Television Association began to show their support of the literacy cause by printing and broadcasting information on literacy as a public awareness service (National Adult Literacy Database, 2003).

Charitable organizations such as Performers for Literacy (PFL)/Les Magiciens des Mots[3] and ABC CANADA Literacy Foundation[4], backed by the private sector, jumped on the literacy bandwagon in 1990 and devoted their attention to promoting literacy. PFL set as their goal to foster the development of a reading culture in Canada through the use of the media, national celebrities and community role models in their programs such as The Kids*Lit/Jeux*Contes (Performers for Literacy, 2004). Meanwhile, ABC CANADA initiated Family Literacy Day in 1999 (National Adult Literacy Database, 2003). This popular annual event, held each January, highlights for Canadians the importance of reading and engaging in literacy–related activities as a family (Dunsmuir, 2003).

Continuing appreciation of the significance of literacy for access to knowledge has kept literacy in the forefront in the new millennium. The federal government established the Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network (CLLRNet) in 2001

---

[3] Performers for Literacy/Les Magiciens des Mots is a charitable Canadian organization which sponsors enjoyable activities to encourage a love of reading in children (Performers for Literacy, 2004)

[4] ABC CANADA, a charitable Canadian literacy organization, promotes literacy through public awareness programs and campaigns, support of local literacy groups and research of literacy issues to provide information and guidance to the literacy field and ABC CANADA campaigns (ABC CANADA, 2004).

as one of its Networks of Centres of Excellence. Their goals are to support research in improving children's language and literacy development, educate specialists in language and literacy in Canada and facilitate the dissemination of information to the relevant stakeholders (Wright & Sinai, 2003). CLLRNet research projects fall under one of the following themes: biological factors underlying the development of language and literacy skills; sensory processes and environment; language; literacy; and social, economic and program influences (Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network, 2004).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)[5] launched the United Nations International Literacy Decade in 2003 with the theme of "Literacy as Freedom". The objective is to support the cause of increasing literacy throughout the world (Rutsch, 2003) and is part of a drive to increase education around the globe by 2015 (IRA/UNESCO Join Forces, 2003). Another organization dedicated to promoting literacy, The International Reading Association[6], recently partnered with UNESCO for a two year cooperative agreement aimed at helping countries ensure that their children "attain a mastery level of reading competencies that enables them to benefit from learning opportunities throughout their lives" (IRA/ UNESCO Join Forces, 2003, p. 1).

---

[5] UNESCO is an international multidisciplinary agency for education, the sciences, culture and communication. It aims to reduce poverty, increase education, eliminate gender disparity and implement a strategy for sustainable development. UNESCO also acts as a clearinghouse to gather and disseminate information, knowledge and best practices, identify innovative solutions and test them through pilot projects (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2003).

[6] The International Reading Association is a professional membership organization dedicated to promoting high levels of literacy by improving reading instruction, disseminating research and information about reading and encouraging reading. The International Reading Association offers professional development and advocacy, establishes and strengthens partnerships, and promotes global literacy development (International Reading Association, 2004).

Literacy in New Brunswick

During the International Year of Literacy in 1990, New Brunswick Premier Frank McKenna, appointed Canada's first Minister of State for Literacy and established an Advisory Council on Literacy. Members of the Council designed a *Framework for Action* to outline new roles for the government, community and private sector for the delivery of innovative literacy programs (Ministry of State for Literacy, 1994). Despite this increased emphasis placed on literacy, results on the 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) were disturbing for New Brunswick. This test determines how well adults use printed information to function in society and identifies factors that influence literacy proficiency.

Findings on the IALS, a comparative study of literacy in 22 countries, revealed that up to 60 percent of adults residing in New Brunswick were rated in the bottom two of five literacy levels (Statistics Canada, 1998). Placement at these levels means that the participant either could not read at all or could read, but not well. That is, they were only able to use literacy for basic tasks like finding words in text. In a functional sense, someone rated at Level 1, the lowest level, might have problems understanding the information on a medication label to administer it appropriately. While those at Level 2, the next level, might adapt to functioning in their daily lives, they would struggle to learn new job skills. Level 3 is considered the basic literacy level. Some occupations call for integration of several sources of information or solving more complex problems which would require a Level 4 or Level 5 rating.

Statistics Canada (1998) breaks literacy skills down into three areas of prose literacy, document literacy and quantitative literacy. Prose literacy involves the ability to comprehend and use information from written text such as news stories, poetry and works of fiction. Document literacy refers to the functional use of reading to be able to follow maps, transportation schedules and job application forms. Quantitative literacy requires the practical use of mathematics for activities including balancing a chequebook, filling out order forms or calculating a tip (Shalla & Schellenberg, 1998). In arriving at a literacy level for an individual on the IALS, the three areas of literacy are examined with each scale having a literacy proficiency rating between 0 to 500 points. The five broad literacy levels for each scale are: Level 1 (0-225), Level 2 (226-275), Level 3 (276-325), Level 4 (326-375) and Level 5 (376-500) (National Institute for Literacy, 2004).

New Brunswick's inferior showing on the IALS provoked passionate debates and raised serious concern by the provincial government and non-profit agencies championing literacy causes. Literacy stakeholders reacted positively to the reports by keeping literacy on the government's agenda and advocating for regional initiatives to develop creative strategies for delivering literacy programs. The government established a network of community-based programs for adults to upgrade their literacy skills. One innovative literacy program created in 1991 and jointly supported by the government, private sector and the local communities, Community Academic Services Program (CASP), spread to communities across the province (Gorlick, 2001). Each CASP provides adult learners free and accessible literacy training on a flexible schedule

customized to meet their needs. Academic upgrading is available at the basic level (grades 4 to 6) and intermediate level (grades 7 to 9).

The focus on literacy was also directed towards investing in early intervention with children. The New Brunswick Department of Education partnered with Literacy New Brunswick, Inc.[7] and community agencies to develop programs to address low levels of literacy in New Brunswick children. In 1997, the now annual *Read Across New Brunswick Challenge* was started by the Ministry of State for Literacy with Sobeys (grocery) stores and NBTel (provincial telephone company) as corporate sponsors. This was designed as a friendly community competition to motivate citizens into reading on a regular basis (Department of Education, 2003b). Two other community-based programs, *Read, Read and Slide* and *Let's Celebrate Reading Together*, were introduced in 1999.

Recent studies to assess literacy levels of Canadian school children revealed that New Brunswick children had similar results to New Brunswick adults on the IALS. When compared to their counterparts in other provinces, the performance of New Brunswick children is disheartening. Outcomes on the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Program for International Student Achievement (PISA) 2000 survey, an extensive project designed to provide international indicators of the skills in reading, math and science of 15 year olds, revealed that Canada's overall achievement in reading literacy was near the top of the 32 countries tested (Bussière et al., 2001).

---

[7] Literacy New Brunswick, Inc. (LNBI) is a non-government organization that promotes the importance of early literacy interventions and a literacy-rich culture through involvement with various provincial literacy initiatives (Literacy New Brunswick, Inc., 2004)

However, the average reading scores of New Brunswick grade 10 students, both girls and boys, were the lowest in the country.

In the new millennium, the focus for literacy intervention continued to expand into the preschool years and the domain of parenting. In 2001, the *Early Childhood and Family Literacy Summer Student Project* was developed by the New Brunswick Coalition for Literacy (NBCL)[8] with Laubach Literacy New Brunswick (LLNB)[9], Literacy New Brunswick Inc. (LNBI) and la Fédération d'alphabétisation du Nouveau-Brunswick (FANB)[10] to offer support to develop and expand early childhood and family literacy initiatives in the community. The aim of this project was to engage preschool children and their family members in various activities which promote and foster early literacy skills and to increase awareness of the important role of these activities in preventing later literacy difficulties (Literacy New Brunswick, 2001a).

A renewed interest in literacy at the school level is apparent with the tremendous variety of literacy initiatives which are being undertaken by the local school districts to address concerns regarding poor achievement in children's reading scores on standardized testing. Debates rage over which programs and approaches are best to implement; research-based programs are not always recognized and the methods used for

---

[8] The NBCL is a non profit agency established in 1988 to carry out literacy services with representatives from government and community groups (Literacy New Brunswick, 2001b).

[9] LLNB is a non-profit volunteer organization that offers free literacy and numeracy training for adults (Laubach Literacy New Brunswick, 2004).

[10] FANB is a non-profit francophone organization with a primary focus on family literacy. It was established in 1988 to make the francophone public aware of the benefits of literacy (Fédération d'alphabétisation du Nouveau-Brunswick, 2004)

promoting literacy are plagued with controversies (E. Crawford, personal communication, May 27, 2002). Further, the expanding use of technology-supported learning offers teaching alternatives which challenge traditional classroom instructional models and introduce possibilities for enhanced learning (Barclay, 2001).

A number of initiatives have been implemented in the early grades in New Brunswick schools in an effort to boost literacy. Some of the most common activities include daily silent reading periods; the regular use of adults, high profile sports team players or older students as reading buddies; and after school reading programs and tutoring sessions. The application of specific computer programs to enhance reading skills and the inclusion of ninety minutes of daily uninterrupted literacy programming have also been put into practice in recent years (E. Crawford, personal communication, May 27, 2002). The latest kindergarten to grade 2 initiative, part of New Brunswick's Quality Learning Agenda to strengthen the provincial education system, is the early identification and intervention for students learning to read who are experiencing difficulties with phonemic awareness[11] (Heydon, 2004; Province of New Brunswick, 2004). Short term intensive small group programs are conducted by Early Literacy Specialists or Literacy Support Teachers.

It is expected that achieving competence in not only school literacy, but also the new literacies that will be needed for the modern information and communication technology, will become more and more critical. Western society, with its largely

[11] Phonemic awareness refers to the ability to identify, attend to and manipulate sounds in words (Adams, Foorman, Lundberg, & Beeler, 1998).

information and knowledge-based economy, relies heavily on technology. As Rideout (2001) has highlighted, in our complex and rapidly changing world, individuals must acquire increasingly specialized skills for their livelihood since resource base and industrial jobs are on the decline. Economically-disadvantaged children who lack access to computer technologies and the associated new literacies that are becoming essential in western culture, may find themselves without sufficient knowledge to cope effectively with electronic media needed for success in the future. Richmond (1999) contends that this will cause them to trail farther behind their economically-advantaged classmates.

Poverty and Literacy

Shalla and Schellenberg (1998) point out that some literacy researchers ascribe to a cultural deficit theory of literacy to account for variations in literacy performance and academic achievement. In this body of research, the focus is on the culture of poverty perspective and its proponents hold to the belief that there is a strong correlation between poverty and low levels of literacy. According to this view, children from low-income homes are destined for low achievement since it is felt that their home environments do not provide the types of literacy-enhancing experiences, values and attitudes that are important for school success. Willms (1997a; 1997b) shows that Canadian youth from less advantaged financial backgrounds perform poorer in literacy skills than those raised in better financial conditions, while Chaney (1994) cites American research to support the claim that fewer than half of young adults who were raised in financially disadvantaged homes achieve more than a basic literacy level.

B. Hart and Risley (1995) contrast the literacy experiences of children growing up in poverty circumstances, in middle class homes, and in homes with professional parents. Their findings reveal that all children have social interactions with family members and are surrounded everyday by language. The difference was not in the kind of experience, but rather in the frequency. They found that parents who were professionals spent 50 percent more time talking to their preschool children than those parents who were on welfare. Since children who are economically disadvantaged have less opportunities, they learn significantly fewer words and have restricted vocabularies when compared to their peers from middle class homes or those with professional parents.

B. Hart and Risley (1995) state that by the time a child is four years old, the effect of differences in home experiences on early literacy skill development is apparent. They estimate that an average child with professional parents has heard 30 million more words, 600,000 more encouragements and 100,000 fewer discouragements than a similar child on welfare. Thus, with this difference in experience, there is a greater chance that children from low-income homes will encounter more difficulties with language learning and literacy in school, when compared to their peers from other socioeconomic classes.

Smith and Dixon (1995) studied the academic abilities of preschool children from low-income families. They found that the children were failing to acquire literacy skills at a level judged to be comparable to that of their middle-class peers. These researchers discovered that children from low-income homes were not read to as often in their early years as children from middle class homes, nor did they engage in meaningful interactions with text as frequently as their middle class counterparts. Almost 75 percent

of the parents of the middle class reported reading daily to their children, while those from the lower class reported reading a maximum of once each week.

Chaney (1994) suggests that both family income and maternal education correlate highly with the types of literacy-related activities that are promoted at home. That is, she infers that the home practices in low-income homes and in those homes with mothers with limited education do not support the development of the types of skills that are critical for literacy learning and success at school. Chaney explains that due to their restricted access to literacy materials and fewer travel opportunities that help to enrich literacy, children from low-income homes may not have the same experiences with language and literacy as children from advantaged homes. She also found that more family members read for pleasure in the upper middle class homes compared to the lower class ones. Heath (1983) stresses that although low-income families may be as verbal as those from other socioeconomic classes, the types of interactions in low-income homes may vary considerably from the decontextualized language of the school and this places children from low-income homes at a disadvantage.

Purcell-Gates (1993b) states that amount of reading has been positively correlated with socioeconomic status, but she denies that a relationship exists between poverty and low family literacy. In a later study of several low-income families, Purcell-Gates with L'Allier and Smith (1995) found that while some low-income homes had limited involvement with literacy, a number of homes had a literacy-rich environment. Other researchers, such as Breen et al. (1994); D. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988); R. Taylor (1995); and Yaden, Rowe and McGillivray (1999) stress that traditional measures of

socioeconomic status are not adequate for explaining how home environment affects literacy or school success and one must be cautious in drawing any conclusions about the impact of social class on literacy in the home. Thomas (1998) states that "we still do not understand how the interaction between parents and their children affects literacy learning" (p. 22) since little research has been conducted on the ways families influence their members' literacy development.

Further, it is possible that some of the differences in literacy achievement could be attributed to the variations in the quality of school programs and instruction rather than simply to income-related differences in the children (Willms, 1997a). Individual personality factors must also be taken into account. Clearly, more research is needed to identify the variables in literacy achievement and to understand how they may interact and mediate the relationship between poverty and literacy.

There is a paucity of empirical studies in how school-age children engage in literacy in the home (Thomas, 1998), although anecdotal reports and best practices opinion papers abound (Nickse, 1989). Theoretically-framed research is clearly needed (Thomas, 1998; Unwin, 1993). In addition, Hicks (2002) points out how studies of school children's learning needs and how they engage in literacy centre more on ethnicity and less on class. This focus implies that poor and working class children are primarily from ethnic minorities and ignores the existence of many poor and working class white children. Hicks states that more research is needed on this latter group who may also "experience painful cultural dissonance in middle class classrooms" (p. 4).

Looking back, it is evident that I had become frustrated with the limitations in research on literacy in low-income homes when I began searching for answers to my questions why so many children from low-income environments seemed to have more special learning needs and a less than adequate literacy foundation. Thus, this exploratory study aimed to help fill some of the research void by looking at the daily experiences of families living in low-income circumstances and examining factors that contribute to or restrict their level of literacy attainment. I intimately examined the lives of the selected families, while remaining sensitive to their context. I evaluated existing literacy education in their children's school and community contexts. For the purposes of this research, low-income families are defined as those receiving government income assistance and meeting provincial guidelines to receive subsidies for housing and daycare arrangements. The definition adopted for the family includes any combination of people that reside regularly in the home and who may or may not be related by blood.

Purposes of the Study

In my study, I sought to uncover how the values regarding literacy come to be acquired by individuals who are living in low-income circumstances. I attempted to further elucidate the role of literacy as a social construct (Street, 1995) and, following my pilot study, to fill in gaps in my understanding and perception of literacy agencies like the education system and greater society. It was my belief that both the education system and the greater society with its authoritarian hierarchical structure can be unwittingly unjust to certain groups of people, serving as a means of sustaining relations of domination. Initially, I chose the family as the starting point for analyzing the social context that

facilitates literacy learning as one example of a societal structure that sustains relations of domination. While my primary focus was on the family, I went beyond family interactions in the home environment to also include a secondary focus on the larger context of the public school in the community.

This study has three main purposes. First, the study examines family literacy by providing a detailed description of the nature of family literacy in one selected low-income community. Second, the study contributes to the knowledge base regarding circumstances that facilitate or impede literacy. And third, I offer an organizing framework that I developed to help understand the complex nature of family literacy.

Research Questions

The general overarching question for my study was "what are the literacy-related practices of low-income families and how do the families perceive these practices?" My specific research questions are outlined later in this section. First, I frame this study by posing several questions that force one to think about the lived reality of those residing in low-income circumstances and the meaning that education and literacy might have for them in their lives. I then explore issues related to how the parents in the selected community shape the literacy practices and perceptions of their children, with a view to understanding the sociocultural factors that affect literacy.

The research questions center upon exploring the social world of these children and the ways the children and their parents use the dominant and often transparent codes of mainstream academic discourse in household literacy activities. Parental motivation to

become involved in their child's education and what they understand about the concept of participation in relation to educational decisions and decision-making are examined.

I also tried to gain an understanding of teachers' perceptions of the families' funds of knowledge as a resource for curriculum design and children's literacy growth (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992; D. Taylor, 1993). Moll et al (1992) describe funds of knowledge as historically developed and accumulated strategies. These include knowledge of the language, social and discourse norms, and other cultural and linguistic resources of students and their communities, their multiple approaches to literacies, and their ability to solve the daily events of life (D. Taylor, 1997). As well, I look at how schools reflect and reproduce the inequalities of power and privilege of the society at large.

The following key sub-questions serve as the driving force for my inquiry and together help answer the general overarching question regarding literacy practices and perceptions of low-income families:

1. How do family literacy practices and events unfold in these low-income homes?
2. How is literacy embedded in families' social practices and relationships between schools and homes?
3. What conditions and factors within the family contribute to family literacy and the enculturation of children into these practices?

I had planned at the outset to describe my observations, rather than indulge in value judgements by trying to ascertain what is right and what is wrong in what low-income parents do to promote literacy development in their children. I maintain that all

parents want their children to succeed and that decisions regarding their actions are made with good intentions. Even though what some parents choose to do may not fit neatly within the parameters of what a teacher believes is good practice, I feel that rigorous pursuit of defining best practices is ultimately dangerous. I am adamant that educators must learn not to privilege one set meaning and to grasp what "otherness" means when looking at the nature of literacy in low-income homes. They must recognize that diversity abounds rather than try to impose a middle class perspective and stifle the chance for new possibilities and different ways of understanding and experiencing the world.

Significance of the Study

My research offers an original scholarly contribution to the extant body of knowledge in the field of family literacy in Canada. My study is theoretically oriented and data collected provide a basis for future literacy research. I extend previous research, such as the valuable ethnographic work conducted by Heath (1983) in the Piedmont Carolinas. Heath studied the everyday activities and conversations of citizens of a white community she called Roadville and a black community she named Trackton to examine how the children learn to use language in their homes and communities and the significance that context plays. In the next chapter, I elaborate on Heath's important landmark study of these two communities varying in their home literacy environments.

In my research, I offer new insights into the family life of the selected participants by entering into their life-worlds and presenting a detailed and sensitive portrayal of lived dimensions of enculturation and family literacy. Similarly, Heath conducted an exhaustive longitudinal study of the language-learning habits of the children in her

communities, their home routines and the families' social networks. I explored first-hand the experiences of those living in low-income circumstances in New Brunswick, an area where there has been little research conducted to date.

I offer a theoretical base from which those working in this field of literacy may operate their programs or ground their methods of intervention. My descriptive work points to the value in applying critical and feminist approaches to studying family literacy and for inviting social action. I set out to extend critical theory to the field of family literacy, including emphasizing the importance of feminist studies and gender politics in looking at family literacy. Through my study, I provide a new way of understanding literacy experiences of low-income school-age children and their families while exploring concurrently their home and school environments and the cultural constraints and forces that shape their lives.

This research may be helpful to those working in the field of education. I look at the definition of literacy from a wide angle as a social construct and examine some of the beliefs about literacy that have been perpetuated in the literature. The findings and recommendations may also provide a valuable contribution to teachers and teacher education programs. Thus, this information should be made readily available to both practising and pre-service teachers. In light of the increasing ethnic and cultural diversity in many classrooms today, there will be a growing need for curriculum which will ensure that students from all backgrounds are valued and can experience success. This investigation will inform educators about household forms of knowledge, respecting

family culture to build on literacy strengths, and the importance of incorporating critical instructional practices that address varying diversities in the curriculum (Hicks, 2002).

My research contributes a fresh perspective to understanding the underlying ideological assumptions about literacy in low-income homes by challenging widespread myths about literacy in these families. Some dominant misconceptions are perpetuated by the media and uncritically accepted as truths by educators. These include the notion that families living in low-income circumstances are a homogeneous group, the children lack family support for education, the children show reduced levels of motivation for learning compared to their middle class counterparts, the culture of low-income families is adverse to educational achievement, the parents are lazy and give little attention to schooling and the families participate in few literacy activities.

There are also direct implications from this research for community literacy practitioners. The rich detail concerning not only the literacy activities, but also parental attitudes, beliefs and values about literacy and education, provides a much-needed basis from which literacy practitioners may inform their practice. Case study methodology provides truthfulness in representation and makes the research report less esoteric and more accessible to a wider audience (Cohen & Manion, 1994). This will encourage literacy practitioners to formulate their own opinions from the implications of the study.

Further, information gathered may be added to the body of knowledge that policy makers can draw upon to help them understand how the middle class position drives classroom dynamics and to develop policies to better serve students. Just as Fagan (1998)

points out in his study, I believe that "politicians would do well to read [this study] and listen to the 'messages' that originate from the people."

Assumptions and Presuppositions

In this section, I present my assumptions and presuppositions up front so that the reader may be informed of the possible impact that these biases could have on this study. Because I am the primary instrument of analysis and interpretation of the data, it is important that I state my role clearly and outline any biases that could colour my observations (Merriam, 2001). The intent of the case study is to provide a full and rich description of the reality experienced by the participants. So that I could do this as objectively as possible, I had to identify and reconcile my own biases that could affect the interpretation of data in my analysis.

I offer background information about my family heritage and my work experience and discuss how these factors might introduce a bias in my study. My research foundation focuses on biases related to my beliefs about literacy and the role of the family, and on my impressions about schools and teaching. I have filtered my values pertaining to literacy, poverty and families through a process of critical reflection and evaluation. My professional education combined with my lived reality has provided me with practical, authentic experiences related to methods for understanding language and literacy. The knowledge gained from these opportunities has helped me to move beyond a technical perspective to recognize how individuals practice literacy must be considered in concert with the social context of literacy.

Family Heritage

My research has been a journey of self-discovery and deep introspection in which I have embarked on a process for developing an understanding of my identity as a member of a minority culture and appreciating how it influences both my learning and teaching practices. Although I was eager to answer my research questions and to better understand low-income families and the diverse ways that literacy is perceived and embedded in their lives, I began my excursion by acknowledging my subjectivity and positionality with respect to poverty, education and marginalized others. I felt it was incumbent on me first to make sense of my family heritage and life experiences and then to speculate about their influence on my construction of knowledge.

I spent the majority of my childhood in a predominantly mainstream white middle class suburban neighbourhood with limited exposure to non-mainstream minority cultures. As I reflect back to that time, I recognize that contextual factors, like the silenced voices of my eastern European Jewish immigrant grandparents and other relatives, affect my understanding of oppression in general and more specifically, racial and religious discrimination. My enculturation, undoubtedly influenced by an awareness of the atrocities that were committed against my family members of only a generation or two back, involved an appreciation of Jewish values such as social justice and compassion (Schwartz, 2001). My cultural heritage has become embodied in my values and beliefs, while my life experiences have further shaped my identity and influenced my social practices. This knowledge has been advantageous in my research journey by

helping me at the outset to recognize more readily situations where there is domination and marginalization of vulnerable groups.

My research on literacy in low-income homes has also been fueled by the wonderment of how my father, the eldest child of poor immigrant parents learned to read before school entry and how my mother as a young child fulfilled her responsibility to do paperwork for her immigrant parents who could neither read nor write in English. I recall my mother explaining how her father depended so heavily on his memory in his work, similar to some of the adult immigrants cited by Klassen and Burnaby (1993) in their study of new users of English. Reportedly, my grandfather was able to conduct business for an entire day and then return home and recite the details of his transactions for my mother to record. Thus, my definition of literacy and choice of conceptual context lead me to look at how language and literacy are bound in economic and political systems and to a sense of family and community (Key, 1998).

Work Experience

As a speech-language pathologist, I have been working over 15 years with children in programs designed to support and enhance their literacy development. In the schools where I have worked, I have become increasingly aware of the higher referral rate for children from low-income homes. This is consistent with the research findings showing that children from low-income homes experience more academic problems (Thomas, 1998). In tracking my career, my penchant for innovation is readily apparent. My practice of challenging the status quo has led me to question the normal course of events and to seek alternative and potentially better ways of achieving the desired results.

For this study, my knowledge of schools has been informed largely by practice. I drew to a great extent upon my vast experience from working in nearly every public school in southeastern New Brunswick. My familiarity with the provincial curriculum and my recognition of materials presented in class has proven to be invaluable for me both in the design and implementation of my study. Over the years, I have witnessed a variety of instructional styles and qualities; these formed a frame of reference and a filter for my observations. For example, I believe that a teacher's instructional style, personality and abilities are as important as the pedagogical value of the teaching methods employed. Moreover, I have faith in the merit of students discovering answers to their own or their teachers' questions and I recognize the value of cooperative learning practices.

I contend that my background could be seen to be highly beneficial to my research and adds credibility to the analysis. However, I also recognize that some individuals may feel that I would be a biased observer of events in the school and in forming my impressions of instruction.

Research Foundation

I began my research with a foundation centred on three beliefs. First, I view literacy as a complex process which is deeply rooted in social, economic, educational and political structures (Stuckey, 1991). Second, I regard literacy as a social practice and acknowledge that all children grow up with some form of literacy as an integral part of their personal and familial lives (Goodman, 1986). Third, I consider the family to be the child's first teacher. Through the myriad interactions in the family context, children learn

how to behave according to the expectations that the family holds as members of their culture (Richardson, 1994).

The pivotal role of the family and the ways its members use literacy must not be underestimated. The family is viewed as a vital learning unit (Nickse, 1989) and serves as "the most important element in literacy development" (L. M. Morrow & Paratore, 1993, p. 194). Children learn not only speech patterns and language from their family, but they also acquire the values of the culture, including their beliefs and learning patterns about literacy (Harman, 1987; Purcell-Gates, 1993a; Tabachnick & Bloch, 1995). Raymond (1982) stresses that for teachers to develop humane and effective pedagogies and policies they must recognize that differences may exist between what a school promotes and what a family practices in terms of dialect and grammar, for example. He adds that if the language the student brings to the classroom differs from what is favoured at school, the home language must not be labeled as less valid.

Parker (1989) argues that differences between the literacy promoted in the home and that in the school may contribute to difficulty with what he calls schooled literacy. This school-based or school literacy involves reading and writing specific forms of texts and talking about them in ways that are typically prescribed by the school. For example, children may be expected to read trade books in the narrative genre and write about the stories in story-like frames (Pellegrini, Galda, Flor, Bartini & Charak, 1997).

Thomas, Skage and Jackson (1998) add that school-based literacy is often decontextualized and requires students to read, understand and answer questions which may be far removed from the present situation. Freire (1970), the renowned Brazilian

literacy theorist and critical educator, deplored the banking concept in traditional school-based literacy instruction. This is the notion of educators depositing knowledge in the minds of students for their future use. Instead, he advocated a form of education which values students' prior knowledge and encourages them to read both the word and the world (Freire, 1987).

Similar to Parker (1989), Polakow (1993) ascribes to the view that deficiencies in the homes of the "undeserving poor" (p. 84) consign them from birth to a world of "otherness" (p. 2). My view is that the purported relationship between reduced resources or promotion of alternate literacies in the home cannot be connected to literacy outcomes in such a simplistic causal manner. I also recognize a strong need to study the sociocultural factors that influence literacy in contemporary society to gain a fuller understanding of this relationship. By sociocultural factors, I refer broadly to the cultural attributes of the population such as their ethnic origin, language or languages spoken, religion, kinship, and belief systems, along with the values, norms and practices of the population. I also acknowledge the close link to socioeconomic factors.

Definition of Terms

There has been no meeting of the minds in the literature on the definitions of literacy and related terms. Not surprising, this lack of agreement has led to tension among literacy practitioners and scholars revolving around this controversy. Graff (1987), a literacy scholar and historian, argues that there is no accepted definition of literacy and the subject is therefore highly over-rated. He believes that rather than encouraging rational thinking, literacy simply serves the purpose of preparing individuals for the

workforce. Raymond (1982) describes "one of the most puzzling paradoxes in contemporary education [as the] inability of literate people to agree about the nature and value of literacy" (p. 2). While the word literacy slips easily into conversations, it is seldom used by speakers in the same way. Therefore, defining what it means to be literate defies consensus and may vary depending on the context.

A deficit discourse views "illiteracy" as the problem and its proponents believe that the simple solution for illiteracy is to offer more literacy. This explanation is based on faulty assumptions about language, literacy and learning, which overlook the invisible wider societal factors (Pellegrini, 1991). For the purposes of this research, the definition of literacy goes beyond the traditional limited meaning pertaining only to the ability to read and write. This will be elaborated in the next section, followed by definitions of literacy practices and literacy events, family literacy and family literacy programs, and then a few other selected terms used in this research.

Literacy

Descriptions and definitions of literacy have evolved, particularly in the past decade, as individuals from diverse disciplines such as education, psychology, anthropology, sociolinguistics, history and economics have each brought their own perspectives forward on literacy and its parameters. Typically, literacy definitions fall into one of four categories which will each be presented here (Robertson, 2003).

The first category is the traditional definition of literacy which focuses simply on the ability to read and write. By this definition, one is considered literate by being proficient in reading and writing tasks. Alternatively, if required skills in these areas are

inadequate, the individual is labeled as illiterate. D. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) criticize this limited perspective which views literacy as a "discrete event" (p. 201), or reduces literacy to "merely a mechanical set of skills" (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p. 16).

The second category of literacy moves beyond the two disembodied concepts of reading and writing to include a continuum with levels of proficiency in a variety of skills to meet daily demands to engage in work, family and community activities. This category includes a sociolinguistic perspective and recognizes that linguistic, cultural, economic and social contexts vary depending on one's circumstances. For example, ABC CANADA Literacy Foundation, states that "Literacy is the ability to read, write, calculate, speak, and understand, as well as sign (for the Deaf) and communicate in other forms of language, according to need" (ABC CANADA, 2003, p. 5). Similarly, on July 25, 1991 the United States Congress enacted the National Literacy Act PL 102-73 which defines literacy as an "individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one's goals, and develop one's knowledge and potential" (United States Congress, 1991).

The third category of literacy is more inclusive and its proponents advocate for a critical and participatory approach to literacy while considering the skills needed to function in a knowledge-based society. Woods (2000, ¶ 2) expands this definition of what it means to be literate to include the ability "to read the signs and symbols and to negotiate, or navigate within the world in which one finds oneself." Luke (1988) adds that literacy refers to a set of socially organized practices and constructions learned

within and through a range of cultural contexts in home, school and community that allow one to function in society, achieve personal and social goals and develop knowledge.

Finally, the fourth category embraces the broadest and most dynamic view of knowledge about literacy by pointing to factors that involve specialized literacy to process and synthesize information in an increasingly technological world. Willinsky (1990) recognizes how literacy is used to represent, inform, engage, express and entertain and in doing all of these he promotes a broader concept of literacy. Additionally, he believes that literacy should be viewed within a framework of lifelong learning for both children and adults. Fisher (2001) points out that literate people "learn independently, interdependently and continuously throughout their lives" (p. 58). Literate behaviours go beyond the concepts and behaviours one uses to read and write. These behaviours include "reflecting on [one's] literate activity and using oral language to interact with written language by reacting to a story, explaining a piece of writing or describing a favourite book to another person" (Key, 1998, p. 102).

The work of Luke (1988) resonates with me, as I also view literacy as a complex and dynamic social phenomenon learned within various cultural contexts. People engage with literacy in many different ways for a variety of purposes, such as for enjoyment, entertainment, learning, maintaining relationships, or for simply getting things done to solve the daily events of life (D. Taylor, 1993). Therefore, literacy may be seen as an activity used in everyday life and is bound with what is done in a local sense (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). My definition of literacy further acknowledges the existence of many

literacies, each with its own funds of knowledge or accumulated ways of knowing (D. Taylor, 1993).

Although it is now recognized that people possess various kinds of literacies, historically institutions of public education have been central in promoting a universal type of literacy which Cook-Gumperz (1986) has appropriately coined schooled literacy. Attaining an adequate level of schooled literacy, measured by the acquisition of mainstream knowledge reflecting the dominant culture, is associated with financial success and occupational status in Western society (Shalla & Schellenberg, 1998; Statistics Canada, 1996b; Willms, 1997b). Advantaged groups suppress those who do not reflect middle class culture and opportunities, thereby denying them equal opportunities (D. Taylor, 1997).

Some researchers and practitioners believe that the connection between the literacy of an adult and child should be acknowledged. When adults improve their literacy and enhance their skills, they transfer knowledge and skills to their family members at home. Sheehan-Holt and Smith (2000) found that adults who had participated in basic skills programs report an increase in their reading practices in daily lives. While there are diverse reasons for adults to enrol in literacy programs, children are often a powerful motivation for parents to improve their literacy skills (Bingman, Ebert & Bell, 2002; R. Rubin, 1997). As the first teacher for the child, a parent may have a desire to be able to help with schoolwork and to speak to the teachers. These parents may recognize a need to improve their own literacy skills to be able to offer this assistance.

Literacy Practices and Literacy Events

Barton and Hamilton (1998) contrast literacy practices and literacy events. Literacy practices refer to the basic unit of a social theory of literacy. They are the "general cultural ways of utilising written language which people draw upon in their lives" (p. 6). Literacy practices are not observable behaviors, but social processes that connect people and involve values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships. They are the accepted ways of doing things (Barton, 1994). Cultural groups may have their own set of literacy practices which are shaped by social rules and "include shared cognitions represented in ideologies and social identities" (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; p. 7).

According to Barton and Hamilton (1998), literacy events arise from literacy practices. They are those observable activities where literacy has a key role (Heath, 1983). Usually there is written text, and there may be talk around the text. Many of the literacy events may be observed in regular and repeated routines or communicative situations in which people participate in home, school and community contexts. Some settings may be overtly instructional, while other ones are not. Knowledge of Barton and Hamilton's (1998) notion of literacy events helped to shape my views on the range of literacy in low-income homes, while Edwards' (1994) division of literacy events into the categories of activities of daily living, entertainment and religion guided the method of data collection in my study.

I looked for literacy events in activities of daily living such as the manner in which families manage their finances and paid their bills, how they understand schedules to use the public transit system, how they use literacy in following a recipe or use

patterns and directions for home repairs. I also examined how they used literacy with respect to entertainment. I wanted to make sense of how they understood the television guide, did crossword puzzles, found items in catalogues and magazines or engaged in crafts. Finally, I aimed to look at literacy events in religion in their lives, such as bible reading and understanding notices about church activities.

Family Literacy

Like literacy, a plethora of definitions of family literacy has been put forth (Shively, 2001). For this research, the meaning adopted involves the intergenerational sharing of literate experiences that provides family members with an environment that supports and expands the range of literacy activities in the home (Parks, 1995). Family literacy is a learned process which encourages parents to incorporate activities in their own cultural context (Parks, 1995) and extend the range of learning in the family (Hudson River Center for Program Development, 2001). As outlined by the International Reading Association (1994), family literacy occurs naturally during daily routines and includes all of the ways that family members use literacy both at home and in their community. Barton (1997) lists some examples as writing a note to the teacher, sharing a bedtime story, making a shopping list and following a recipe. He adds that adults often serve as the literacy role models in the home, and may read and write for a variety of purposes or have literacy–related discussions, all as part of family literacy.

Shively (2001) points out that the notion of family literacy is not new and those that support it simply do so because it makes sense for them. She adds that the definitions may vary to reflect the values and suit the purposes of the group that offers them. Some

agencies offer family literacy programs that provide family members an opportunity to learn together how to use the power of literacy and family communication to help them meet personal goals and ultimately improve their quality of life. These programs build upon this natural learning bond between adults and their children. They recognize and support the influence of the family on the literacy development of all of the family members.

Other Terms

Other selected terms used throughout this research, arranged in alphabetical order, include: culture, discourse, enculturation, heart, identity and voice. Each of these will now be defined.

Culture can be seen as the "the totality of a people's experience" including "its history, literature, language, philosophy, religion, and so forth" (Sleeter, 1996, p. 146). Such an idea recognizes that persons are socialized into their culture and values.

Discourse is defined by Lewis (1993) as:

> a set of social practices that signify positions in subjectivity which are always multiple and which are always negotiated within the broader political and economic relations that mark our day-to-day lives... discursive practices are the stories we believe we can tell to ourselves and also the practical engagements these stories imply... They are a way of negotiating our subject position within the relations of power. (p. 113)

Enculturation is the process undertaken in adapting and conforming to the basic values, norms and belief systems of one's culture. Spindler (1974) refers to this "process of generational continuity" (p. 28) in which enculturative factors "perpetuate, recondition and occasionally renew the way of life of a people" (p. 9). Lankshear (1992) adds that we

are "inducted into using language, behaving, valuing, and believing to give a shape to our experiences" (p. 126).

Heart is the seat of all emotions and what "dampens the eye or broadens the smile. It is the minefield of our desires and the source of our motivation. Our confidence flows from its fountain. We lose hope when its waters run dry" (Malayalam, 2003).

Identity is a sense of self-constructedness in response to one's social environment. It involves a feeling of belonging to particular social groups, including but not limited to those based on one's gender, ethnicity, race, religion, and/or social class (Lips, 1993).

Voice is the ability to express freely one's ideas and opinions and is central to a feminist perspective. Sinner (2003) points out how the dichotomies of voice and silence hold positions of power and marginalization.

Plan of Presentation

This thesis is organized into five chapters; the central heart theme is used in the thesis title and in frequent quotations throughout. In this first chapter I have provided background information on the fields of literacy and family literacy in Canada and New Brunswick. I introduced the research problem and offered some insight about how I became interested in the topic of family literacy, its significance, some assumptions and presuppositions and definitions of terms used. I pointed out the difficulty in using the word literacy because of the lack of an agreed upon definition. I built an argument that literacy is not merely the skills of reading and writing traditionally promoted by schools, but rather there are multiple literacies which are linked to one's sense of self, values and

forms of power. In Chapter 1, I also emphasized the importance of the researcher ensuring self-reflection.

In Chapter 2 that follows, I offer a review of pertinent literature regarding literacy in low-income homes and family interactions to provide background on the historical, political, social and economic issues that affect literacy. I show how family literacy has arisen as a hybrid theme in educational research and discourse over the last two decades, melding concerns with adult literacy with children's emergent literacy and early school reading and writing. In viewing literacy as a social practice, there is an emphasis on understanding schools as a mechanism for producing social inequality.

I highlight key studies in the literature on family literacy. Some emphasize the importance of literacy in the home for literacy development, often finding fault with lower class families in not assuming school literacy as a standard. Others emphasize the dedication and commitment of lower income families by engaging in activities to support their children's schooling success. However, their activities may not be mainstream. These approaches to family literacy then compensate for the deficit or build upon parents' and household literacy practices to support their children's literacy development.

Other strands of research focus on parents' use and sense of agency with literacy. This type of research views parents as important models for guiding their children. Program strategies focus on strengthening the literacy abilities and uses people have already as resources in their lives, while assuming the coherence of children's literacy development with parental orientations to reading and writing.

I open Chapter 3 by justifying my choice of a qualitative research design for my study to capture the experiences of the participants and better understand the social and cultural contexts in which they operate. I describe how the in-depth case study was conducted with purposefully selected participants in the natural settings of the homes and schools. Data collection was preceded by months of participant observation of the classrooms and school programs. The interview was the primary data collection method because of its strength to focus directly on the topic of the case study. I also employed field notes, parent journals, observations of parent-child interactions, and questionnaires. Additionally, in this chapter, I address issues around how the data collected was coded and analyzed to seek themes and meanings that generate in-depth understanding of literacy in low-income homes.

In the following chapter, Chapter 4, I discuss my intensive fieldwork. I present case narratives of the eight participant families, all who live in low-income circumstances in New Brunswick. Through rich description of their experienced realities, I make the knowledge and perspective of the participants visible to the reader. I highlight the mothers' strength and courage, often in the face of daunting circumstances. I also offer a description of the school and the significant people in that setting for my study.

In Chapter 5, the final chapter, I articulate my findings, draw some conclusions and suggest implications and recommendations for future research and practice from an interpretation and discussion of the findings. I also highlight the contributions of this study to scholarship in the field of family literacy. Insofar as the thesis displays differences among the low-income families, my results support arguments that class

cannot be taken in a simple way to characterize families or children from them. Further, while the families show active uses of literacy and support for children's development, my research supports claims that literate commitments and strengths can be found in poor families.

I show how social structures and policy affect educational practice and how educational issues interact with a range of broad social issues. I promote a view of multiple literacies, the integrity of literacy practices of which the communities are part and the need to challenge power relations in education and the inequalities they generate. The value of thinking critically and knowing how to use language and literacy for improving one's life is described. Finally, in order to provide readers with a structure to ground family literacy programs, I propose a model.

Appendixes follow Chapter 5. They contain copies of items used in this study including consent and assent forms, summary information about the study, the interview guide, questionnaire, and analysis forms.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

What comes from a book is knowledge.
What comes from the heart is wisdom.

- Garth Brooks

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide background information and justification for the research undertaken. The literature review critically analyzes a segment of the published body of knowledge, organized around the subject of literacy-related practices in low-income homes. In this chapter, I summarize prior research studies and theoretical articles in the literature to explain and define the problem. The aim is also to discover gaps in the literature and areas that need further research, as well as to provide the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis, offer a conceptual context and propose a framework for family literacy.

Background

As discussed in Chapter 1, western society places a high value on the attainment of literacy and a primary focus of traditional education has been to establish literacy skills in children. It is generally agreed that achieving a high level of literacy is a worthy goal, but there is no consensus about how to achieve this outcome. One of the obvious problems, as pointed out by Graff (1987) and more recently by Fagan (1998) and

Casmier-Paz (2000) is the ambiguity in the definition of literacy and what it means to be literate (Ellsworth, 1989).

In addition to the problem of defining what literacy is, there is the problem of explaining what literacy does. Graff (1979) labels this as the literacy myth or the widespread belief that if people become more competent in reading, writing and other basic skills, they will become more productive. According to this viewpoint, the achievement of basic reading and writing skills is both a necessary and sufficient condition for social and economic progress, as well as personal success. This is the fundamental assumption justifying the need for large-scale national literacy projects for disadvantaged groups. However, as Fagan (1998) counters, "education alone was never seen as a job ticket; many other factors had to enter the picture" (p. 86).

Graff (1979) critiques the overly simplistic claim of what literacy can accomplish. He also argues that factors other than literacy are the underlying causes of problems such as poverty and crime. He maintains that when all the emphasis is placed on the false potential of literacy to prevent poverty and crime and make people happier and more productive, other factors are overlooked. Graff (1979) states that "The reality [of national literacy movements] is more complex, is harder to face politically... the level of literacy is less important than issues of class, gender, and ethnicity; lack of literacy is more likely to be a symptom of poverty and deprivation than a cause" (p. 18).

Literacy has been described as a social process with context being very important, and each community having its own literate culture and view of literate behaviour (Bhola, 1996; Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Ferdman, 1990; Horsman, 1990). This, in turn, influences

how individuals acquire and engage in literacy. Barton (1994) is quick to point out that people have different experiences and various demands placed on them and as a consequence, they experience "different worlds of literacy" (p. x). Fagan (1998) acknowledges that many people with a low level of literacy attainment who might be labelled low-literate function well in their own sociocultural context. They feel that their literacy skills are adequate to meet their requirements and do not perceive a need to upgrade. At the same time, they may place a higher value on other aspects in their lives, such as their family, and measure quality in life through means other than the level of literacy attained.

D'Angelo (1982) argues that individuals with low levels of literacy may be highly intelligent, particularly when it comes to performing practical tasks. He attributes the cognitive differences between literate and less literate individuals to their experience with different environments and having had fewer educational opportunities. Fagan (1998) highlights how Newfoundlanders in his research "construct their image within the reality of their culture and how they live this reality" (p. 10). Other recent literacy scholars, such as Gee (1995) and Street (1996, 2003), also challenge restrictive views of literacy and lend support to Graff's (1979) understanding of other determinants of opportunity and success in society.

For a literate culture, Freire (1970) and later Stuckey (1991) insist that knowledge of the word cannot be separated from knowledge of the world. Stuckey (1991) suggests that knowledge of both proceed concurrently. Freire (1970) points out that people must understand their relationship with the world, including their past, since they are

constrained by social structures. He suggests the use of a problem posing model in which individuals use dialogue and reflection to continually question how the present came to be and to try to determine the role of the past in constructing the present. It is through this learning that they are liberated.

Street (1984) also advocates for an understanding of one's sociocultural context to be able to function effectively as a literate being in one's own culture. Meanwhile, Jarvis (1992) talks about the learning process, which he sees as wider than education, as giving meaning to experience and transforming that experience into knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and attitudes. He recognizes both an individual component and a social context with pressure from social structures and control by powerful elites. To Jarvis (1992), this is a paradox; learning is individual, but the learner must relate to the social nature of society. Another part of the paradox is that institutions that are needed to help with the functioning of the system of education, in fact, may constrain learning. Yet, without these institutions, opportunities for learning would be reduced.

In Chapter 1, I reject the notion of literacy as a single fixed competence or measurable achievement in favor of a more inclusive evolving definition that accounts for the existence of multiple purposes for literacy and multiple goals and expectations for literacy education as advocated by a number of contemporary literacy researchers (Heath, 1983; Lankshear, 1997; Street, 1984). In my definition of literacy outlined previously, I put forth a set of skills that allows one to work with ever changing structures to help negotiate the world. As Fagan (1998) points out, literacy cannot be understood in isolation from the larger sociocultural context.

The term multiliteracies was coined in 1996 by a group of leading educators from the United States, Great Britain and Australia who called themselves the New London Group. Multiliteracies refers to a new combined approach to literacy pedagogy that includes a broader conception of literacies which emphasizes participation and a multiplicity of discourses to address the range in cultural and linguistic diversity in society (New London Group, 1996). The term discourse was explained in Chapter 1. In brief, discourses are sets of social practices that help regulate subjective life. Primary discourses are learned in the home while secondary discourses are attached to institutions. This approach to literacy goes beyond the use of traditional print to place emphasis on visual and media literacies of learners and recognizes how meaning is made in ways that are often multimodal.

Having discussed the definitions of literacy and problems in defining the term, I now turn to a historical overview of the family literacy movement, tracing its development back to initiatives designed to support families. Below, in the historical review, I highlight what was happening in North America including programs and legislation, while providing a cursory overview of other initiatives elsewhere in the world. This is followed by a review of program approaches, a look at sociocultural contexts for literacy learning and a discussion of Auerbach's socio-contextual family literacy model. The relevant research reviewed on family literacy includes a focus on poverty and family interactions in low-income homes.

Following the literature review, I discuss the conceptual context I chose as a framework for understanding the research questions for my study. This includes a critical

theory stance based on principles from the Frankfurt School to show how literacy is social, political and economic in nature and social reproduction theory with Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and habitus as useful points of reference for discussing how literacy learning is embedded in cultural contexts. Finally, I conclude the chapter with an emerging framework in which I offer a broad conceptualization of family literacy.

Family Literacy

The field of family literacy unites principles from early childhood and adult literacy for a whole-family learning effort. Although research in the domain of family literacy has a history of about 20 years, what is striking is the absence of a solid theoretical framework on which interventions may be based (Gadsen, 1994). Early work was not embedded within a theoretical framework, and was often poorly conceptualized. Further, in my literature review, I could not find convincing evidence that learning was enhanced, that students progress further in their education, or that they achieve more in life as a result of exposure to one particular program approach over another.

I now offer a cursory historical review of family literacy and synthesize results into a summary of what is and is not known in the field. As Thomas (2001) points out, "issues related to defining family literacy are fundamental to an understanding of underlying assumptions that drive decision making about program models and instructional practice" (p. 171). The summary is followed by a look at family literacy program approaches and two classification schemes to highlight the controversy in approaches. Then, I discuss related research where cultural issues and context are central to expose the gaps in the research and to help develop questions for future research. Since

family literacy is still relatively new and unknown, research with school age children, and particularly with a focus on members of low-income families, is scarce.

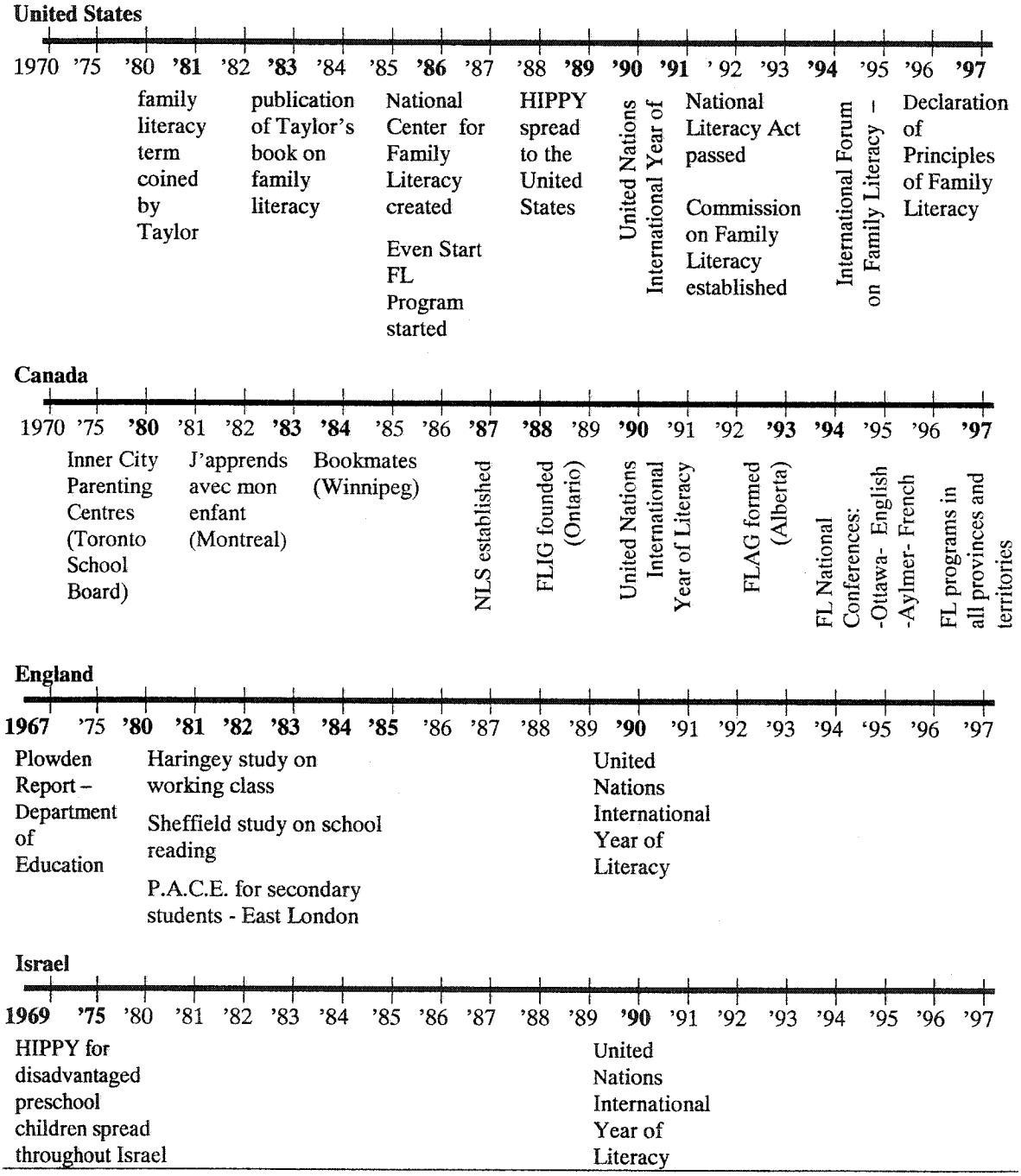
Historical Review of Family Literacy

Figure 1 on the next page illustrates how the family literacy movement developed concurrently in the United States, Canada, England and Israel. Although the term family literacy was coined in the United States in 1981 by D. Taylor in her doctoral dissertation (D. Taylor, 1993), Skage (1995) in her comprehensive review of the history of family literacy states that initiatives to support families in their literacy development may be traced back to the 1967 Plowden Report by the Department of Education and Science in the United Kingdom. Reportedly, this document promotes home-school partnerships and the creation of programs that provide parents with reading strategies to use with their children to support school literacy.

As reported by Skage (1995), as early as 1969, a research project at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Israel was examining the feasibility and effect of HIPPY (*Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters).* This initiative for disadvantaged preschool children was operating in homes across Israel by 1975, and by 1989 it had expanded to five other countries including the United States. Meanwhile, back in England in the 1980s, the Haringey study was looking at the effect of children from working class homes reading two to four times per week to their parents. At the same time, researchers in Sheffield, England examined factors in school reading attainment among young children from poor urban areas, while *Parents' Aid for Children's Education* (P.A.C.E.), a literacy program for secondary students, was created in East London. Thomas (2001)

Figure 1

History of the Family Literacy Movement, 1967-1997



Note: FL = Family Literacy; FLAG = Family Literacy Action Group; FLIG = Family Literacy Interest Group; HIPPY= Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters; NLS = National Literacy Secretariat; PACE = Parents' Aid for Children's Education

added that organizations in developing countries, such as Save the Children Foundation, also began to include family interventions supporting family learning environments.

The history of the family literacy movement in North America began with the publication of D. Taylor's (1983) influential book on this subject and the subsequent creation of the National Center for Family Literacy in 1986. Family literacy was pushed forward by concerns that the education system was not meeting the needs of educationally disadvantaged families (Thomas, 2001). As discussed in the previous chapter, The United Nations' declaration of 1990 as International Year of Literacy brought attention to the state of literacy programming while the government provided funding for launching new literacy initiatives and research projects both at the local and national level.

In 1991, the National Literacy Act was passed in the United States to encourage the development of literacy programs in a family context (United States Congress, 1991). That same year, the International Reading Association formed the Commission on Family Literacy to help disseminate information on programs and to study issues in the field (L. M. Morrow & Paratore, 1993). In the last decade, the number of American family literacy programs has increased rapidly. L. M. Morrow, Tracey and Maxwell (1995) offer a discussion of over one hundred of these programs, including Even Start, which is currently the largest initiative in the United States. The Even Start Family Literacy Program model, initiated in 1986, serves to help parents become full partners in the education of their children. This large federal investment is a unified design which integrates literacy training for parents, parenting education and early childhood education

to help children from disadvantaged homes "start even" with other families (McKee & Rhett, 1995).

D. Taylor proposed a Declaration of Principles for family literacy practice in 1997, after extensive international consultation with family literacy researchers, practitioners and families, beginning at the International Forum on Family Literacy in Tucson, Arizona in 1994 (D. Taylor, 1997). One goal of the Declaration was the development of policy and practice guidelines for literacy organizations which recognizes family knowledge and problem solving. A total of 126 principles are included under the following seven categories: family; language and literacy; research and program development; ethics; pedagogy; program assessment; and guidelines for educators, policy makers and funding agencies (Thomas, 2001). These principles support families, recognize diversity and promote social justice and equality. By challenging the deficit-driven family literacy program models, D. Taylor (1997) redefines "the relationship of literacy to poverty, the notion of socioeconomic status and the concept of 'disadvantaged' families" (p. 3).

The family literacy movement in Canada developed in close parallel to the American movement. Thomas (1998) provides a historical background. Inner-city parenting centres established by The Toronto School Board were among the first documented programs offered in Canada in the early 1980s, followed by *J'apprends avec mon enfant* in Montreal in 1983 and *Bookmates* in Winnipeg in 1984. In 1987, Cabinet authorized the creation of the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) to undertake partnerships with governments, agencies and organizations to promote literacy (Barker,

1999). Family literacy was selected as an early NLS priority (MacNutt, 2001). In 1988, the Family Literacy Interest Group (FLIG) was founded in Ontario, followed by the formation of the Family Literacy Action Group (FLAG) in Alberta in 1993 (National Adult Literacy Database, 1997). The following year, was a big one for family literacy in Canada with a national conference held in Ottawa, Ontario in English and a symposium in Alymer, Quebec in French (Thomas, Skage & Jackson, 1998)

Partnerships and strategies continue to be developed with NLS such as *The Family Literacy Dissemination Project,* which includes a directory of Canadian initiatives (Thomas et al, 1998) and case studies on specific programs (Thomas, 1998). The aim is to promote dialogue and discussion on current practice and future directions. The seven types of programs identified by Thomas et al (1998) include: intergenerational projects; focus on parent or primary caregiver; parental involvement; family literacy activity for the general public; projects for family literacy resources; family literacy professional training and resources; and resources for the general public. By 1997, all provinces and territories had family literacy programs operating in diverse locations such as libraries, churches, schools, health units and community centres (Thomas, 1998).

According to Thomas (2001), Canadian family literacy programs have been typically short-term interventions of low intensity. She points out that policy discussions have identified an optimal model of coordinated social services to ensure more intensive opportunities for families. However, for fully integrated programs with literacy at the centre, there is a need to coordinate provincial and federal services. Support for family literacy programs has come from special interest groups and family literacy

organizations. Canada Post and ABC CANADA have also undertaken provincial and national projects to increase public awareness of literacy in the family. Moreover, various conferences in the past decade have provided a forum for discussion and dissemination of work on family literacy (Thomas, 1998).

The following section relates in particular to the third research question regarding factors within the family that contribute to family literacy and enculturation of children. I offer two classification systems for family literacy program approaches. First, I present an overview of Morrow and Paratore's (1993) scheme of home-school partnership programs, intergenerational literacy programs, and ethnographic studies of family literacy. The simplicity of this organizational grouping is likely to mask important differences between the programs. Then, I compare and contrast Auerbach's (1995a) scheme of Intervention Prevention, Multiple Literacies and Social Change in terms of how each type of program views the problem, what each one recommends to solve the problem and its notions about power and culture.

Program Approaches to Family Literacy

A literature search revealed a burgeoning body of studies and articles on family literacy program initiatives but, like literacy, there is no agreed upon definition for family literacy (L. M. Morrow et al, 1995) and the programs vary in terms of their purpose, content and who attends. In addition, theoretical underpinnings for programs are often absent (Gadsden, 1994) and there has been little evaluation of the effectiveness of the various initiatives. Auerbach (1989) describes the common transmission of school practices model which promotes parental involvement in supporting school goals. Other

programs aim to raise literacy levels by working either with parents alone or together with their children (Philliber, Spillman & King, 1996). Despite the differences in programs, they share the common goal of aiming to enhance literacy within the home (Purcell-Gates, 1993b).

L. M. Morrow and Paratore (1993) recognize the diversity in family literacy programs and suggest a three category classification scheme consisting of home-school partnership programs, intergenerational literacy programs, and ethnographic studies of family literacy. Home-school partnerships are designed to support families' participation in their children's education and usually involve parents in literacy activities which support school-based goals. Inclusion of children in the activities is optional. Intergenerational literacy programs are designed to improve the literacy development of both adults and children. They offer literacy instruction to adults to guide them in helping their children with literacy skills. They may or may not include children. The third category is ethnographic studies of family literacy which involve long-term, detailed investigation of the ways in which literacy beliefs and practices are constructed through the interactions of family members.

Auerbach (1995a) classifies current family literacy programs into the following three categories, although it is clear that they share some overlap: (a) intervention prevention, (b) multiple literacies, and (c) social change. How programs falling under these three categories would view literacy problems, their probable solution, and their varying notions regarding power and culture are summarized in Table 1 on the following page. Auerbach criticizes the first two approaches; she especially abhors the

Table 1

Classification of Family Literacy Program Approaches

	Intervention Prevention	Multiple Literacies	Social Change
View of the Problem	Flawed home practices. Undereducated parents. Parents don't value literacy.	Mismatch between culturally variable home practices and school literacies.	Problems originate from complex interaction of political, social and economic factors.
Recommended Solution	Change patterns of family interaction. Promote literacy.	Investigate/validate multiple literacies and cultural resources. Use culturally familiar and relevant content. Instruct: 1st language.	Focus: social context. Dialogue as key pedagogical process. Content from critical social issues in participants' lives.
Notions about Culture	Do not consider cultural/contextual variability.	Cultural practices: centre of curriculum development.	Emphasize culture and power.
Notions about Power	Individual empowerment through self esteem/personal responsibility.	Empowerment though affirmation of cultural identity/community building.	Personal empowerment inseparable from social change.

Note: From "Deconstructing the discourse of strengths in family literacy", by E. Auerbach, 1995a. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 27(4), pp. 643-658. Copyright 1995 by the National Reading Conference. Adapted with permission of the author.

pathologizing medical model that is implicit in the intervention prevention category. She explains that the commonly stated strengths focus is only masking a deficit approach which points fingers at mothers as the source of the problem. Further, she claims that these models perpetuate negative stereotypes of families caught in a vicious cycle from the disease of illiteracy.

Fingeret (1984) suggests that adult educators may also fall into a trap of accepting a deficit perspective of literacy. In this case, non-readers are seen as dependent and embedded in a culture of poverty. The oversimplified assumption is that once these individuals fill their literacy deficit by learning to read and write, they will be able to find gainful employment and they will no longer have a problem.

Sociocultural Contexts for Literacy Learning

I will now address both the home environment and the school and community as contexts for literacy learning. I highlight how the social realities and cultural characteristics of families must be taken into account, otherwise well-intentioned school practices aimed at involving parents may result in unintended discrepancies in educational outcomes (Auerbach, 1989). This is followed with a presentation of Auerbach's socio-contextual family literacy model in which she proposes a broader definition for family literacy than the common transmission of school practices model.

Home Environment

Research evidence suggests that families play a role in promoting academic achievement and improving school outcomes in their children (Heath, 1983). A variety of direct and indirect forces, including issues of power and identity, impact on the lives of

families when they are making connections between literacy and society. D. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) explore the ways in which home settings provide dynamic literate environments where writing and reading are an integral part of the family life. Similarly, Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell (1999) address the importance of household educational resources to help children prepare to participate in a classroom literary discourse.

The construct of at risk has permeated the lexicon of family literacy service providers. In fact, Swadner and Lubeck (1995, p. 1) point out that in the five year span between 1989 to 1994, an overwhelming total of 2,500 articles were published on the topic of *children and families at risk*. The at risk notion implies that the child suffers from a socially induced deficiency that will place him or her in a position at risk for school failure. Although the focus is on deficits in social, economic, and cultural conditions in the child's environment, political injustices perpetuated by powerful institutions like schools are dangerously overlooked. The blame is placed on students, families, and their communities for lacking important resources.

Pellegrini (1991) critiques the concept of at risk. He points out how the label reproduces racist and classist assumptions about the student's abilities, gives no explanation regarding who is responsible for the child being at risk, and has overall, negative consequences for the child. Pellegrini presents two models of at risk. The most popular model places blame on the child or family. They are judged to be genetically inferior or lack certain books at home or opportunities to participate in literacy events. In the second model, the blame is placed on the school for being inappropriate in content and organization, curriculum and interaction style of teachers. Instead, he advocates

looking at the broader picture of social inequities and difficulties some families experience in accessing resources. Pellegrini argues that the reason that certain children fail with school-based literacy is simply that they lack familiarity with school contexts.

School and Community Context

Schools and other community contexts operate as sociocultural institutions that play a key role in socializing children to mainstream values, and therefore serve as a primary site for social reproduction and identity formation. The role of the teacher in this process becomes one of organizing and guiding students toward the acquisition and mastery of the required knowledge, skills, beliefs and values.

In selecting curriculum and pedagogy that may not be culturally relevant, teachers may effectively silence some student voices. Further, by dividing students into ability groups and altering the content of the curriculum to which they are exposed, this provides students with differential learning opportunities. That is, the curriculum for lower ability groups may be reduced in scope, content, and pace relative to the curriculum for higher ability groups and this may serve to discourage students in the lower group. Auerbach (1989) favours a progressive model of family literacy that acknowledges context. This will be discussed in the section that follows.

Auerbach's Socio-Contextual Family Literacy Model

Auerbach's (1989) socio-contextual approach offers a practical framework for understanding the influence of contextual issues in the study of literacy. She recognizes families' complex social and economic realities, while considering the social issues from people's lives and connects the notion of personal empowerment to social change. Her

model both acknowledges and uses parents' knowledge and experience socializing children to mainstream culture. She stresses the importance of cultural variability in discourse styles and literacy practices.

Auerbach (1995a) considers the social context with the complex interaction of political, social and economic factors. She problematizes notions of changing values and the teaching of parenting skills while she encourages collaboration with families to guide and inform instruction. Auerbach is very quick to knock any "bullet program models" (p. 647) aimed at raising literacy levels and school performance by implementing single practice solutions, such as book reading. She re-examines the notion of literacy and faulty assumptions that lead to a devaluation of home practices. In addition, she feels that conforming to mainstream practices ignores family strengths and is done at the expense of valuable culture-specific practices.

Similarly, Fagan's (1998) research emphasizes the importance of culture or "the categories, plans, and rules" (p. 16) that a group of people use to help them understand their world and plan their actions. Although he recognizes that there are variations in values within a cultural group, he notes that there are also some universal values that underlie the rules, norms and behaviour patterns. He explains how values relate to literacy, by pointing out that people will be involved in literacy acts if they value literacy. He adds that the role of literacy and the rating of an individual as literate or otherwise can only be understood when one takes a broad view and considers the social, political, economic and religious contexts.

Likewise, Capper (1994) stresses that schools do not exist in a vacuum, while Ewert (1993) also feels that literacy must be viewed in a sociocultural context. Literacy and poverty are then regarded as the products of economic, social, linguistic and cultural structures, rather than the result of one's own deficits and failures. Ewert (1993, ¶ 13) emphasizes that in a skill driven effort, individuals learn to accommodate to those structures that exploit them and therefore literacy combined with basic adult education is seen as an effective "vehicle for awakening the critical consciousness of the poor and oppressed."

Not all literacy researchers agree with the views and ideas discussed in Auerbach's socio-contextual model of family literacy. Historically, adult educators have failed to acknowledge literacy as a social, cultural and political phenomenon and therefore may not agree with some of Auerbach's fundamental propositions. As it is evident in the design of some of the adult programs, they ignore the critical social structures, cultural atmosphere and the need for dialogue (Ewert, 1993; Fingeret, 1983). Their literacy efforts are skill-driven, rather than involving a challenge of the socially constructed concepts and assumptions around literacy including, as D. Taylor (1993) describes, the discourses in dominant texts and established systems of privilege.

Related Research on Family Literacy

Many other scholars have contributed to the knowledge base regarding literacy. In this section, I discuss some of the leading works on family literacy that highlight the relationship between culture and education. Rather than present an exhaustive account, I highlight the main assumptions and arguments that add to an understanding of this broad

topic. The work of several researchers (Heath, 1983; Leichter, 1984; Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman & Hemphill, 1991; D. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, 1988) which show this relationship between culture and education will be featured first, followed by a brief overview of other related studies.

Studies on Culture and Education

Heath's (1983) classic study is based on her extensive ethnographic fieldwork regarding the culture, language and parenting styles of families in the Piedmont Carolinas. Her research, conducted between 1969 and 1978, uses participant observation methods. By living, working and playing with families in two neighboring communities, she was able to consider literacy within the context of a language and culture. Heath examined how mainstream and non-mainstream parents of Roadville, a white working class community and Trackton, a black working class community and the townspeople where the children attended school learn to use oral and written language to support children's literacy development. She found that the parents in the two communities had different oral and literate traditions, as well as contrasting beliefs about how to support their children's development.

Heath (1983) describes the many functional ways that literacy is used by adults and their children. She shows how differences in language and culture between students' home and school settings make academic success at school difficult. She expresses concern about the "effects of the preschool home and community environment on the learning of those language structures and uses which were needed in classrooms and job settings" (p. 2). Heath found that the African-American children are socialized at home to

explore, while the Caucasian children are socialized in a far different manner, they are accustomed to answering questions for which the questioner knows the response, mirroring the structure of learning in the classroom.

Heath concluded that when literacy in the home is at variance with the school, it could contribute to low school achievement. For instance, unlike the Roadville parents, Trackton parents did not typically buy toys or books for their children, nor create reading or writing tasks for them, or model reading or writing themselves. Heath found that some other ways that the mainstream Roadville parents support their children's literacy development include asking them questions, engaging them in conversations, reading bedtime stories to them, surrounding them with print and remaining an active volunteer at school.

When the Roadville children started school, their home and school worlds were a better match than the Trackton children because of their socialization to literate ways of the school. That is, the environment in which they grew up allowed them to use language in the manner expected at school. In contrast, the Trackton children who were well-prepared for life in their own community, were confused when teachers asked hypothetical questions or ones in which the teacher knew the answer. They reacted strangely at school and many soon learned to tune out because their form of language was not promoted at school. Upon recognition that the beliefs and styles of interaction of the children differed from the townspeople, Heath (1983) then recommended a program to "help working-class black and white children [to] learn more effectively" (p. 4).

Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, and Hemphill (1991) at Harvard University conducted a two year ethnographic study of the effects of home and school experiences on literacy achievement of low-income children living in one of three neighborhoods in a small city in the northwestern region of the United States. They used the following three models to explain home-school influences on literacy achievement: (a) the family as educator model which focuses on parental expectation and engagement in literate activities, (b) the resilient family model which includes the effects of emotional, sociological, interactive and psychological variables on the family's ability to cope with life and still have resources to promote the child's well-being, and (c) the parent-school partnership model which includes parental involvement with the school.

Snow et al (1991) conclude that both home and school have separate and unique responsibilities in preparing children for literacy. They show that children raised in stressful homes, with poor emotional environments and limited resources do not perform as well as those from resilient homes. One interesting finding is that "the teachers' practices, not education, marital status, or work place of the parents...made the difference in whether parents were productive partners with schools" (p. 139) and also that excellent classrooms could compensate for poor home conditions. Some of the teachers' practices they endorse include acknowledging the importance of decontextualized language for success in reading, listening to children read for a minimum of 10 to 20 minutes each day for stimulating vocabulary development and facilitating reading comprehension, encouraging children to play with both verbal and written language, engaging in discussion with children about what they have read, and making a print-rich classroom.

They describe excellent classrooms as ones in which there are varied materials and activities available at a variety of levels. There is also integrated reading, writing and content area instruction.

D. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) conducted an ethnographic study with six poor black inner-city families who had children perceived by the parents as successfully learning to read. Their results lead them to question the assumption that low-income families are disadvantaged by being linguistically deprived. They found that these families show many varied early literacy experiences in their everyday lives. In fact, they stated that social class could not explain their findings; much literate behaviour was an integral part of these homes and support for literacy efforts was clearly present.

These two researchers turned to the strength of the family as educator model and a recognition of the resilience of these families to explain their findings. What they learned, however, was that there is a mismatch between the expectations of the school and the cultural expectations and interpretations of the home. The school provides primarily workbook and drill activities, while the families offer their children rich reading and writing experiences. D. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) suggest that a problem arises when the students employ the discourse practices of their home to learning situations at school.

As D. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) emphasize, much literacy learning takes place in the context of family-based interactions and activities before formal school instruction. Clearly, the child's literacy development is shaped by experiences at home right from birth. Therefore, supporting parents in their role as their children's first

teachers can have a positive impact on the child's emerging literacy skills and attitudes toward learning which has long term implications for the child's future success not only in school, but later for life (Heath, 1983; L. M. Morrow, 1989; Nickse, 1989; D. Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines 1988).

Halle, Kurtz-Costes and Mahoney (1997) also present research related to culture and education. They studied how African-American disadvantaged parents circumvent detrimental effects of poverty and translate academic aspirations for their children into reality. They report that the number of books in the homes of these low-income families was related to children's reading scores in the subsequent year. They conclude that providing access to children's books through libraries may be one of the most important activities that disadvantaged communities and schools can do to help.

Leichter (1984) studied family environments to obtain a picture of home literacy resources. She clustered the conceptions of the ways family environments support or hinder literacy development into three categories: (a) interpersonal interactions - parental response to child's literacy learning; (b) physical environment - available resources and household arrangement; and (c) home emotional and motivational climate.

Results revealed that parents bring their literacy and school experiences to their child's reading and writing exploration, often trying to compensate for an unpleasant past by making literacy positive for their child. Also, she discovered that there is a wide range of learning activities and these are classified differently by parents in terms of educational value. Although Leichter (1984) acknowledges that the dynamics within the

family must be understood by those engaging in literacy education, some of her categories may not be equally important in all families.

Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski and Apostoleris (1997, p. 539) explain how the moderating effects of family configuration and the gender of the children affect parent involvement in children's schooling. In their study of children in grades 3 to 5, they found that two parent families are better able to "buffer adverse circumstances", while stressful events may be disheartening and overwhelming for a single parent without social support. In addition to diverting their attention, taking both their energy and time, the stress in their lives may make the parents "less psychologically available for or aware of involvement activities." Grolnick et al also highlight how parents erroneously believe that boys are more independent than girls and when under stress, parents will be more likely to pull resources from their sons rather than their daughters.

Other Studies

Influences from childhood.

D. Taylor (1983) found that literacy is a dynamic in the family affecting members' attitudes and the process of their literacy development. Her research lends support to the idea that literacy transmission by parents is influenced by memories of their own childhood experiences. In her study, parents of children who do not experience reading difficulties recalled various forms of print as part of their family life and in their adult life, these parents engage in overt literacy activities with their children.

Similarly, Morawski and Brunhuber (1993), in their study contrasting proficient and remedial readers, showed that proficient readers hold positive attitudes about reading.

They recall their first reading experiences to occur with a family member, usually their mother, at a preschool age. Thus, parents of capable readers may feel that they have a role in teaching their children, just as their own families had engaged in these activities with them.

In contrast, Morawski and Brunhuber (1993) found that remedial readers in their study tended to have more negative attitudes about reading. Their earliest recollections of learning to read were not until they were in school. For this group, the teacher was the focus, rather than a family member. Parker (1989) also found that parents in educationally and economically impoverished homes do not remember literacy experiences in their past, nor do they promote literacy habits in their own families. One may surmise that these parents' energies are diverted to day to day coping, leaving them less available psychologically to help their children.

Social networks.

Researchers emphasize the importance of capitalizing on interactions and the role of social networks in facilitating literacy skills (Auerbach, 1989; Fingeret, 1991; Gee, 1989; Pellegrini, Galda, Shockley, & Stahl, 1995). Grolnick et al (1997) point out the role of other people in providing social support for learning. Through social networks, people connect with others and the broader the network, the less socially isolated they become.

Horsman (1990), in her study of mothers attending literacy upgrading programs in rural Nova Scotia, found that many of the women are considered isolated through their illiteracy. She notes that as they improve their literacy skills, they begin to find their voice and express their ideas more freely. These women are often silenced through the

political process of enforcement of a single literacy spread across the curriculum in school, without regard for ways of supporting and engaging them as learners. Although this study contributes to an understanding of social networks, it underscores the complexity of comprehending the factors associated with family environments. There is a need to think of increasingly diverse literate practices which are socially embedded, not just uniform technical skills that may be promoted through schooling (Barton, 1994; Heath, 1983; Street, 1995).

Identity formation.

Research also points to a relationship between literacy and the formation of an identity (Cornes, 1994; Davies, Fitzpatrick, Grenco & Ivanik, 1994; Luke, 1995a). Identity is a phenomenon learned in a social context (Jarvis, 1992) and it has been acknowledged that learners replicate their cultures in forming an identity. The process is complicated and involves learning through action and interaction with others, while being socialized into the dominant culture. Families and schools are sites of cultural transmission where much informal learning occurs. The church, workplace and other community settings may also influence identity formation and cultural transmission.

Barer-Stein (1993) explains how much of what we label as one's own identity is actually cultural identity or the "myriad of involuntary attachments to customs, values, manners, beliefs and attitudes rooted in cultural soil and learned before we were aware that we were learning anything" (p. 151). She also describes how it is possible for an individual to belong to several cultural groups at the same time and how each group

contributes to identity formation. Identity itself is therefore impressionable and unpredictable.

Negative stereotypes and expectations may serve to inhibit one's full participation in society. As Polakow (1993) explains, those from low-income backgrounds are consigned to a world of otherness right from birth. She states that society may hold negative stereotypes about the capabilities of those from low-income homes and this undoubtedly influences their self-efficacy or belief in their ability to carry out an activity. Further, identity also determines access to resources over space and time. Ultimately, these factors influence the formation of one's own identity. Women's identity may be bound with literacy in some cultures. For example, in a culture where men might be expected to be the provider for the family, the women's role with regard to literacy may be quite different from the men's.

Toohey (1996), in her study of second language learners, stresses the importance of recognizing the role of individual circumstances in forming skills and interests, as well as the learner's outlook. Davies et al (1994) point out the relationship between literacy, strength and identity. They claim that reading and writing have the potential to develop people's strength and identity or conversely to drain their strength and overwhelm their identity. Harker (1990) states that with great effort, it is possible to take on an identity that defines greater possibilities for learning than might otherwise be available.

Orr's (1995) case illustrates well Harker's (1990) point of taking on an identity and changing group membership. Orr describes how she rose from a working class background to become a doctoral student. Her parents had come from poverty

backgrounds and her father's parents had limited English proficiency (L. Orr, personal communication, November 11, 2003). During her childhood, her mother had accepted a menial job at the local university which offered library privileges and the Orr family went to the library nearly every week to borrow books. Orr became a voracious reader by her own volition. Later, she earned university scholarships, which she described as her escape from her working-class life. As she said, "it's facing a lifetime of poverty without hope of change which is soul-crushing" (L. Orr, personal communication, December 4, 2003).

Clearly, Orr is intelligent and ambitious, but she attributes her success to hard work. She explains, "Are brains any use without hard work? ... I know diligence was very important to my success" (L. Orr, personal communication, December 4, 2003). Personal goal setting was a critical factor for her academic success, as was her:

> passionate desire to never be poor again ... to never again have to forego medical treatment because of lack of money, to never again be embarrassed by what [she] wore or where [she] lived, to have a job where [she is] treated with some respect, to escape that constant daily worry over dollars that [she] remember[s] so well from childhood. (L. Orr, personal communication, December 4, 2003)

Orr made choices and set her priorities, while never losing focus on her direction (L. Orr, personal communication, November 11, 2003). Her parents were also supportive of her goals, which eventually led her to a tenure-track position as a university English professor. Orr (1995) referred to her "former life...her divided self [and although she was now] living like a member of the middle class...[she was engaged in negotiation of her identity and acknowledged that] a part of [her] would never leave the working class"

(p. 17). Her continued ties to the working class illuminate the complexity of the process of identity formation.

Critique of the Research on Family Literacy

The foregoing discussion lends support to the direction of my research questions. I have pointed out the significance of context variables and a social dimension in viewing individuals as situated within the social world. A primary premise of my research questions, backed by a divergent body of literature, is the importance of culture. Delgado-Gaitan (1994) stresses the necessity of critically examining the various notions of literacy and the socializing of children to mainstream culture. Clearly, education's dominant discourse represents power relations and social formations that are the products of history and culture (Stuckey, 1991).

In striving to understand family literacy, the various ways that social and familial situations may impinge upon literacy and the way institutional practices may exacerbate those influences must be critically examined. There may be benefits in looking beyond the individual to consider how institutions structure experiences of students and how work, along with neighborhoods and interpersonal factors may have an impact on individual achievement. It behooves educators to become better informed about the contexts in which children live (Harman, 1987) to help them to augment the various ways that children are enculturated into the literacy practices. Without considering some of the social realities and cultural characteristics that may be influential in the lives of students, institutional practices may contribute to, or indeed create, greater discrepancies in academic and literacy outcomes (Auerbach, 1989).

At this point, it is perhaps a good idea to pause and enter an important caveat regarding the dangers of such surveillance for those with little or no power over their lives. While it is true that knowing about family situations may help educators understand why children are having certain problems, there is also a danger in knowing too much or at least certain things. Those who are on the receiving end of such inquiries may see the intrusions as just more regulation of their lives, which are already regulated by social service agencies and others.

One of the most common methodological limitations in the literacy studies has been the treatment of social class as fixed and a failure to look at the multifaceted aspect to social class. Some studies have included a very specific minority that is not representative of the general population. Other studies fail to deal adequately with the issue of gender, the feminization of poverty and the impact of literacy in families. Further, when referring to home learning activities, the comprehensiveness of the involvement is frequently not defined. For example, in addition to using inconsistent definitions, behavioural aspects such as reading books to the children or helping with homework are recommended, but details are lacking in terms of interaction patterns. Perhaps less reliance on parent report and more direct observation and analysis of actual interventions would be helpful.

In addition to methodological limitations in the research, there is a lack of conceptual models to help understand literacy in low-income homes. The section that follows addresses the idea of adopting a conceptual context for helping to situate the research questions for this study. I first look at critical theory based on the original ideas

of the Frankfurt School and then sociological notions of cultural capital and habitus as presented by the prominent French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. In my literature review, I continually came across notions of power connected with low-income individuals lacking political control of their lives. However, I found this to be an underdeveloped discussion topic in the literature.

As I searched for the meaning of power issues in literacy practice, I was led to critical theory. My interests in seeking to understand what makes systems as they are, combined with the recognition that the principles of critical theory may be applied to this area that has not been adequately addressed in research to date, seemed to give strength to my justification for the application of critical theory in this study.

Conceptual Context

Critical Theory and the Frankfurt School

This research draws on ideas from critical theory of the Frankfurt School tradition. Critical theory, informed by multiple perspectives, emerged with the establishment of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany in 1923 by a group of predominantly Jewish intellectuals. The term "critical theory", however, was not actually coined until 1937 to describe the theoretical program of the Institute. Due to the political situation in Germany and the rise of the Nazis, these theorists at the Institute were forced to relocate to France and then the United States before returning to Germany after the war (Peters, Lankshear & Olssen, 2003).

According to R. Morrow (1994), the Frankfurt School was characterized by its systematic use of traditional research methods, such as survey research, to test and refine

propositions derived from Marxist tradition for emancipatory ends, while challenging modernity. Some of their early research projects involved studies of the family, culture, Nazism, and the nature of authority relations under capitalism (Peters et al, 2003). Critical theorists accept interdisciplinary theories and methods from the social sciences and humanities. In their more humanistic approach than traditional theorists, they understand the ways in which power and capital influence freedom and opportunity in society and concentrate on language and media as agents of social renewal.

Critical theory offers an alternative theoretical perspective in family literacy by calling into question notions of power and, in doing so, expands the boundaries of the field. Although research revolving around the principles of the Frankfurt School is unusual in childhood studies and has not been carried out in the educational setting, it has much to offer contemporary educators struggling to understand institutional structures and relations of capitalist society which reproduce oppressive ideologies and sustain social inequalities (van Manen, 1990). McLaughlin and Tierney (1993) support the use of critical theory epistemologies when conducting research "on and with the silenced" (p. 32), while Giroux (1989) and Peters et al (2003) promote the use in educational research to bring out the central position of politics and power.

Critical theorists disclose patterns of social dominance and oppression in society by posing important questions that address whose knowledge is privileged and whose values are governing (Hart, 1990). The unequal and unjust distribution of limited resources, such as opportunities and income, and the exercise of social and political power result in various social classes experiencing dissimilar cultural and economic

environments. A sense of powerfulness is denied in some, while it is promoted in others (Adler & Goodman, 1986). Thus, studies of family literacy could benefit from a critical theory framework to create possibilities in the lives of individuals.

Galbraith (2001) promotes a controversial new area of childhood studies in childhood reading experiences in which she brings together materials from the disciplines of literature, psychology, history, anthropology and neurobiology. She frames the importance of her study through the lens of critical theory. There is a commitment made through this lens not only to try to hear, but to understand and privilege the situation from the child's position rather than from an adult standpoint or from a position lacking in reflective thought.

Galbraith says "this emancipation must be accomplished through adults transforming themselves and their own practices" (p. 188) rather than forcing the child to conform to the adult's way in a more typical socializing model of childhood. She points out, however, that many scholars criticize and marginalize this view arguing that it is not possible for an adult to see from the child's perspective. Galbraith counters that it is not only possible, but an emancipatory childhood studies approach is urgently needed, to discover the child's truth. Similarly, critical theory as a model can offer for my study a way to understand the subjective positions of the families living in low-income circumstances. As a framework, critical theory may provide a way to look at the forces that caused the oppressive situation and show how these forces can be overcome as the oppressed person becomes more aware of them.

Geuss (1981) indicates that critical theories serve as guides for human action by first making people aware of their interests and then serving an emancipatory function to free them from a kind of coercion. He states that critical theories are forms of knowledge which have "cognitive content" (p. 2). They place high importance on self-criticism and recognize that knowledge constitutes power. The importance of self-reflexive modes of dialogue for learning is emphasized. Geuss explains that since these theories are reflective, they differ from objective theories in natural science.

Although critical theory of the Frankfurt School was never unified, and has grown in many different directions, there are some characteristics in common in all critical theories. First, a transition from the present state of society to another state is theoretically possible. Second, the transition is practically necessary, and third, the transition will occur if the agents adopt the critical theory as their "'self consciousness' and act on it" (Geuss, 1981, p. 76).

When the present research is viewed from a critical theory perspective, a need to problematize literacy and examine the positions of people in relation to the institutions becomes evident. Adler and Goodman (1986) state that a distinctive aspect of critical theory is attending to this power in society and the roles that schools play in creating and perpetuating a social reality by serving only some class interests. Literacy assumptions and presuppositions, differential access to literacy enhancing opportunities and school-based attainment must be questioned. Cherryholmes (1993) stresses the need to trace how power and underlying ideologies "weave through the hegemonic values and practices of education" (p. 18). He argues that students learn hegemonic accounts of social relations

through texts that are products of the powerful dominant class and which may foster acquiescence in the students. Further, this class privilege and domination contribute to a generic social reproduction maintaining social and political privilege and inequalities.

Capper (1998), a critical theorist and postmodern scholar, recognizes that many school administrators deal primarily with the daily functioning of the school. She argues that few of them view schools as agents in the reproduction of a social class system and so therefore do not want to or recognize a need to transform the system in place. In contrast, she says that those educators who adopt a critical theory perspective as part of their curriculum:

> believe society is teeming with injustice and oppression. They wish to initiate social change to emancipate the oppressed and disenfranchised. Social change is accomplished by taking a critical view of education and focusing on power relationships through rational, intellectual dialogue about problems of practice...[the teachers] decide whether educational practices address social justice and empowerment for oppressed persons. (Capper, 1998, p. 356)

Nicholson (1994), a feminist critical theorist, uses and discusses critical theory to look at how:

> schools in a capitalist society not only do not fulfill the functions they are widely believed to fulfill, but on the contrary carry out tasks odious from the standpoint of a democratic ideology ...Schools, rather than providing a fair means for channeling young people of different capacities into different classes, legitimize existing class divisions construct[ed] on the basis of differences in inheritance. (p. 73)

Nicholson discusses the way schools perpetuate class privilege rather than help level the playing field for all children. As well, she comments on the public and private sphere in relation to family and institutions like the school and this is useful as a basis in

understanding the present research and the complexities related to the lives of the participants.

The merit in applying critical theory in educational research has been pointed out as the issues of critical theorists should become the focus of educational activity. As discussed, much of critical theory is concerned with power since all discourses can have power effects. In Chapter 1, I provided Lewis's (1993) clear and easy to follow definition for the complex term discourse. Lewis explains that discourse is political, socially negotiated through power. It is judged by a set of social relations among differentially empowered individuals that produce and reproduce social structures. Important questions forming part of the discourse include who is to remain silent and which topics are not to be spoken. Although discourses may be challenged, some have materialized in institutions built in accordance with them. For example, schools as societal arrangements establish institutionalized roles which impose limits and conditions for the formation of subjects including literacy. Lewis also explains that women have often been excluded from the dominant discourse. In Chapter 4, I address the issue of how underlying power relations and interests of men may confine the interests of women. I also provide some specific examples of practices that construct oppression.

Critical theorists have given us much to think about on behalf of oppressed groups as they address matters of knowledge, power and educational practices. However, critical theory is not without its critics. Postmodernists dispute some aspects of critical theory and point out difficulties in the application of the principles of critical theory. Some postmodernists argue that critical theory has become elitist and has moved away from its

roots in Marxism. They claim that critical theory denies notions of subjectivity and values in social investigations and considers social sciences to be objective and neutral.

McCarthy (as cited in Peters et al, 2003) criticizes critical theory for its lack of concern about limits. He feels that the notion of emancipation which is viewed as a form of self-realization is exaggerated. Others deride the heavy emphasis of critical theory on culture alone, with not enough attention to economics or politics. McCarthy feels that there is a problem with every social movement from feminist theory to gay and lesbian studies and postcolonial studies specializing and trying to promote their cause. He argues that this emphasis has taken away from economics and that a need has arisen to continually develop critical theory to address the concerns of new social movements. McCarthy has also come down hard on critical theory for being tied too close to academic work and being too far from the lived experiences of oppression of those being studied.

In summary, critical theorists point to a need for the oppressed to question and challenge the way things have been done and place power issues at the centre (M. Hart, 1990). The ideals used to criticize are rooted in experience and challenge hegemonic ideas (Young, 1990). Critical theorists must analyze, interpret and actively criticize oppressive social structures that characterize contemporary society. In becoming critical, individuals may help transform themselves and assist others in oppressive social conditions. One limitation of using critical theory rests in determining whether it is attainable for those in oppressive conditions to effectively use critical reflection to gain required knowledge. It may be that individuals in these circumstances are working so

hard simply to exist that they do not have the luxury of time, language resources or other means to think about the oppressive social conditions.

Bourdieu's Sociological Theory

R. Morrow (1994) points out that a looser definition of critical theory would include the work of Bourdieu which complements traditional critical theory. I will now address some of Bourdieu's work to form a sociological model of literacy as cultural capital to help inform my research questions and analysis. Like Auerbach (1995b), Bourdieu focuses on the variability in culture and its importance in people's lives. Horsman (1990) states that by analyzing one's sociocultural context, an opportunity is afforded to interrogate the status quo of modern life and challenge oppressive educational formations offering differential access to power and privilege. In the field of family literacy, the inclusion of a broader context for understanding the child and the socializing effects of the child's culture has only recently emerged (Thomas, 1998).

In the next section, I look at how social reproduction theory and Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and habitus can be helpful for laying out a framework for understanding my data.

Social Reproduction Theory

Social Reproduction Theory suggests that public schools, as institutions, serve a function in society for maintaining the status quo by reproducing social relationships and attitudes that characterize society. Wishard (2002) explains that this widespread ideology, particularly popular in the United States, conceives of schooling as a means of cultural and social reproduction in which the adult is at the centre of all interactions and exchange

of ideas. Further, she explains, the focus is on the transmission and reception of culturally and socially valued knowledge and information, from adult to child, according to a schedule set by external experts.

Cultural capital.

Bourdieu does not specifically address literacy. However, his theoretical ideas have guided research on cultural reproduction for three decades (Bottomore, 1977) and may offer an alternate model for identifying factors that influence the value and limits of school literacy (Luke, 1995b). School literacy assumes that students must learn prescribed reading, writing, and language skills within a specified timeframe, with little attention or valuing of their life experiences (Fagan, 1998).

In 1977, Bourdieu and Passeron addressed the relationship between power and culture in a text[12] about reproduction in society. They used the term, "cultural capital", to describe the values, forms of communication and organizational patterns of the dominant class, claiming that the less privileged low-income class lack these cultural privileges or

> the cultural goods transmitted by the different family pedagogic authorities (PA), whose value qua cultural capital varies with the distance between the cultural arbitrary imposed by the dominant PA and the cultural arbitrary inculcated by the family PA within the different groups or classes. (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 30)

In other words, the cultural capital is the difference between the value of the goods passed on as cultural capital by the family (family pedagogic authority) compared to the standard value (cultural arbitrary) assigned by the dominant class (or dominant pedagogic authority). Willms (1997b) offers a more straightforward

[12] The original French version of this text was published in 1970 by Les Editions de Minuit, Paris.

definition of cultural capital as simply having a "familiarity and knowledge of high culture" (p. 6), while Hourigan (1994) refers to a system of meanings, taste, dispositions, attitudes and norms defined by the dominant class as socially legitimate. In a more recent work by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), they argue that what they call cultural capital should really be called informational capital. In the embodied form of cultural capital, they include the various dispositions that have been internalized by individuals through their socialization, while in the objectified form, they refer to writings, fine art, scientific instruments, and other objects that require specialized cultural abilities to use.

Bourdieu (1986) argues that the culture transmitted by the school, a middle-class institution, is related to the culture of the wider society. Lamont and Lareau (1988) add that schools value middle class language patterns, organizational structures and authority relations. Parental possession of these values is assumed to support the academic achievement of their children since these parents are able to relate to school staff and are comfortable in getting involved at school, while their children possess the cultural capital to appreciate the curriculum and can readily adapt to school life. Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) highlight how the cultural heritage of privileged French students, rather than parental finances, helped them to succeed at university. Not only their predisposition towards intellectual pursuits, but also their general values, provide the students with the skills that help them more readily to acquire the knowledge needed in higher education.

Literacy has been described as one form of cultural capital (Bhola, 1996; Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Luke, 1995b) and an instrument of social power which defines social class (Willms, 1997a). Both the granting and restricting of access to available resources and the capital of schooling has become bound in social structures that serve to maintain the status quo (Toohey, 1996). Willis (1976) explains that the dominant groups are skilled in "symbolic manipulation of language and figures", therefore ensuring "success of their offspring and the reproduction of their class privilege" (p. 194).

Bourdieu's concepts help explain the existence of persistent inequalities in a stratified society. People become part of their particular culture by learning how to interpret and use its signs and symbols (Langer, 1991). Although one may adopt new attitudes, beliefs and opinions, one cannot readily escape from the dominant pattern of one's class. This was discussed earlier with the case of Orr (1995).

The school plays a key role in the production of literacy as cultural capital (Luke, 1995b). Imposing middle class values and many textual practices contribute to the conservation of class structure by restricting some students' participation. Luke (1995b) adds that the value of a student's cultural capital also depends on the availability of economic and social capital. Eitle and Eitle (2002) developed a framework for systematically examining family cultural capital. They include such items as cultural trips to art, science or history museums, extra-curricular art, music or dance classes, and household educational resources of daily newspaper, magazine subscription or regular purchase, encyclopedia, atlas, dictionary, computer, more than 50 books, and a pocket calculator. Children from advantaged backgrounds are more likely to have greater

cultural capital and financial resources than the lower class. As well, they possess a habitus or disposition towards school success, which will afford them greater opportunities to access academic discourse. Habitus will be discussed further in the next section.

Habitus.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) define habitus as the "product of internalization of the principles of a cultural arbitrary capable of perpetuating itself after pedagogic authority has ceased and thereby of perpetuating in practices the principles of the internalized arbitrary" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 31). That is, habitus is a culturally specific way of acting, seeing, and thinking. Habitus is a product of history and ensures that past experiences are retained in the form of schemes or the disposition held by the individual (Bourdieu, 1990).

The dominant habitus, which is passed on in a form of cultural capital, acts as a filter in a hierarchical society (Harker, 1990). Habitus is not explicit, but operates on a deeper level to shape or structure surface attitudes and beliefs, thereby ensuring social reproduction. For Bourdieu, the habitus is the basis of learning (Luke, 1995b), while Willms (1997b) talks about habitus as holding, for example, a disposition toward linguistic and social competencies.

Conclusion

Some educational researchers criticize social reproduction theories for being too mechanistic and unable to capture the complexities of life. However, researchers have not found a fitting alternative; they continue to grapple over how to carve out a theoretical

perspective that is in line with family literacy. The preceding discussion highlights the difficulty of applying a model to family literacy that looks at socio-contextual factors since one must get into the homes and hearts of those being studied to understand the complexities of their lives and the difficulties they face before being able to help them effectively. Thus, I recognize the value in using a critical theory perspective for studying family literacy in low-income homes. Its emancipatory ethic and method allows for silenced voices to be heard and not only recognizes but acknowledges and addresses the power differential in human relations. Critical self-reflexivity is promoted as a means to help open the world of possibility to the disempowered, and may result in empowerment.

Following my explorations of the sociocultural context, power, the formation of individual identity as they relate to family literacy, and choosing culturally relevant pedagogy, I have located a gap in the literature around critical social theory as a foundation for learning and acquiring literacy. In learning about literacy, one must determine the social positions that are both challenged and held as individuals learn relationships with their social world. This has led me to move toward developing a framework for situating my research questions which I will present in the next section. My model is emergent and subject to further refinement and revision as my inquiry and understanding progress. The revised model appears in Chapter 5 on page 320.

Towards a Developing Framework of Family Literacy

Introduction

When I look at the complex nature of family literacy in low-income homes, I draw upon the philosophic and research approach of critical theorists, but also touch on

feminist and postmodernist research genres, particularly when examining issues of power and voice. A framework may be useful for breaking down not only the sociocultural issues and the significant role played by politics and economics in understanding family literacy, but also in situating individual factors. A broad conceptualization of family literacy learning contributes to an understanding of ongoing and life-long experience for both children and adults. My developing framework of family literacy, illustrated in Figure 2 on the following page, was created as a result of my literature review.

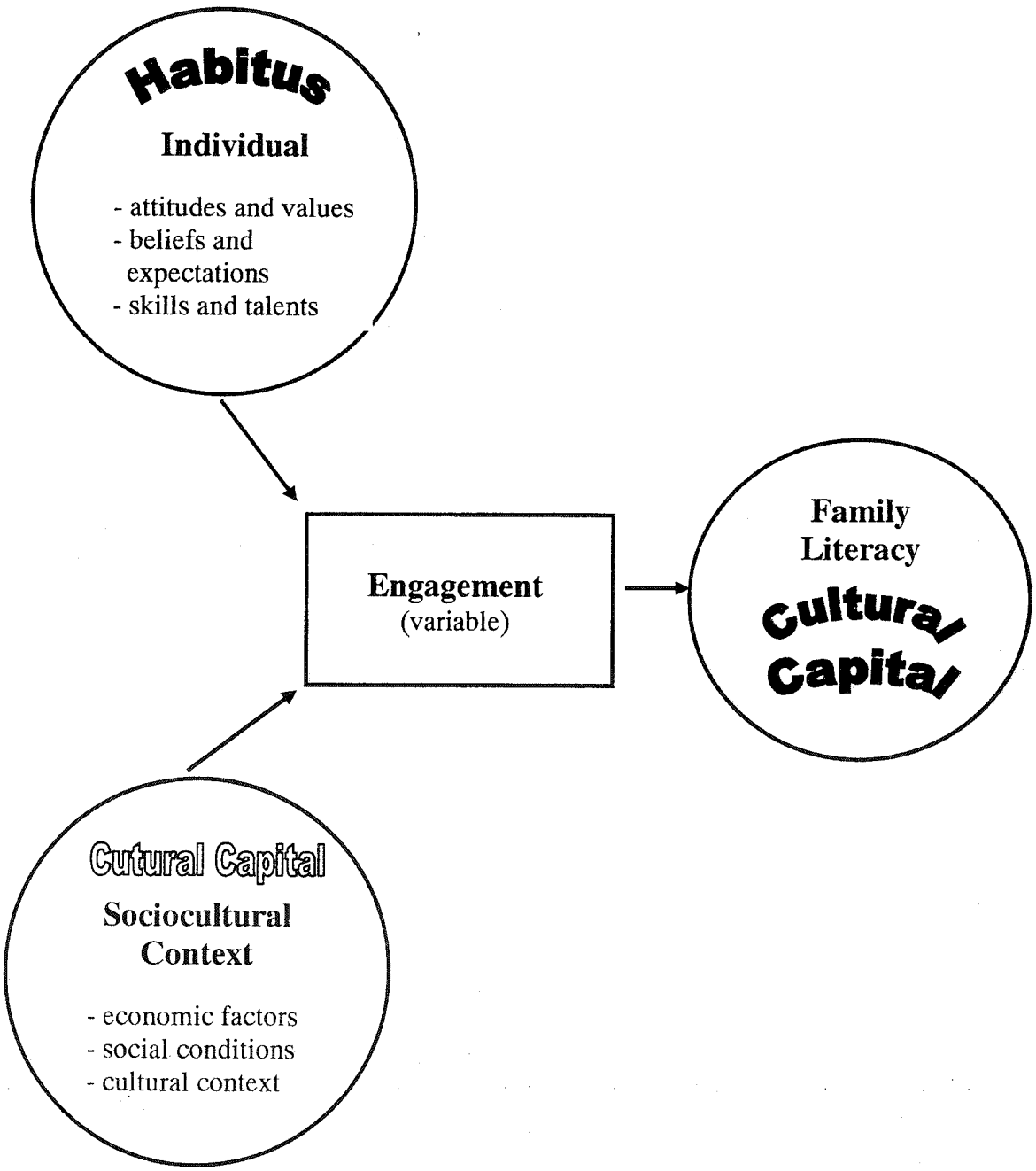
Individual

As shown in Figure 2, the individual is represented by the circle in the top left. Personal attitudes and values are shaped by the society in which a person lives. For example, if the individual has a positive attitude about literacy and learning and values and feels supported by those around, he or she may feel more confident in his or her abilities. The person may be more goal-directed and more likely to accomplish his or her goals than someone who lacks this support.

Beliefs, including factors such as whether or not an individual feels capable of learning, along with the source of the motivation, are factors to consider with the individual. Children who feel they have some control over what happens to them will be more self-motivated in potential learning situations. Conversely, those who feel that outside forces have full control will require an external motivator to push them to act. The skills and talents of individuals develop from having opportunities to be active participants in literacy activities.

Figure 2

A Broad Conceptualization of Family Literacy Learning



Thus, individuals establish their habitus as learners from multiple influences in their own environment. This may involve adopting values of the culture to which they are exposed. Important in this is the effect of experiences and prior knowledge to motivate and offer the individual access to literacy and a sense of either power or powerlessness.

In the next section on Sociocultural Context, I highlight how individuals are socialized into their culture and values. Sleeter (1996) and later Nagle (1999) argue that individuals become entrenched in the dominant cultural milieu through public social institutions such as schools, as well as the media. In addition, faith organizations, such as churches, cannot be overlooked since they may also play a significant role in socializing individuals to literate ways.

Sociocultural Context

Similar to Auerbach's (1989) socio-contextual approach that incorporates family, culture, and community, I place the individual within a family recognizing the family as a primary focus and a social context. This position is represented by the circle labeled Sociocultural Context on the bottom left in Figure 2. Each individual is interdependent on others within the sociocultural context and affected by variables related to social and family conditions. They may interact with others in their family unit and are influenced by the family literacy practices, cultural capital, as well as by various economic factors, social conditions and cultural beliefs.

One's socioeconomic class, based on family income, family size and composition, and the educational achievement of the family members, plays a role in the

socialization of the child. In addition, the attitudes, beliefs and expectations about literacy and assumptions about children and learning, create and sustain the particular environment of the family. Through the socialization process, family members receive messages that help them adapt to a particular ideology. For example, some families are socialized along middle class lines and may use more school-like models of education than other families. It is believed that those children who are felt to be better prepared for school come from homes with adults who are good readers themselves and regularly read to their children. Their environment also offers routines for sharing books and for adults and children to communicate with each other.

When looking at economic factors, the impact of poverty must be considered. Statistics from the National Council of Welfare (1999) show that women face a significantly higher risk of poverty than men, with 20 percent of all Canadian women living in poverty and women comprising 70 percent of all of those living in poverty. This gender gap in economic status has been labelled the feminization of poverty (McLanahan & Kelly, 1998). Among families, single-parent families have the highest poverty rate of all family types and most single parent households are headed by women (Holyfield, 2002; McLanahan and Kelly, 1998).

In terms of family structure, the negative consequences of growing up in a single parent family are well-documented. Society and social policy can contribute to factors that keep women and their children living in poverty. For example, government programs in Canada only partly support women who must divide their time between caregiving and working outside the home, leaving them with little free time. Holyfield (2002) points out

that when welfare recipients obtain a job, they lose their health card[13] and child care benefits. Many of the part-time jobs, however, are low paying with few benefits; families fall through the safety net and then must struggle to survive. Further, research reveals that living in a household headed by a single mother means that the child has an increased likelihood of reduced school performance, poorer health, and malnutrition compared to those residing in middle class households (Holyfield, 2002).

Understanding the effect of economic factors, such as poverty, on literacy levels and educational attainment has long been a focus of sociological inquiry. Clearly, the more economic resources that parents have, the greater the opportunities their children have (Holyfield, 2002). It goes without saying that if a family lacks sufficient economic capital the family will be limited in its ability to access modern technology, such as purchasing a home computer or other household educational resources (Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). Lareau (1989) stresses the importance of these household educational resources including books, computers, newspapers, magazines, and encyclopedias to help shape the academic orientation of a child.

Children from low-income homes tend to have fewer family educational resources when compared to their more affluent classmates. They often start school with fewer academic skills (B. Hart & Risley, 1995) and their parents are less able to help with homework or pay for special programs that orientate the child to the way of the school

[13] The Human Resources Development (HRD) branch of Family and Community Services in New Brunswick offers income assistance clients and their dependents a health card that covers the costs for most essential medical expenses including dental care, glasses, prescription drugs and ambulance fees.

and build their cultural capital. Heath (1983) and Nagle (1999) claim that children who have not had experience with a literacy that parallels school literacy will be marginalized, while those who have had early exposure to mainstream literacy will know what is valued, may have mastered some of the basics for school, and will therefore find school literacy more accessible. A number of researchers show how the home environment serves as an important site for learning and the development of a young child's literacy knowledge and attitudes about reading and writing (Heath, 1983; D. Taylor, 1983; D. Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988).

The developing framework helps pave the way for a more socially-based understanding of literacy, while also attending to important political and ideological dimensions. One must also look at the school context. Research from the sociology of education suggests that literacy and education in general are inherently political (Giroux, 1988) and serve as a form of control to maintain social and economic inequalities (Key, 1998). According to Giroux (1988):

> To be literate is not to be free; it is to be present and active in the struggle for reclaiming one's voice, history and future. Just as literacy does not explain the causes of massive unemployment, bureaucracy, or the growing racism ... literacy neither automatically reveals nor guarantees social, political or economic freedom. (p. 65)

Literacy in school contexts is shaped around the roles of the teacher and the learners. It is recognized that most teachers belong to the dominant white middle class and are socialized along these mainstream lines. Holyfield (2002) believes that teachers need to move past the notion that society and schools are neutral and recognize the

existence of various classes while understanding the effects of attitudes, beliefs and values. White middle class ideology pervades policy, curriculum and instruction.

By placing the concept of voice in the context of power relations, it helps explain practices of individuals within these institutions. Although institutional discourses may be challenged, many have simply grown to become hegemonic practices that are recognized as part of the institution (Stuckey, 1991). For example, schools as societal arrangements establish institutionalized roles which impose limits and conditions for the formation of subjects including literacy. Important questions comprising the discourse include who is to remain silent and which topics are not to be spoken. Classroom practices embody unequal power relationships and reproduce these social inequalities (Rist, 1970; Tett & Crowther, 1998).

An awareness of the differences in power in a given situation influences whether people are silenced or speak (Ellsworth, 1989). Holyfield (2002) claims that most white educators continue to teach from a white middle class perspective believing in the existence of an egalitarian society and assuming that culture is neutral. Simply by virtue of their membership in this class, teachers may unwittingly privilege those similar to themselves, thereby creating a barrier to educational opportunities for low-income children (Nagle, 1999). Holyfield feels that teachers must become more skeptical of the school system as an institution and learn to confront themselves and their beliefs to promote more equitable learning experiences for all children.

In a classic longitudinal study of a group of black children in an urban ghetto school, Rist (1970) reveals how the teacher's choice of group placement of kindergarten

children according to their perceived ability is decided by the eighth day of school and persists for at least several years after that choice. He also shows that one factor heavily influencing the academic achievement of the students is the differential response of the teacher to the various groups. That is, the teacher offered preferential treatment to the children at Table 1, which was the group perceived to have the most capable learners. Conversely, those children seated at Tables 2 and 3 were perceived to have less ability and did not receive as much of the teacher's time. Further, the teacher had reduced expectations of the academic potential of Table 2 and 3 students.

Rist (1970) found that teachers have an image of the traits needed to be a successful child at school and the closer the child is perceived to fit with this image, the higher is the ability grouping in which the child is placed. He learned that the teachers expect those children from the lowest socioeconomic class to perform the worst academically and consequently, they are slotted in lower ability groupings. Rist also surmises that as time goes on, the children's performance may be the result of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Those children who are tracked into a lower stream and may in fact read well later, "had no option but to continue to be a slow learner, regardless of performance or potential" (Rist, 1970, p. 287).

Engagement and Family Literacy Learning

The middle of Figure 2 features a box that represents engagement in literacy. Engagement is defined here as active, attentive and responsive participation by the individual in learning. As illustrated, the individual interacts with members of their culture in a social context. To the extent that the literacy activities are deemed

meaningful to the individual and there is support to engage in a task that might be too difficult to do independently, there will be motivation for involvement and learning. Thus, the level of motivation to participate in an activity is not fixed, but highly variable. Opportunities for support for learning may come from the family, but also public institutions such as schools, faith organizations such as churches, or other cultural contexts.

On the far right, the final circle represents the outcome of one's engagement in literacy. As illustrated, the individual, the sociocultural context and how they interact affect how one engages in literacy and ultimately what one learns and how much cultural capital they might acquire.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion highlights the complex relationships among social, cultural and economic factors in the developing framework. The factors in my conceptual context are believed to interact in a mutual synergistic manner to either support or impede family literacy. This framework may have explanatory power in the data analysis for illustrating how discriminatory practices and policies may continue covertly to compromise learning opportunities for marginalized students, while recognizing the power and domination of social institutions. By attending through text and talk to factors such as the social structure, social actions and social practices, educators will not perpetuate powerlessness or repress voices that are not in the mainstream.

Those individuals in influential positions of power and who view literacy as neutral should break out of that mindset (Stuckey, 1991). Open-minded educators will

gain a deeper understanding of the various social conditions under which families from backgrounds dissimilar to their own live (Auerbach, 1995a; Burant, 1999). They should acknowledge and examine their attitudes and beliefs and remove barriers to ensure equitable access to learning experiences, thereby increasing chances for academic success for all students. Otherwise, as Stuckey (1991) points out, literacy will continue to be a violent experience to those not in the dominant white middle class.

Summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed pertinent literature to ground the research questions for my study. I have presented background information on the field of family literacy along with a discussion of highlights from literacy studies contained in the literature. The areas of poverty, literacy and family interactions have been explored from a critical theory perspective. Auerbach's socio-contextual model and Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital were highlighted to help me more fully conceptualize my general overarching question regarding literacy practices and perceptions of low-income families, as well as to help situate my three sub-questions:

1. How do family literacy practices and events unfold in these low-income homes?
2. How is literacy embedded in families' social practices and relationships between schools and homes?
3. What conditions and factors within the family contribute to family literacy and the enculturation of children into these practices?

My developing framework accounts for a variety of structural factors that serve as determinants to either impede or promote family literacy. As outlined in this chapter,

those who have used deficit-based explanations of literacy pathologize illiteracy as a social ill and fail to account for the structural factors. Proponents of deficit-based explanations also suggest that literacy directly leads to personal and social economic advancement, which I have shown is a gross simplification that fails to account for the many intervening factors.

In the next chapter, I present information to justify my choice of a qualitative research paradigm and a case study design for my study. I introduce the participants, data collection methods and analysis techniques. Finally, I conclude with a discussion on the procedures taken to ensure the trustworthiness of my study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Look at every path closely and deliberately, then ask ourselves this critical question: Does this path have a heart? If it does, then the path is good. If it doesn't, it is of no use.

- Carlos Castaneda

Introduction

This chapter presents the methods of data gathering and procedures used to analyze the information obtained. The study relies on qualitative methods of data gathering to better understand the social and cultural contexts within which participants operate.

Qualitative Research Paradigm

My task in this study was to record my participants' stories with fairness and integrity to create an accurate picture of individual lived experience. The use of qualitative research methods, guided by the theoretical basis outlined previously, is ideally suited for this purpose (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While quantitative methods generally require minimal contextual connections to the social world in order to formulate correlations from data that is often numerical in nature, research conducted within a qualitative paradigm requires a linkage to phenomena that are located in natural settings as a means of uncovering the experiences of participants from their personal perspectives. Qualitative research uses inductive inquiry, from which descriptions,

concepts, and abstractions emerge from the data (Merriam, 2001). A qualitative research paradigm is less concerned with outcomes, products, comparisons, correlations, or in the deductive support of theory and hypothesis testing, but rather focuses on providing a rich description and a broad view of the processes and events being studied, sometimes building towards a theory (Merriam, 2001).

The qualitative research paradigm in this study was primarily exploratory in nature. I was the main instrument of data collection, interpretation, and analysis. I used naturalistic inquiry which emphasizes holistic and inductive theory development emerging naturally from the research methods (Merriam, 2001). I addressed the meaning and context of lived experience regarding literacy in low-income homes to try to understand and appreciate individualized experiences and voices (Patton, 1990). For this study, low-income families are defined as those families receiving income assistance and meeting provincial guidelines for housing subsidies and daycare arrangements. These families have less disposable income compared to middle class families to spend on books, toys, extracurricular activities and family outings.

As the researcher, I became immersed in the setting and experiences of the participants while I interacted with them in order to record and observe their reality. I made an attempt to get to know the community, the school and the norms of the culture by spending a full day each week in the school for a period of about six months before actual data collection. In that time, I observed in a number of different classes to note strategies that the teachers used and teaching techniques. At the same time, I met with people outside of the school who were prominent members of this community. These

included the community adult literacy instructor, teachers at the area child care centre, and community centre staff. Speaking with them helped provide me with a more complete understanding of this community and its resources.

Case Study Design

Description

The case study is a qualitative research method that was developed primarily in the social sciences, and has become popular in educational research (Cohen & Manion, 1989). The case study method, as applied here, is concerned with developing a deep understanding of the complex realities experienced by the participants with the event or entity bound in space or time (Creswell, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Miles and Huberman (1994) describe the four key parameters of a case study. First, one looks at the natural setting where the event or entity exists. Next, the actors are observed or interviewed. Then, there are the events that the actors are either observed doing or report during the interviews. Finally, case studies look at the process surrounding the actors and the events being studied.

Through case study methodology, my research "prob[ed] deeply and analyz[ed] intensively the multifarious phenomena" that constitute family literacy in selected families with a view to understanding these practices (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 106). Case study research is an inductive process that attempts to provide a holistic description of the processes, actions and events involved using participants' perceived realities and the observed reality of the events and processes being studied (Merriam, 2001). This method allows the findings to emerge from the data.

The research employed a pilot study and then multiple exploratory case studies (Yin, 1993) in an attempt to uncover the interplay among significant factors in family literacy practices, while carefully attending to the social situation and contextual realities. In the following sections, I discuss my pilot study and how it informed this study, the process for gaining entry, the participants in the study, as well as methods of data collection and analysis.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to create a profile of family literacy in selected low-income homes and to uncover mothers' recollections of their early reading experiences (R. Rubin, 1997). Four mothers with children attending two different elementary schools were included. Participants were nominated by the school resource teachers. Two of these participants were interviewed in their homes, while the other two were interviewed at their child's school. Consent was obtained from the participants to audiotape the interviews. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim and analyzed for themes.

A pilot test of my interview guide was intended to help me refine it to ensure that the questions were understandable to the participants and could be answered. No significant problems were revealed with its use. However, in the course of the pilot study, new questions emerged, requiring either elaboration or further exploration of events, feelings, or perspectives. Using information gained from my interviews in the pilot study, the interview guide was subsequently expanded in the areas of children's activities, parental attitudes and beliefs about literacy practices, and the role of the school environment.

A content analysis revealed that the mothers in the pilot study actively promoted literacy. They tried to create environments for encouraging literate behaviors and for participating in various literacy events, but faced limitations in resources and opportunities. Emergent themes related to reduced access to a variety of reading and writing materials, high academic aspirations for their children, disempowerment by authority figures and attempts at self-empowerment, and limitations in resources of time, finance and support networks.

These findings contribute to the developing framework and support the application of a sociocultural approach and the use of critical theory to provide a strong framework for understanding the complex nature of family literacy. Since richer data were collected from those interviewed in their homes, compared to schools, home interviews were used for gathering data from parents in the present study. Based on recommendations from the pilot study, four additional data collection measures, a parent questionnaire, school observation, parent-child interaction and parent journals were added for the research study. Although Ross, Rideout and Carson (1994) warn that journal writing might be problematic with those who have poor writing skills, or who are careless or unmotivated, this technique held potential for the proposed study since preliminary pilot data revealed frequent writing within the daily routine among all of the participants, regardless of educational level (R. Rubin, 1997).

Gaining Entry

Following approval of my study by the University of Ottawa Ethics Committee, I submitted a written request with a copy of my research proposal to The Director of

Education for the school district seeking endorsement of my study. This is contained in Appendix A. I was then invited to make a short presentation to the school district supervisor with the mandate for research projects. Once approval was attained at that level, I met with the school principal from one of the two schools involved in my pilot study. She readily authorized me to involve her school in my research.

I chose this particular school for my study for several reasons. First, students from this school score among the lowest in the school district in their language arts achievement in provincial standardized testing. Second, I wanted to separate my professional role in the school district with my researcher role and chose a school where I had never worked and knew only a few of the staff. Third, the school already made a commitment to improving student literacy by undertaking a few unique literacy initiatives. The principal expressed interest in offering support for my study in the hopes of furthering the school's understanding of influences on the children's literacy that occur outside of the school. The school staff also welcomed me as a researcher attempting to help them to better comprehend what forces in society influence how these low-income families act.

Initial meetings were then held with the school resource teacher and area day care centre director to explain my research study. Informed consent was obtained from them before their involvement was secured. [Refer to Appendix B.] Both of these women were well known in the community. They were familiar to the families and through their work had developed trusting relationships with them. For these reasons, they were asked to identify potential participants who were representative of their community in terms of

socioeconomic status, language of the home and educational level (G. Anderson, 1990) and who also met the other criteria for the study in terms of having a child enrolled in the Core French[14] program in the primary grades. They also provided me with background information on community resources for literacy development and their perceptions regarding parental involvement in the child's schooling. [See Appendix C for the interview schedule used.]

The purposive sample consisted of a total of eight students in the grade 1, 2 and 3 Core French program (age six to eight years) who were matched for gender and grade level with two levels of parental educational attainment. That is, half of the selected students had a parent with a high school diploma, the equivalent credential, or were actively working on academic upgrading in a program. To contrast, the others did not have a parent who had graduated from high school or a parent who was upgrading his or her skills for the General Educational Development (GED), a diploma awarded to adults who have not completed high school but are successful in writing an equivalency exam. Often these adults enrol in courses for educational upgrading before writing the exam. Family composition details for each case are contained in Table 2 on the next page.

As shown, four of the eight families had both a female and male adult present. The primary contact for all of the families was the mother. Of these families, John, Lynne's partner (Case 2) and Andrea (Case 7) hold a high school diploma or equivalent,

[14] Core French and French Immersion are the two programs offered in New Brunswick public schools. In the Core French program, French is taught as a subject for one period each day or several periods each week for a minimum total of 1300 hours of instruction in French language, grades 1 to 12 (Department of Education, 2003a).

Table 2

Family Composition by Gender and Educational Attainment

Adults in the Family					Children in the Family	
Case	Male	Grade	Female	Grade	Boys - Grade	Girls – Grade
1	--	NA	Julie [a]	12 mod[b]/U	Grade 2[a]	Grade 10 Kindergarten
2	John[a]	12+[c]	Lynne[a]	9	--	Grade 3[a]
3	--	NA	Natalie[a]	8	Grade 4 Grade 1[a]	--
4	Doug[a]	9	Beth[a]	10	Grade 5	Grade 3 Grade 1[a]
5	--	NA	Michelle[a]	12 mod[b]U	Grade 3[a]	Grade 2 Kindergarten
6	Robert	7	Jill[a]	10	Grade 1[a] Infant	--
7	Allen	7	Andrea[a]	12	Grade 3	Grade 2[a] Grade 6
8	--	NA	Jane[a]	12 mod[b]	Grade 5 Grade 7	Grade 2[a]

Note. Grade = last grade completed; U = upgrading; [a]study participant [b]12 mod = modified high school program (upgrading at grade 6 level) [c]= Community College course after high school

while Jane (Case 8) has a modified diploma, but was not included in the more educated category since her education level was estimated to be below grade 6. Julie (Case 1) and Michelle (Case 5) were involved in academic upgrading, while the others had all dropped out of school and had no other formal education. In terms of gender and grade level distribution of the children, there were four boys: two in grade 1 (Case 3 and Case 6) and one each in grade 2 (Case 1) and grade 3 (Case 5). The girls were also evenly distributed with one in grade 1 (Case 4); two in grade 2 (Case 7 and Case 8) and one in grade 3 (Case 2).

Procedures

The sample for this study was drawn from a low-income community in a New Brunswick city. The area is home to a concentration of families dependent on welfare support. About half of the students in the area elementary school reside in low-income homes; many of the families are receiving income assistance and live in a government-subsidized housing project. English is the predominant language spoken in most homes, with French spoken at times by parents in two of the homes, but not to their children who speak only English. A variety of community-based educational, health care, and social services programs are offered to many of the families.

The school resource teacher made initial contact with potential parent participants. She provided a general overview of the study, introduced me as her friend and obtained permission to release their telephone numbers to me if they expressed interest in participating. [Refer to the overview of the study for the resource teacher contained in Appendix D.] I then made follow-up contact to confirm interest and to

discuss involvement requirements. I explained clearly that participation was voluntary. Letters of informed consent with the study purposes, participant obligations, methods of maintaining confidentiality, rights of participants to withdraw, and the name of the researcher and affiliated institution were required to be signed before an individual was permitted to take part in the study. [Copies of these forms are contained in Appendix B.] The consent forms were read to the parent participants, having regard for the low literacy level of some of the parents.

My success in readily gaining entry in the participants' homes may be in part due to my ability to fit into many settings and to adjust to the needs of the participants, a skill acquired from my work experience. Staff working in the community forewarned me to be cautious about my social presentation to facilitate acceptability. They informed me that many of the families had unpleasant experiences with government employees such as child protection social workers. They felt that if the families associated me with their other government workers, they might assume I was a potential threat to their welfare and be less open. Thus, they suggested that as a government employee, I should take precautions to keep that part of my identity separate from my student researcher role.

A curve was thrown my way in the course of my study when I was in a strike position for work and expected to picket in the area neigbouring this community. Remaining cognizant of my ongoing need to negotiate social situations, I willingly offered to travel to the next town to help the smaller number of union members in their hospital as a way to reduce my risk of having my identity as a government worker disclosed.

Family Participants

The primary caregivers were the main source of data. They were all English speaking, resided in a low-income neighbourhood and had at least one child enrolled in the targeted grade 1, 2 or 3 Core French classes. The use of purposive sampling helped to uncover the full array of "multiple realities relevant to this inquiry" (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 386), while allowing for the possibility of a few participants discontinuing their participation. I gave pseudonyms to each of the participants to protect their identities without detracting from the richness of the description of the outcomes. Originally, I wanted the participants to choose their own names. However, after several parents picked the same names from characters portrayed on popular television soap operas, I decided to randomly assign names from my list. Chapter 4 contains details on the family participants.

Parkview School

Physical Characteristics

Parkview School (not its real name) is at the center of the community, located on a thoroughfare. The school serves students from kindergarten to grade 8 inclusive. Adjacent to the school is a small public park that is maintained by the students and, as such, it offers a model to the students and others for community social action. The school offers both a Core French and Early French Immersion[15] program, like many other schools in the province. The division between these programs is evident, with a majority

---

[15] French Immersion is an optional French Second Language program in which French is the language of instruction for a significant part of the school day. Early French Immersion in New Brunswick begins in grade 1 and offers at least 6600 hours of instruction in French (Department of Education, 2003a).

of students from poverty backgrounds and those students presenting with special needs enrolling in the Core French program. In contrast, more middle class students enrol in the French Immersion program.

Staff

In general, Parkview School has an experienced staff and low turnover even though it is a challenging place to work. The teachers appear to rise to challenges. Most of the staff would be eligible to transfer to another school but they remain at Parkview by choice. The staff are positive; one feels that sense as they enter the building or see them joking with each other in the open door staff room. People are smiling. It appears that those who work at this school either stay for a single year because they cannot find their niche or they remain long term.

Teachers at Parkview School also seem to enjoy working together. For example, in the course of my study, the staff successfully completed a course that had required after-school study. The program focuses on teaching the students responsible behavior and problem solving. All teaching, administrative and support staff ensure that there is consistency in their manner for dealing with the students by using this approach only.

The principal of Parkview School is innovative and community-focused. She takes the initiative to offer more than just academic instruction in the building during traditional school hours by opening her school both during and after the school day to allow various community resources to be situated within the school facilities.

Although all specialists are in great demand at this school, social work needs are especially prevalent with so many families faced with heavy economic and social needs.

Parkview serves a sizeable population of students who are often marginalized in society, and are impoverished youth living with disenfranchised adults in economically depressed situations. The quantity of available social work service is not adequate and Parkview staff are regularly faced with helping parents with personal problems, supporting students with a variety of emotional and behavioural concerns, and working with agencies in relation to these and other issues.

The school and teachers in this study were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity. A description of the key school participants: the principal, resource teacher, and the grade 1, 2 and 3 Core French teachers is given in the next chapter.

School Goals

Literacy is a primary school goal at Parkview School, and it is pursued with vigour. Clearly, it is a focus that is not to be forgotten. Children will use the word literacy in conversation to describe a project they have completed. The students appear to know that there is something unique happening at their school that can be a lot of fun. As one walks through the school hallways, there are banners with encouraging expressions to point out to students the value of school and literacy. Classrooms also contain a number of literacy mementos.

A literacy program in operation at Parkview School was founded on the assumption that action at the school level can reach beyond the school walls to have an impact in the children's homes. Staff at the school believe that their popular program extends opportunities for literacy development by recognizing the importance of literacy in the lives of both children and adults. Adults and other family members may become

involved in a literacy project with their child; all participation in the program is valued. Thus, the program focuses attention on the need to promote literacy and demonstrates its commitment to supporting education and lifelong learning for all.

Data Collection Methods

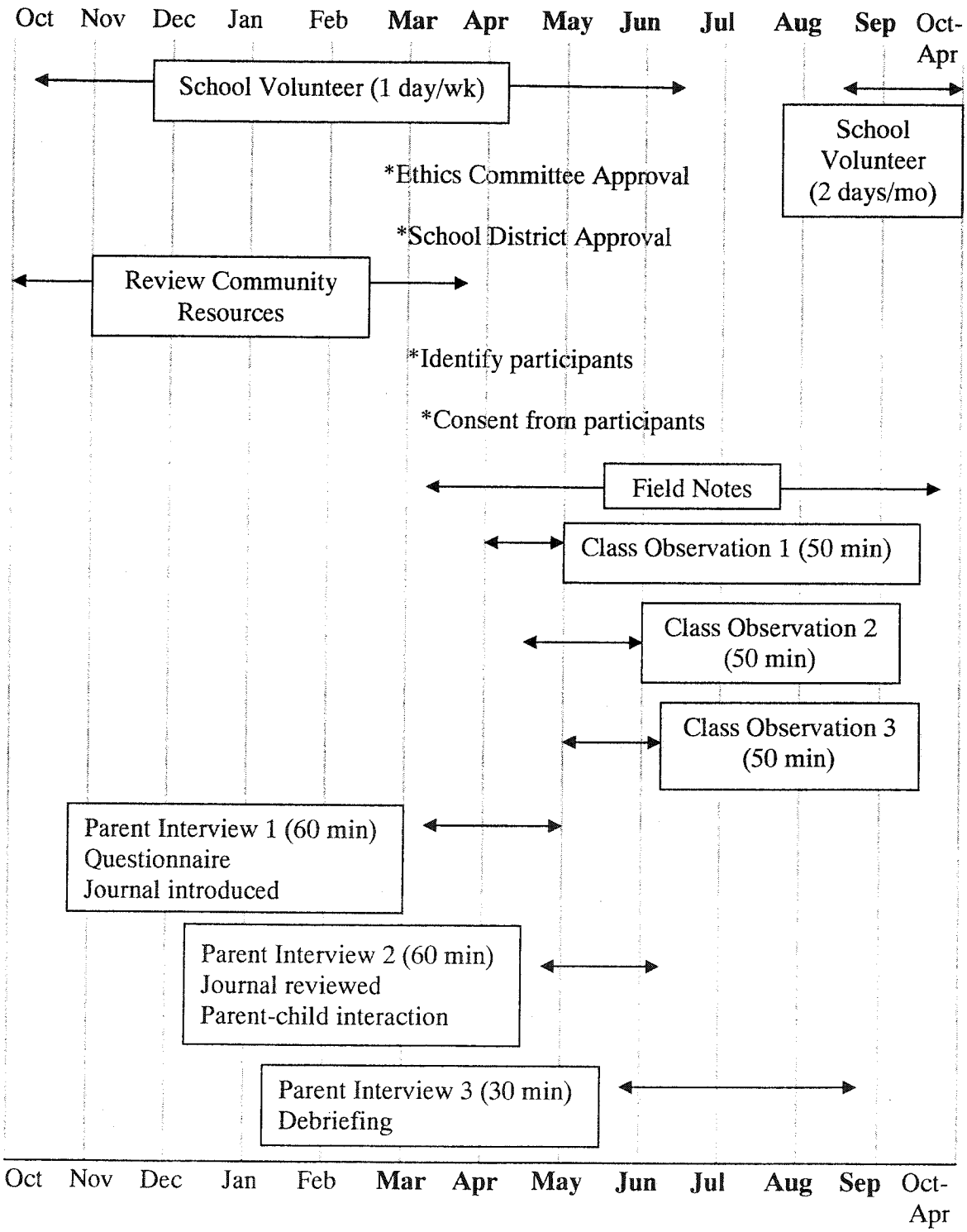
A wide variety of data collection methods are typically used in case study research to provide a rich set of data to capture the complexity of the context. Data for my study were collected from the families and schools over a seven month period. The data were generated in a variety of ways: (a) audio recordings of interviews with parents; (b) parent questionnaire; (c) parent journal writing; (d) video recordings of parent-child interaction; (e) field notes from home visits with parents; and (f) field notes from school observations. These six rich data sources provided me with the views of the participants so that their reality could be better understood. In this section, I describe the data collected from the parents first, followed by the school data. A description of each instrument used and details on the data collection procedures involved are given. A summary of the data collection methods is contained in Figure 3 on the next page.

Parent Participation

Parental involvement included two interviews in the family homes averaging approximately sixty minutes each, and then one thirty minute interview. A short answer questionnaire was completed by parent participants during the first interview. The parents maintained a reflective journal for one week after the first interview. During the second interview, the parents participated in an interaction with their child that was videotaped with consent. Field notes were taken throughout. Each set of data collected was labeled

Figure 3

Summary of Data Collection Methods



with date, time, length and source and assigned a pseudonym. Further detail regarding the content is contained in the section on Field Notes.

Semi Structured Interviews

The use of interviews in case study research is well-documented as a valid data collection measure (Yin, 1994). The use of semi-structured interviews allows the interviewer to probe for more information on certain topics. Gilbert (1993), however, warns that limitations caused by interviewer bias, misdirected prompting, problems with question wording and assumptions can distort the data.

In this study, an iterative process of multiple interviews allowed me to develop questions based on initial conversations with participants and to explore them in subsequent interviews (Creswell, 1998). I was cautious to be non-judgmental when collecting my data and to create a sense of openness and respect for the person being interviewed. As such, I aimed to present as an interested, neutral listener. I consciously positioned myself as knowing little about families and the education system and was cautious to never outline my professional side.

As previously explained, one of my underlying motivations to adjust aspects of my presentation of myself and role was my readings of contextual cues and the reactions to me as a government employee by those who worked in this community and knew my participants better than I did. Those individuals working in the community had inferred that the families were likely to adopt a negative viewpoint of me and would not feel comfortable in revealing elements of their lives to me if they knew I worked for the

government. Thus, in my social interactions with them, I chose not to risk potential consequences of full disclosure.

There was little negotiation regarding what was acceptable in conveying the aspect of my identity related to my employment and much conscious thought behind my lack of disclosure. I conveyed only a selected facet of my identity as it pertained to the research while using language that was familiar to them. That is, I presented myself simply as a student doing a project to learn about what families do with their children outside of school. Parents were accepting of this explanation of my role and willing to let me into their homes and their lives.

In the course of the interviews, the parents readily exposed details of their lives, including traumatic events they had suffered. My socialization as a health care worker elicited a desire to nurture, and I found the task of remaining distant a challenge. Although some of what the parents said was shocking and distressing to hear, it was necessary for me to respond in ways that promoted continued participation. By feeling at ease with emotions expressed, this gave me greater access to their intimate lives. According to Seidman (1998):

> The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to 'evaluate' as the term is normally used... At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience. (p. 3)

Three interviews were scheduled and conducted with each family. Arrangements made in advance proved to be not appropriate since the parents did not cancel appointments if something arose and would indicate that they had forgotten the planned meeting when questioned later. Most of the parents preferred that the interviews occur

immediately after the telephone call was made. Long term planning appeared to be difficult for all of the parents.

Since family members often experience activities differently (Snow et al, 1991), in the four families where there was more than one caregiver, I invited both to be interviewed. Doug was present when Beth was interviewed (Case 4) and John (Case 2) was interviewed after Lynne. Both Robert (Case 6) and Allen (Case 7) declined. During the interviews, I often probed for more details to get clarification on points that were not well understood. The interviews were audiotaped and then transcribed for inclusion in the data analysis. I also noted my observations and recorded my comments in field notes.

Interview 1.

Overview

Preliminary data were gathered to obtain an account of the family's literacy practices and events, parental attitudes and beliefs towards literacy, and the conditions influencing these practices. An "interview guide" approach to naturalistic interviewing starts with a list of issues to be addressed by each participant, still allowing for other topics to emerge, specific to each participant (Patton, 1990). A conversational style allowed me to present the new questions while maintaining the flow of the interview.

The pilot study interview guide, as discussed previously, had been modified for this study to incorporate recommendations from my preliminary work. The revised interview guide remained semi-structured to permit emergent questions in the interview process in response to the situation (Merriam, 1988). Along with obtaining basic demographic information, broad areas of questioning for the initial interview included:

(a) adult exemplars of literacy behaviors; (b) child participation in literacy associated activities; (c) access to reading and writing materials; (d) purposes of reading and writing and (e) parental involvement in school activities. [A copy of the interview guide is contained in Appendix E.]

Parent questionnaire

A parent questionnaire [contained in Appendix F] was completed during the initial interview. The questionnaire allowed for a uniform system for participants to rate such areas as their attitudes and beliefs about literacy, their self-perceived competencies in helping with school work, access to books and their family values towards education. The questionnaire consisted of six indicators arranged in Likert rating scales, five multiple choice questions and one open-ended question. Interviews with parents were audiotaped with approval.

Field notes

I wrote descriptive field notes regarding the surroundings and any pertinent observations, reflections, impressions or emerging patterns during and after the interviews, remaining sensitive to the participants and aware of how recording at the time could disrupt the communication. My notes, contained in a total of twelve 5 inch by 8 inch divided page spiral-bound stenographer's notebooks, include details that helped me to reconstruct the events later. I included descriptions of the setting, the layout of the room, signs of literacy and other symbols that were visible, activities occurring, use of language, non-verbal behaviors, as well as anything else that captured my interest about the setting or interaction at the time.

I recorded my feelings and thoughts about what I observed and raised questions in informal notes on one side of the page separate from the descriptions, as I reflected on the events both during and after the observation. Later, I typed some of my notes in a word processing program, elaborated upon my assumptions and emerging insight while looking for patterns and themes. I then organized my notes by putting those pieces that appeared related into files on the computer and made some tentative interpretations, expanding significantly on some parts.

Parent journals

Parents were given semi-structured journals [see Appendix G] during the first interview and instructed on their use. This included a written explanation of a literacy event, with examples. They were asked to either write or audiotape daily entries for one week. The use of audio recorded diaries has been used successfully in a study with adolescents (J. Steele, personal communication, September 17, 1997), but none of the participants in my study chose this method for the data collection, opting instead to handwrite their entries.

Their journals chronicle their lives by providing a snapshot in time. The contents for each entry are a modification of those used by Ross, Rideout and Carson (1994) in their study of personal caregiving. This involved describing the literacy event to determine the activities parents define as literacy-related, naming the purpose of the activity to reveal cognitive processes used to define the activity, providing any thoughts and feelings about the activity which identified an affective dimension, documenting any co-occurring activities to expose the context within which activities occur and the level of

attention given to the literacy activity and, finally, evaluating the activity to reveal the consequences as stressful, pleasurable or other. According to Marshall and Rossman (1995), a strength in this data collection technique, is in its elicitation of voice.

The journals were picked up from the parents at an agreed upon date and reviewed immediately. They were often incomplete and were subsequently discussed with the parent during the second interview to obtain further information. Even with this manner of data collection, the journals offered a valuable source of revealing accounts of home activities that would have been difficult to obtain otherwise. Insight into such affective variables as attitudes and emotions, as well as parental values and beliefs about literacy practices were gained by probing the parents further about the activities they described and recording their direct quotes of sentiment.

Interview 2.

A second interview followed my transcription of the data collected in the first interview and a review of the parent's journal. The purpose was to ensure that my transcription was consistent with the parent's intention and to seek clarification or amendments where required. I also gathered additional data through a parent-child interaction which will be outlined in more detail in the next section.

I explained to the parents and their children that I would like to obtain a sample of how they spend time together. The video recordings of the parent-child interactions provided observational data from a natural environment. A parent-child interaction, believed to be the "foundation of literacy development in children" (Thomas, 1998,

p. 13), was videotaped after obtaining parental approval and a signed Assent Form from the child. [A copy of this form is contained in Appendix B.]

The presence of a video camera initially could have been disruptive for some, but none of the children mentioned any concerns to me and all of the parents, although more self-conscious, complied with my request to videotape them. I offered examples of some possibilities if they did not independently suggest an activity or routine. The options included shared book reading (Beals, deTemple & Dickinson, 1994), such as reading a story to the child or helping with homework, interactive play (Nickse & Quezada, 1994) which could include family members engaging in a commercial game, sport or other activity together or a mealtime exchange (Beals et al, 1994) or the preparation of part of the meal together. The activities chosen by the participants are presented in Table 3 on the next page.

A guide was developed for analyzing shared book reading and is contained in Appendix H. This included adult book reading style, child behaviours, purpose of parent-initiated dialogue and purpose of child-initiated dialogue. These categories were based on Wade and Moore's (1996) focus points for observing children during book sharing and Kook and Vedder's (1995) variables used in coding book reading episodes. Snow et al's (1991) observation categories and Bottorff's (1994) hints for effectively using videotaped recordings were used for analyzing other types of parent-child interactions.

Parent-child interactions

A second type of naturalistic observation looked more specifically at the nature of the adult-child interactions surrounding literacy events (Mason & Allen, 1986;

Table 3

Activities Chosen by Parents for Parent-Child Interactions

Case	Activities Selected[16]
Julie	Mother playing a board game with son and younger sister; dress-up.
Lynne	Father and daughter conversational exchange about pet bird. Reading with mother and father.
Natalie	Mother preparing dessert with her sons.
Beth	Family role-playing visit to doctor; discussion; reading.
Michelle	Mother playing in an outdoor inflatable swimming pool with children.
Jill	Mother playing outdoors with squirt guns with her son.
Andrea	Mother reading a story to her daughter and daughter's friend.
Jane	Mother helping her daughter and friend with homework.

[16] As indicated, in some cases the child engaged in more than one activity with (a) parent(s).

Scarborough, Dobrich and Hager, 1991; Snow, 1991; Teale & Sulzby, 1987) to determine how adults foster literacy development. The observational data from parent-child interactions were intended to complement the interview data and reveal aspects of behaviour in the participants that would be unable to be recognized or obtained in an interview or from a written form.

Upon completion of the interaction, the parents were asked to discuss whether this was a regular routine for them, to indicate if their child's behavior was typical, and to comment in general upon what had just occurred. I then dubbed the 8-mm videotape onto a VHS format. Each original tape was assigned a number, indicating participant, date, tape number and time. Two VHS copies of each original tape were made, with one copy given to each participant at the end of the study.

Field notes

Field notes were also systematically written during the second interview to document my observations. I aimed to remain cognizant of the way school or community literacy programs influenced family literacy. My notes included the date, time, place, and length of time in which the observation was conducted, details on the actual observations and my emerging thoughts on social processes while noting patterns, themes, and categories of behaviour emerging from the data.

Interview 3.

A third follow-up interview was completed with the families upon review of the videotape transcripts. This session served as a type of debriefing to allow participants an opportunity to discuss any issues or concerns that may have arisen as a result of the

interviews or from their involvement in the study. This meeting also provided me with an opportunity to correct misinformation about the study or obtain further elaboration or information confirmation where needed. Although not requested, two families gave me several artifacts of the children's writing and drawing. These contained sketches of cartoon characters and hearts with the message, "I love you Mom."

School Data

School data consisted of detailed field notes made during classroom observations. The use of observation as a method of data collection in qualitative research is well-recognized (Stake, 1995), particularly in case study designs (Yin, 1994) although Gilbert (1993) warns about limitations and potential problems. He discusses the possibility for recorder bias and obtrusive influences which affect the reliability and validity of the data collected.

Becoming Familiar with the School

To better understand the ways the children learn at home, it is essential to know how they are taught at school (D. Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). I wanted to ensure that I was familiar with practices at the school and comfortable with the staff and students before I began my data collection. I also took measures to ensure that when the actual time for data collection occurred, it would not seem unnatural for me to be there. As discussed earlier, I offered to volunteer at the school for a period of six months one full day each week prior to my data collection. I was immediately welcomed in this capacity by the school principal. The resource teacher was assigned the responsibility of arranging a schedule of activities for me each week.

I spent most of my time in the three Core French grade 1, 2, and 3 classrooms where I would be collecting data later, as well as in the two kindergarten classrooms. As a skilled volunteer, I was sometimes asked to help with activities that used my professional knowledge base, including observing students with the resource teacher and problem solving regarding teaching and learning strategies, working in the classroom to assist the teacher with activities such as listening to individual students read, and administering screening tests. I also helped with other tasks as assigned, such as passing out or collecting materials for activities, helping students working in cooperative groups or preparing materials in either the classroom or the office. While serving in this capacity, I was invited to accompany the teachers in their staff room at their break time and before and after school hours. This additional contact with the staff provided me with an opportunity to observe them interact informally in a group.

Classroom Observations

After my period of volunteering in the school, I made three planned 50 minute observations with teacher approval for each of the three target classes for a total of nine classroom observations. By this point, I felt I had already gained the trust of the teachers. They knew me and felt I understood their situations and challenges by having spent time previously in their classes. The school data collection portion of the study was confined to a single semester. Nearly all of the activities were conducted in a classroom setting. However, the bounds of this case study included informal observations out of class such as individual help sessions, student-teacher discussions, and parent-teacher exchanges.

My role on these occasions was that of a non-participant observer (Cohen & Manion, 1989; Creswell, 1994). My presence was kept as passive as possible to preserve the natural setting for these observations, except when I was approached first by a student. During the class sessions I stayed by myself at a table at the back of the room. This vantage point kept me out of the students' sight, while giving me a good view of the teacher and students. Before and after classes I interacted cordially with the students, pursuing general conversation with them. I gathered observational data in the most unobtrusive manner possible in extensive researcher field notes. I was careful to keep writing during my data collection, so as not to alarm the teacher as if she suddenly did something when she caught me writing.

The focus of my observations was on the classroom verbal interactions, how the teacher allocated time and the ways children come to learn the processes involved in the classroom to become literate. I was cautious not to be disruptive or interfere with the teaching and learning occurring. My notes included interaction patterns among students and between the students and teacher, such as complying with or resisting teacher script for creating knowledge (Beals et al, 1994), the teacher's use of discussion prompts and the use of technology. I also noted the frequency of questions directed at boys versus girls in the class. Mehan's (1993) school research formed a basic framework to guide my school-based observations.

Additional Volunteer Participation

At the conclusion of the study, I returned to the school setting to spend two days a month as a volunteer for another eight months. My purpose for the additional time was to

ensure that I had developed a clear understanding of literacy practices at the school and the everyday realities surrounding teachers' work practices (Creswell, 1994).

Data Analysis Procedures

In order to make sense of the data collected, a thorough analysis was performed. This involved transcription of interview data and then organization and categorization of this information. The data collected were matched with themes that arose from the literature review; any new themes were noted. Because the data gathering involved a variety of collection methods, triangulation of the results was possible (Gillham & Buckner, 1997).

Coding

In the data analysis, I sought to understand each of the eight cases and their uniqueness and to gather meanings that might be applied to help understand issues surrounding literacy in the home or school setting. Analysis was ongoing throughout the study, beginning during the course of the fieldwork following completion of the first interview. The in-depth information gathered about each case from the six sources of data (interviews, field notes, questionnaires, journals, videotape interactions and classroom observations) was analyzed to form a picture of what was occurring in the situations studied. The use of case study methodology allowed a closer look at the situation to "seek patterns of relationships between factors deemed important for the working of the particular phenomenon" of literacy (Purcell-Gates, 1995; p. 179).

The interviews in the homes were transcribed and then coded for themes. Audiotapes and videotapes were transcribed verbatim using standard transcription codes

suggested by Wolfe (1998). After each step in the analysis, I continually reflected on what was learned from the participant and how that might shape future interviews. Transcripts were read repeatedly to become familiar with the content and to listen for emerging themes. Observer comments from field notes pertinent to the research questions, plus any points of clarification, reflections, or reflections on points of clarification, were added to the transcripts in the margins to provide a rich and more complete description of the data (Creswell, 1998).

The open coding process, based on the descriptions given by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Cohen and Manion (1994), was dynamic and iterative in nature with little structuring done a priori. The data were organized and read repeatedly in a search for emerging themes. Initial tentative codes were given to help assign meaning to themes based on my research questions. This early structure evolved as the actual themes developed in the data with the process of coding and recoding several times. Different colored markers were used to mark blocks of data by theme. The codes generated for each case were grouped to help form categories within these various interactions and then were cross-referenced through similar characteristics across cases (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Constant Comparative Method

The inductive processes of case study research places the data analysis in parallel with further data acquisition. This process allows the research to follow emerging themes during the study. This means that the researcher is driven by the analysis as it evolves

along with the developing outcomes. Further data may also be sought to compile a complete description of an emerging theme.

A content analysis involves dividing the data into meaningful segments according to emerging themes and concepts (Miles & Huberman, 1994) while listening for "the meaning of what is said" (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 1995, p. 226). An experienced qualitative researcher from a New Brunswick university was engaged to review the plausibility of the categories proposed in the content analysis. A reliability check on the measures, as recommended by Appleton (1995), was performed by having a colleague independent of the research and familiar with parent-child interactions review a random sample of four of the videotapes and perform the same measurements to seek congruence in theme recognition. Any discrepancies were discussed and resolved to mutual satisfaction. This was a way to safeguard for reliability (Kvale, 1996).

Material that related to a theme was sorted and grouped by category with the aid of a word processing program to manipulate the data into category files and to help in the retrieval of segments. All units were coded with a sentence number, date and pseudonym. The frequency of codes was then counted and comparisons were made across categories as per procedures described by H. J. Rubin and I. S. Rubin (1995). The transcripts were read repeatedly for evidence to confirm or refute the themes. Additional sets of data were likewise read, with the named categories in mind and expanded as required.

Questionnaire items were analyzed first by using frequency distributions and then qualitatively. Responses to the open-ended questions were qualitatively analyzed and, where indicated, further probing was done to ensure understanding of parental

beliefs and a link to emergent themes. The compiled data were described comprehensively in a case study narrative. Quotations were used for "drawing the reader into the case" (Creswell, 1998, p. 186). Once the within case analysis was completed, a cross case analysis was done to build an explanation that fit all codes. After each case was presented, this process involved seeking "converging lines of inquiry" (G. Anderson, 1990, p. 163).

In the next section I will highlight the specific means employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the study and give credence to the research.

Trustworthiness of the Study

The primary goal of a qualitative study is not on the validity and reliability, but on forming a unique interpretation of specific events. Verification methods are aimed at providing trustworthy representations and authentic information (Creswell, 1994). Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend four criteria for trustworthiness to improve the likelihood that findings and interpretations from naturalistic inquiry will be credible. These are: credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability. Each of these will be discussed individually with the strategies used in this study.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which the findings accurately reflect the views of the participants (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Through the collection of various kinds of data from interviews, videotapes, journals, observations, questionnaires, and field notes and using multiple methods and sources of information, the reality of the

families was represented as accurately as possible. This procedure lends truth value to the findings showing multiple constructions of reality.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) also discuss the use of peer debriefing as "a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p. 308). My peer debriefer for this study was a fellow doctoral candidate with whom I communicated frequently throughout the course of my study, discussing the framing of the study, methodology, and interpretation of the data.

Member checking is another process recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) through which participants verify data and the interpretations. There were always informal verbal exchanges with family participants following each interview. Although all participants were offered the chance to read the transcripts, not one expressed a desire to do so. The emergent themes were discussed with participants in subsequent interviews and there was opportunity for the parents to expand upon points that needed more detail for understanding. They watched and commented on their videotaped interaction in a final interview and chatted about the study. Thus, I was able to clarify some misperceptions I had about what they had said in their interviews or elaborate certain points with the supplemental information they provided.

Similarly, there was ample opportunity to convey my developing understanding of the subject studied with the school staff in the many informal

exchanges we had along the way. Moreover, I continued to volunteer at the school in the months after the completion of my data collection. This afforded me additional occasions to continue my discussions with staff participants and further explore ideas.

Confirmability

Confirmability deals with ensuring that the data and interpretations of the results are grounded in the context rather than projections and expectations of the researcher. This measure of trustworthiness was addressed through requests for feedback from participants to check insights, results and conclusions. This helped to ensure that they "agree[d] to honor the reconstructions" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 329) and not see the findings as determined by researcher biases or interests. Copies of all taped interviews, notes from interviews and discussions, and hard copies of all transcriptions have been maintained and are available upon request from the researcher.

An experienced qualitative researcher served as the auditor for this study. She reviewed the data, methodology and analysis processes for consistency and applicability, and offered her ideas for changes. Suggested reconsiderations were negotiated.

Dependability

Dependability involves the reliability of the findings and ensuring that the methods used and the process of interpretation are documented. An attempt was made to provide a comprehensive and clear outline of instrument development, research methods and analysis measures to increase the likelihood that the study could be

repeated. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), dependability can also be established through an audit. In this study, the auditor examined the process by which the various stages of the study, including analytic techniques, were conducted to determine whether this process was applicable to the research undertaken and whether it was applied consistently.

Transferability

The use of thick description was important in this study to capture the reality of the participants and as a means to better understand the complex social phenomenon of family literacy. Further, the rich and carefully detailed descriptions offer interested readers an opportunity to be able to compare contextual factors from this study to other settings and determine if findings from this inquiry may be applicable to other persons in additional contexts.

Summary of the Study Methods

In this section I provided a description of the research paradigm and methods used in my study. Following from the qualitative case study framework chosen for this research, I, as the researcher, was the primary means of data collection, interpretation, and analysis. The choice of methods was based on a sociocultural perspective and driven first by the significance of the subject of family literacy and second by an emphasis on understanding the nature and meaning of literate behavior. To learn about the role of family environment and literacy development, I relied upon descriptive research in the form of naturalistic observations. Interrogation served to uncover what was done and why. My role for data collected in the schools was that of a non-participant observer

(Creswell, 1994; Cohen and Manion, 1989). The primary research data were a combination of audiotaped recordings of personal communications between the parents and me. Several short interviews with the parents were conducted in person at their home. External expert review and peer analysis of the transcriptions and coding process helped ensure the validity of the codes and categories developed from the data.

In the next chapter, Presentation of Findings, I provide a summary of the data collected, beginning first with data gathered in the home setting and then I look at data from the school context.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

It is only with the heart that one can see rightly
what is essentially invisible to the eye.

- Antoine de Saint Exupéry

Introduction

This chapter opens with a profile of the participants in the study. They are at the centre of this research and it is important to have an understanding of them as individuals. In all of the families, the mothers were the primary informants and only limited information was made available on their partners, unless they were willing to participate in interviews. Where data are compiled on a family, such as health conditions in Table 9, information for the partner is included where known. The chapter is then divided into one main section and then two smaller sections, in which I explore the emergent themes under the following categories: literacy experiences at home, pedagogical influences on literacy development, and children's enculturation into literacy practices.

Six sources of data collection with the eight families living in one low-income community[16] give a fuller picture of the families to better address the many different aspects of the phenomenon of family literacy. In-depth interviews were conducted in the

[16] Community in this study refers to a geographical area containing government-subsidized housing which is located within the boundaries of one school.

families' homes and therefore brought me face to face with the living conditions of impoverished families. The questionnaire, reflective journals, videotapes of parent-child interactions, school observations and my field notes all serve to substantiate data gathered from the interviews and highlight the familial influences on literacy achievement and how parents support their children at home. The richness of the transcription and coding schemes allow me to look for patterns and help me to deal with some ambiguity in messages and actions.

It is not the intent of this research to make broad generalizations about literacy in low-income families by comparing participants, but rather to understand better the phenomenon of family literacy by looking at literacy-related practices and perceptions. Although comparing the analyses across families brings out some frequently occurring themes between the participants, there are as many differences as commonalities between them. This finding serves to highlight the individualistic and contextual nature of literacy in low-income homes. In fact, as Snow and Tabors (1996) point out, it is difficult to isolate the factors that may produce a given effect simply by comparing across social classes. They argue that social class is a label encompassing many variables which are difficult to separate, including "parental education, occupational status, income, housing conditions, time allocation, attitudes toward school and schooling, experiences with school, expectations for future educational and occupational success, nature of the family's social network, style of parent-child interaction" (p. 1).

In the Literacy Experiences at Home section, I review the circumstances of the lives of my research participants to portray their realities. Their compelling stories

challenged me continually to ponder and reflect on the data as information was being collected. When I began transcribing the interviews, I realized the power of their words. So as not to lose this poignancy, I use their direct quotations where possible and then offer my opinions and interpretations of what they said. All hesitations and repetitions were maintained as I attempted to preserve their meaning by showing the occasions in which they may have been more reticent to speak. I use pseudonyms to protect the participants' identities throughout my reporting, and when disclosing sensitive personal information, I deliberately did not associate the statements made with a particular participant. I was cognizant of how participants might feel if they could be identified in some way from my statements, and of the detrimental effect that might accrue should certain statements be misinterpreted and used to cast a negative tone over the individuals who were so kind as to open their homes and their lives for my research. I therefore used my discretion at these times and took additional precautions to ensure that my writing would not allow participants to be recognized or to feel disrespected because of the stories they told or the characteristics of their lives.

A section entitled Pedagogical Influences on Literacy Development follows the discussion of the literacy experiences at home. In this section, I examine the social organization of the school. Then, I specifically focus on power relations and how the code of the mainstream academic discourse that is used at school is understood and transferred to household literacy activities. I seek answers to my question about how literacy is embedded in families' social practices and relationships between schools and homes.

In the final section, Children's Enculturation into Literacy Practices, I look at conditions and factors within the family that contribute to the enculturation of children into these practices. I present ideas on how the consequences of certain actions of those in power serve to maintain the status quo and reproduction of class structure. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a brief summary.

Profile of the Participants

Participants in this study were eight families, the school principal, the resource teacher and three classroom teachers. The families will be introduced first, identified here by the adults in the home, followed by the school participants. Each profile begins with a carefully selected quotation using the word heart that gives an overview of the participant or his or her beliefs.

Family Participants

Julie

> *There is no light, so bright, as to illuminate the darkness in my heart*
>
> - Aaron Cundiff

My interviewing skills were put to the test with Julie. Her story is one of hope and resilience, as she tries to move on. She recalled many incidents that still were connected with painful memories. Julie grew up in what she described as a dysfunctional home with very few happy times. Her parents were alcoholic and split up the large family when she was a young girl. Her feelings of abandonment and loss were profound and she resented this split. Julie explained that her foster parents did not know how to give the children the

warmth or support that they needed. She longed for love and acceptance and to return home. Instead, she said she found she was practically raising herself as a child.

That split was devastating and she admits that she is still dealing with her own psychological issues from the scars left from her childhood pain. Julie states that she has not been present fully for her children, particularly her oldest daughter who had little guidance or nurturance and now, as a high school student is showing rebellious self-destructive behaviour, including smoking, drinking, dressing provocatively, and staying out late at night. With her two younger children, she is able to offer more conscientious care and guidance.

As a single mother, raising three children, Julie stresses that her children are the most important thing in the world to her and her biggest challenge is the struggle to "get it together" as she copes with a psychiatric disorder. She desperately wants to make life better for her children and is enrolled in academic upgrading with the goal of obtaining her high school equivalency. Julie's self-esteem is extremely fragile and when she has to contact the school, she indicates she feels very inadequate. She comments that she wonders if she "would ever do anything right"! Julie has no family around to offer parenting models to help her and she draws on her friends for strength and support. She relies on an overall spirituality to give her inner strength and meaning in her life.

Lynne and John

> *Little girls are the nicest things that happen to people. They are born with a little bit of angel shine about them, and though it wears thin sometimes there is always enough left to lasso your heart . . .*
>
> - Alan Beck

Lynne presents as a somewhat timid woman with little confidence. She has one daughter and lives with John, a much older man who is not the girl's biological father and has grown children of his own living in another province. Lynne often turns questions over to John if she is not certain of the response. Despite Lynne's limited formal education, she has been able to find steady employment in various low-skilled jobs over the years. Currently, she works part-time in a minimum wage position as a chambermaid in a city motel.

John is affable and welcoming. He did not complete high school, but attended academic upgrading so that he was able to enrol in courses at the community college. He works part-time as a taxi driver at nights with shifts opposite Lynne's shifts so they do not have to pay for babysitting. According to Lynne, Steven treats her daughter like she is the most special prize to him. The couple has dreams for the future of their six year old daughter and they make sacrifices to try to change their dreams into reality and experience life, as they put it, "on the other side of the fence."

Natalie

> *To understand the heart and mind of a person, look not at what he has already achieved, but at what he aspires to do.*
>
> - Kahlil Gibran

Natalie is a single mother who is in treatment for a psychiatric illness. Life circumstances had Natalie as a young adult moving around continuously with an abusive partner. Her life changed dramatically when she left the relationship to return to single life with her two young sons. With no family support and both boys having learning problems, she learned quickly about the importance of self-reliance and deciding one's

own destiny. Natalie deserves praise for the stand she took and her dedication to her sons. Her house is kept immaculate and she takes great pride in keeping it orderly. She works hard and she expects her children to work hard also, particularly because of their learning needs.

Similar to Lynne, Natalie has limited formal education, having dropped out of school in grade 9. She deplores the neighbourhood in which she lives, describing it as a ghetto. She does not feel that it is a proper place to raise her sons because there are too many bad influences. Natalie explains that she knows that work will offer for her the only enduring path out of poverty and she clings to a vision of a very different life that she would like to lead. However, she recognizes that she lacks formal education and specific skills which make it impossible for her to find gainful employment.

Natalie has battled with social workers for support to upgrade her skills so she can remove an obstacle for self-sufficiency. But, according to this participant, she feels that she has been unjustly denied access to programs since the social workers treat her psychiatric problems as impossible barriers. Natalie knows that returning to the workforce would be good for her and she continues to take steps forward in her plan to move on from her current situation by gaining skills through volunteer work with mentally challenged adults in the hopes that this will lead to later employment.

Beth and Doug

Happiness is in the heart, not in the circumstances.

- Unknown

Beth and Doug appear to be a loving couple raising their three children together and doing many activities as a family. Neither parent works in a regular job, although both have had seasonal and part-time low skill employment. They are fortunate to have a relative, Beth's brother, who contributes significantly to their support system by taking their children on outings, taxiing them to after school and weekend activities and buying them gifts.

Beth and Doug grew up in large families. Beth described her family as very dysfunctional. She had been doing well in school when she was a child, until she got ill one year and missed some time. When she had to repeat the grade, problems arose and she lost her interest in education. Beth has helped a friend deliver newspapers in her area and used her organization and public relations skills to volunteer in a political candidate's campaign. This involvement with one of the political parties has helped her to secure paid positions at the polls during the elections.

Doug suffers from a number of chronic health issues and learning problems. He dropped out of school after being teased and not getting the help he needed. Of all of the participants in the study, Doug is the most eager to work. However, with limited education and chronic health problems, he gets little employment aside from working occasionally at a coat check or taking tickets for special events at a recreational centre.

Michelle

> *Truly I have looked into the very heart of darkness and refused to yield to its paralyzing influence, but in spirit I am one of those who walk the morning.*
>
> - Helen Keller

Michelle is a single mother of three whose marriage ended in grief. She had been a victim of sexual abuse and once struggled with alcohol addiction. Alcohol was abused in Michelle's family and she reveals that she learned to drink in her adolescent years as an escape. She continued to use alcohol to avoid making decisions and face the real world and also to stay connected with her group all of whom abused alcohol. Michelle tried to stop drinking and take charge of her life a few times on her own, but was unsuccessful. Finally, she realized her drinking was out of control and she checked herself into a detoxification centre for treatment of her alcoholism.

At the time of the first interview, Michelle was facing up to her drinking problem, and making an attempt at sobriety by participating in a 12 Step Program[17] and openly talking about it. She was maintaining a clear focus on her family. Her identification with the church helps her to maintain inner strength and meaning that she needs to stay the course. Michelle has been involved in academic upgrading at about the grade 6 level. She is hoping someday to finish her high school equivalency.

Jill and Robert

> *I have accepted fear as a part of life -- specifically the fear of change. . . . I have gone ahead despite the pounding in the heart that says: turn back!*
>
> - Erica Jong

[17] A variety of 12 Step Programs exist for the treatment of addictive behaviour. They are based on the premise that a spiritual journey is needed to recover and begin with the person admitting to having a problem, believing in a greater power to help in the recovery and sharing and helping others to guarantee that recovery will continue (SoberDykes, 2003).

Jill is a young mother of a grade 1 boy and an infant son. A central theme throughout her story is her intense desire to belong and for her children to "fit in." She lacks confidence and allows her husband to abuse her for fear of losing him. She stays at home with her infant son and spends time making plastic weaving crafts which adorn the walls of her living room.

Jill presents as a rather solemn and serious young woman, which one might expect given her past experiences growing up in a strict orderly family where feelings were not expressed. She is aware that her eldest son has problems learning in school, but with her grade 10 education and her husband having no academic inclination, she is reluctant to intervene. Jill reveals her fear that she would make the problem worse for her son by confusing him.

In dealing with school personnel, she refers to having something like an "out of body experience", not unlike a state she said she would put herself in when she was abused as a child. Jill retells the story of how she is there with school personnel, but feels like she is just looking down watching all of this happen right before her eyes. Test protocols, notes, and files are all flashing quickly before her eyes. Jill claims that she was pulled out of her state when all of a sudden she heard herself being addressed by her child's teacher who was asking for her opinion on something.

Andrea and Allen

> *Within your heart, keep one still, secret spot where dreams may grow.*
>
> - Louise Driscoll

Andrea was the only parent participant in the study who had completed a regular high school diploma. She is in a marriage with extremely restrictive conditions placed on her and marked by serious conflict. Yet she remains with her husband who is emotionally distant and blaming. Andrea and Allen have four children. The eldest child has moved out and two of the remaining three have severe learning needs. The youngest girl appears to be very bright and Andrea has high aspirations for her to become a doctor.

Allen has only a primary school education and he has a serious gambling addiction. Andrea gives her cashed cheques to a close friend to safeguard so that Allen does not spend all of the family's meager income. Allen does not allow Andrea to have visitors in the home without his permission. I witnessed evidence of his negative communication patterns with her when he arrived home unexpectedly during one of the interviews and Andrea nervously tried to explain my presence. Andrea's quick response that I was merely a student doing a project combined with my casual dress and my car with the noisy muffler, must have been believable and appeased Allen since Andrea was not punished in this instance. Later, I learned that social workers and collection agencies made frequent calls to this home and Allen was likely thinking I was another government employee who would cause him more grief.

Jane

Do what you feel in your heart to be right. You'll be criticized anyway.

- Eleanor Roosevelt

Jane is a single mother who grew up in a middle position of a large and transient family. She graduated from a modified high school home economics program and had her

first child, a son, shortly after high school, followed by a second son and a daughter. After school, Jane babysits two of her sisters' and a friend's children all who reside in the same low-income neighbourhood. Jane informs me that her telephone has been disconnected for "as long as [she] can remember" by the telephone company since she ran up a bill that she could not pay by becoming addicted to calling 1-900 numbers[18].

The absence of a telephone did not pose any significant problems for Jane since in emergencies she felt she was able to use a neighbour's telephone. Although she says she is criticized by others, including her children's teachers, for not having her own telephone, she knows that she cannot have that temptation in front of her and so makes do without a telephone. School staff express concerns about this barrier to having timely contact with Jane. They are uncomfortable about having to reach her through a neighbour.

For leisure pursuits, Jane plays in the dart league with her sisters and some friends in the neighbourhood and enjoys doing crossword puzzles. Her children are involved in bowling. The family has an extensive movie collection and they typically watch a movie each night together.

Parkview School Participants

Principal: Robin

> *In motivating people, you've got to engage their minds and their hearts.*
> *I motivate people, I hope, by example -- and perhaps by excitement,*
> *by having productive ideas to make others feel involved.*
>
> - Rupert Murdoch

[18] 1-900 numbers are direct marketing business telephone lines that charge the caller a fee by the minute for information or services. The lines are frequently used by psychics, for sex lines and for other adult entertainment.

Robin clearly positions herself as a leader for literacy for all her students and staff at Parkview School. In order to succeed in today's society, she believes that students must be able to access meaningful employment. Robin emphasizes that students need to understand the importance of staying in school and she takes every opportunity to give the message to not drop out of school, not only to her present students, but also to former students who may return to visit when they are in high school.

Robin created a program to promote literacy in both her students' homes and the school, modeled around a national environmental program. This literacy program has become the driving force behind a major initiative at her school. Robin's thirst for knowledge is closely aligned to her many practices that are reflected in the sorts of learning tasks she has set out in her school's literacy program and the encouragement and support that she provides to her staff. The tasks are highly practical, promoting students working with their families and giving credit for activities occurring outside of the school.

Even with limitations in financial and human resources, Robin shows that it is possible to make literacy learning meaningful, engaging and highly successful with very little cost. She aims to connect the content and processes to the lives of the students. During my observed classes, students brought a variety of literacy projects to school, completed either individually or with their families. When their project is finished they must document it on a page outlining the names of the participants and what was involved. This page is then added to one of the large white program binders in the office.

The students who participate receive personal praise from the principal for the achievement of their project.

Resource Teacher: Tess

> *As good teachers weave the fabric that joins them with students and subjects, the heart is the loom on which the threads are tied: the tension is held, the shuttle flies, and the fabric is stretched tight. Small wonder, then, that teaching tugs at the heart, opens the heart, even breaks the heart--and the more one loves teaching, the more heartbreaking it can be.*
>
> - Parker Palmer

Tess was born into a teaching culture, with her mother working as a teacher when she was growing up. She too is clearly a teacher at heart, conscientious and caring, viewing teaching as the finest of life's work. Her Resource Room is centrally located at the top of the stairs across from the office. It is a bright, well-organized, and a cheery place with large windows adorned with plants. Tess sees her greatest challenge as assisting the students to overcome low literacy. The view from her window is a busy street and a child development centre for those living in poverty and needing skills development. This centre serves as a constant reminder of why she is there. Students visit her room for a peppermint from one of her candy jars and then are enticed into looking at or borrowing a book. Tess capitalizes on this opportunity to have a little chat about their obligations to her, to themselves and to their teacher.

The Resource Room is usually buzzing with activity from small groups working on various projects under Tess's supervision or receiving extra help. A computer in the room gets little rest with various students coming and going to work on individualized

program goals with selected educational software. At the back of the room, a large conference table remains in regular use by the teachers.

Tess treats each student as an individual, and respects them for who they are. She admits that sometimes she has felt stymied in her efforts to motivate and educate those who require more attention, but this does not deter her. She is not content with the status quo, always striving to do her best at providing sound programs for students and continually searching out new resources.

Grade 1 Teacher: Stephanie

I don't go by the rule book. I lead from the heart, not the head.

- Diana Princess of Wales

Stephanie is an experienced elementary teacher who puts much of herself into her work. She is now teaching some of the children of her former students. Stephanie's personality could be characterized as open and caring. Although she often gripes about the impact of the ever-increasing paperwork burden for teachers today, her overt sense of humour keeps her young at heart. She uses laughter to reduce tension and anxiety, particularly when she looks at her second generation students and the power structures that keep them in the same position as their parents. She struggles to define the purpose of schooling.

Stephanie's dominant mode of teaching often involves a group lesson with presentation of new material on a blackboard. Students sometimes work through exercises provided on worksheets as Stephanie roams among the desks and comments on the students' work; offering individual attention as needed. In this way, she achieves a

fairly high level of interaction between herself and her students. Sometimes, she questions them on their work so that they must indicate what they are doing.

Stephanie regularly motivates and rewards students with small tokens she buys and her classroom is seasonally decorated with many items that she has purchased at her own expense. Class discussion is an important part of Stephanie's classes. Because she believes it fosters effective language learning, each Monday they share what they did on the weekend in a circle time activity.

Grade 2 Teacher: Kelsey

> *Amid all the easily loved darlings of Charlie Brown's circle, obstreperous Lucy holds a special place in my heart. She fusses and fumes and she carps and complains. That's because Lucy cares. And it's the caring that counts.*
>
> - Judith Crist

Kelsey is a teacher in her fifties nearing retirement. As a true educator, she is filled with a sense of dedication and commitment to her job. Her many years of work in the public schools has given her a collection of stories which she can relate about the horrors of poverty, violence or abuse in her students' homes, and some of the families' brushes with the law. Kelsey smiles, although she does not outwardly express her opinions when she tells the story of the mother who was arrested in a drug bust, but claimed she had no idea what was in the bag she was delivering. She continually asks the tough "why" questions, but says she knows the answers.

When questioned about the frequent curriculum changes and how she copes, she replies that basically she does what she knows works, although sometimes it is more

good luck than good management. She values her own hard work and recognizes that this serves as the basis for her decision-making when it comes to school practices.

For Kelsey, she sees good teaching as requiring much student practise of what the teacher has said or demonstrated. The back closet in her classroom has boxes organized with materials for monthly themes. Her classroom activities often showcase her artistic talents and students seem to appreciate the time she spends on art activities and decorating her classroom.

Grade 3 Teacher: Amira

Aim high in your career but stay humble in your heart.

- Korean Proverb

Amira is a young energetic teacher filled with a sense of youthful wonderment. Her teaching characteristics would be considered constructivist in nature, as she regularly joins her students in searching for new knowledge. She believes that students learn best when they are actively engaged in learning tasks, rather than being teacher directed. Many of her activities maximize student learning opportunities by facilitating collaborative learning arrangements among small groups of classmates. Amira's classroom often has a soft buzz of voices and motion as the students are involved in these activities.

This teacher's soft, gentle tone of voice, and ready smile suggest a confidence that she knows what she is doing and her students are glad to be in that class. She has a number of students on individualized behaviour management programs and what is

noteworthy is that she has had success in bringing the troublesome disruptive school behaviour under control.

The group seating arrangement in the classroom and noise do not disturb Amira. She is trying to broaden the minds of her students and help them develop strategies to become more confident as learners and learn to work effectively with others. Her classroom frequently gives way to an excited, open group of learners using cooperative learning principles.

Literacy Experiences at Home

The importance of the family in fostering literacy development has been outlined previously. It is well recognized that literacy at home may contribute to success in socializing children into a literate world and in achieving family goals. Families have multiple approaches to literacy and ways to use literacy to deal with life events. Leichter (1984) found that families contribute to literacy development in three ways: by participating in interpersonal interactions; by organizing the physical environment; and in setting the emotional and motivational climate. Together, these three categories offer a useful and inclusive framework for facilitating the organization of the data for describing literacy experiences at home and the ways in which parents socialize their children to literacy.

Leichter (1984) believes in viewing families as environments for literacy and acknowledges that all families, including those that are financially disadvantaged, have a culture of learning. In contrast to many other theorists who advocate a deficit model of family literacy, she does not suggest trying to fix families and allows room for variability

in how families perceive and attain literacy. This is consistent with the approach I take in this study in which I acknowledge the naturally occurring events of everyday lives and allow the voices of parents to be highlighted.

Interpersonal Interactions

All children in this study have exposure to some form of literacy within their homes and through interactions with their parents and other family members. The literacy experiences shared with the children by family members are varied. The journals kept by the mothers provide a glimpse into the lives of the families and the types of literacy activities in which they engage. As outlined in Chapter 3, the parents were interviewed after the journals were collected to elaborate on their responses and to determine their attitudes, perceptions and opinions on learning and literacy development. The videotaped segments also provide valuable information on how the parents interact and respond to their children in real life situations.

Three important themes emerge in reviewing their interpersonal interactions. First, despite the fact that these parents are not well-educated by today's standards, with only one of the participants holding a regular high school diploma, the parents unanimously place strong emphasis on their children learning and value educational achievement. Second, the parents draw upon their limited personal resources to support literacy and learning in their interactions with their children. Third, the parents have many opportunities to extend literacy in their day to day activities. These themes and perceived limitations expressed by society of the low-income parents in providing literacy experiences in their homes are elaborated upon in the text that follows. As

illustrated, many of these parents engage in a number of activities which support literacy, but they also face barriers, particularly in achieving school literacy. Table 5 at the end of this section on pages 181-182 offers a summary of these activities and limitations.

Value Education

Parents in this study value education and expect their children to perform at their grade level at school. Two ways they unanimously support their children through literacy experiences at home is to see that the homework is completed and that their children practise their reading. Some examples of how they accomplish this and barriers and problems they may face with these activities will be presented in the sections that follow.

Support for homework.

Regardless of the presence or absence of a father, clearly, homework is a gendered task. Beth, like the other mothers in this study, recognizes the value of her children doing home assignments and is in charge of reviewing the homework in her household, with her husband checking only on the odd occasion. The parental role appears to be to encourage the child to complete the work, to help when necessary and where possible, and to support the school in making the child stay late to finish incomplete home assignments.

Julie had told the principal that if her children ever experience difficulties, that she is available and "willing to do whatever it takes" to help them. At homework time, Julie sits with her son and does not allow him to give up, thereby providing him with needed encouragement:

> And then he'll right away say, "I don't know how to do it." I'd say, "Bud you never even gave yourself a chance." I said, "I know you know how to do it." And

> then there'll be an example to show him how to do it...especially his math. There would be an example. "It says right here ... Oh...there it is ... Just look at."

When Jane's daughter was doing her math homework in the videotape interaction and begins whining "I'm tired", Jane immediately reinforces the necessity of the homework by stating, "You have to do your work!" This was not open for discussion. Seated on the living room floor between her daughter and her daughter's classmate whom she babysat, with the television turned off behind them, she begins showing them how to do the math homework as best she can. It is apparent by the length of time that it takes Jane to read some of the questions or her need to reread the questions that this grade 2 math was not a simple task for her. Yet, Jane recognizes that it is important and she stays with her daughter and friend until they are finished.

Even though Jane's daughter is able to read at a level that would be sufficient for her to read the text in her math word problems, she sought her mother's assistance. Jane's manner of helping her daughter with her homework is to read the word problems to her and then dictate what to do, rather than having her try to first read them out loud and helping her if she encounters a problem. For example, she indicates which mathematical operation is required and the procedure involved, "It's take away ... the bigger number has to be on top" or "So you have to put all those numbers down and add them up."

When Jane's daughter makes an error by saying "2 + 3 = 6", Jane does not take advantage of that teachable moment to discuss the question or point out the error. While helping her daughter with her homework, she did not use questioning strategies to prompt her for more active learning. Although Jane seems to be patient when she is working with

her daughter, the fact that she allows errors to pass by makes it appear as if she is task-focused. She appears to be going through the paces, anxious to finish, so she can sign the homework book that the assignment had been completed.

Later, Jane explains the reason that she does not correct her daughter's math errors. She states that she has great difficulty with math and she is not sure how the teacher taught the subject. Since Jane has such limited math skills, even at this primary level it is already challenging for her. She is afraid that she might do something differently from the teacher and the teacher "would be upset with her [manner of teaching]" if she "mixed up" her daughter.

Andrea also sees a parent's role in helping the child, particularly if the child is having difficulty. As she points out, "There's gotta be a certain responsibility to the parents. You know if they are having difficulty." Andrea continues, "If I didn't [check their homework] they probably wouldn't even get it done. They know me at school. If I don't sign their homework book that means some of their homework is not done."

Students in Andrea's youngest daughter's grade are dismissed from school an hour earlier than her children in the higher grades. Andrea established a routine whereby this child begins her homework when she arrives home with the goal to be finished before her older siblings come home from school. However, unlike Jane, Andrea allows her daughter to watch television while she is doing her homework. This likely extends homework time since Andrea states that it takes over an hour for what should be no more than 15 to 20 minutes of work according to her teacher. Andrea describes the homework routine:

> they get out at twenty to two and if she wants to go to the [neighbourhood youth club], usually she comes home. She'll watch maybe 10 minutes of cartoons. And then she'll start doing her homework but then watch the cartoons and do her homework at the same time... so usually by 3:00 she's done.

While Jill and Beth also talk about supporting schoolwork as their role, this means ensuring that homework is completed only if the children are able to do it. Jill reveals that she does not know what to do at home to help her son learn if he is struggling. She attributes difficulties to poor teaching and feels it is entirely the teacher's role to identify the problem and offer help to her son. As Jill emphasizes, "after all that's what they are paid for! I'm not the teacher. I'm the mother!" Since she does not feel she can teach her son, she explains that she would seek needed help from school staff.

Beth states that she found school challenging when she was a child. At times she has difficulty helping her young children with their homework. She indicates that if she has trouble doing the work, she turns first to her mother for help by calling her on the telephone and asking her to explain directly to the child. If that fails, she says she would "just write a note to the teacher and tell her..." or "go in and ask [the teacher] because I can't do his work."

Julie and Jane state that they were enrolled in a modified program in school and recognize their limitations when it comes to helping their children with homework. Jane admits that even then "[I] had a hard time to understand what I was reading when I was - I was in high school. It was discouraging." In discussing the notices and homework that her children bring home, she comments that "sometimes there once in a while a questionnaire is there, I'll have to stop and think. But then, other than that there's not too bad... His - uh – homework... Once in a while there I'll have to observe there and just

look at it." Jane explains that when her oldest son in grade 7 has difficulties, she is unable to provide assistance. She says, "sometimes I have a hard time helping and stuff... because it's regular grade 7 work and I didn't do regular grade 7 work... I was in a modified class so it's like, I can't [help him]."

When the homework routine was discussed with Natalie, she explains that she had been facing problems since the beginning of the school year in getting her son to do his work:

> First week after school started this year, I was already on the phone to the teacher. You know, I'm very particular what I can do with them at homework time... But I said, "You know if I can't get him to do it, it will be incomplete and he'll have to stay after school and do it..."

She reported that recently the problems escalated, "Now it's - last couple of weeks – it's 'I'll do it later, I'm not doin' homework now Mom. Here is my bag, see you.' He's out the door, eh." Natalie describes how homework time goes in her household:

> I mean we could start homework, if he got home at 2:30 from school, it would be 5 o'clock. And okay, I mean it would be done. Sometimes it wouldn't be done. And I have learned now to do what we can do. When it becomes stressful, it's time to stop.

Natalie recognizes her limits in offering support. Her journal entries divulge that homework time in her home is stressful, "He loses patience. I lose patience. So I say- *VERY* stressful." As a single mother raising two young sons, she discloses that she did not like school and dropped out in grade 9. She says she regretted that decision, but looking back now she can justify it. She speaks at length about the difficulties her son is having with his schoolwork, while equating her situation with her son's. She recognizes that she had some learning difficulties, "I would go learn fractions during math class, and

the next day I would go back and be like a blank." She attributes her problems in learning to a short attention span like that which the teachers believe her son is evidencing.

All of the parents interviewed value education and want to ensure that their children get a better education than they had. They realize how important it is to make their children complete their homework and the parents support them at home as best they can. As Natalie explains "Their education is very important because I don't have mine and I can see today you need that and if you don't have that - And grade 12 is nothing. Grade 12 today is like having grade 6."

Reading practices.

The women in the study also see a role to practise reading with their children. Discussion about their children practising reading brought out a great deal about the parents' beliefs in supporting their children's learning. When it comes to reading with her daughter, Jane generally feels more confident of her abilities than with the math. Jane talks about "reading the words, like reading the story and stuff and after like focus on like the picture for what's really happening and that." She says her daughter "don't get frustrated, but she'll come over and sound the word out or she'll say, 'Mom what's this?' And if she reads a sentence, I'll be watching her. And she's reading and she says the word wrong, I correct her. Like I usually will correct her." Jane proceeds to describe how she helps her children in the reading process by sometimes covering the pictures:

> because when ... she reads, she don't really read, she's looking at the pictures. So sometimes, I'll cover up the picture and say, "now read"... And then I usually ask after they're done reading, one page, "so what do you think it said there?" And they usually tell me.

Michelle, Natalie, Andrea and Julie, similar to Jane, concentrate more on how accurately the words are read and place less emphasis on text comprehension. Michelle's method for helping with reading is to "cover the picture and they say the word." She admits that this technique goes against the approach she had been taught to use, but she is not comfortable following what was recommended. That is, "they say that you should let them look at the picture to get an idea, but so well ... I don't do that." Likewise, Natalie outlines how she reads with her sons by, "follow[ing] the words with my finger, a pencil...whatever. But him, he looks at the pictures. For - for the answers. And so does his brother. He'll look more - They guess more than they sound out. They should be sounding out words that they don't know."

Andrea recognizes the importance of education and sees the key as supporting her children in learning to read. She describes how she helps her daughter to read, "What I try to do is if she can't get a word within a couple of seconds, I'll tell it to her and then I'll go back to it." According to Andrea, the more important part of reading was pronouncing the words in the story correctly; she pays no attention to assessing her daughter's comprehension of the text or extending her thinking in any way. Likewise, Julie has expectations for how her son should read and becomes upset when he reads too quickly and he is not articulating the words clearly, "It's like a computer. I say 'Bud, slow down, slow down 'cause I said, 'when you read fast, you're not catching the words that are on the book' ... Because I find when he reads too fast, he's not pronouncing his words clearly and he's just tstststststs."

Beth is one of the few who believe that the most important part of reading is to "know what's the story's about" or focusing on comprehension of the text. When Beth's children read books from school, they often talk to Beth about the stories after they finish, particularly the eldest daughter who she feels is "really interested in reading." In a segment of her videotaped interaction on story-reading with her daughters, Beth demonstrates her reading strategy. She waits briefly if the child pauses or hesitates in reading a word, before providing the word for the child to repeat. On one occasion, it was noted that Beth used a gesture for the word "hand" to help her daughter to guess the word before telling her the word directly.

Summary.

In summary, many of the low-income parents in this study had learning difficulties when they were in school and dropped out early or followed a modified program that was less academically demanding. Nevertheless, they recognize the importance of education and participate in literacy experiences at home that demonstrate the high value they place on education. As outlined, schoolwork is a gendered task; regardless of family composition, mothers are the ones who encourage and support their children with their homework assignments and reading practice as best they can. If they encounter difficulties, they try to obtain support from other family members or the teacher. However, the participants in this study did not capitalize on teachable moments and had a fear about instructing the child in a manner that was different from the teacher and upsetting the teacher or confusing the child. Although several of the women acknowledged that they should use the pictures in the text to help the child with reading,

they chose to cover the picture and put a heavy emphasis on reading fluently over comprehending the text. They did not use questioning strategies to prompt the child.

Use Personal Resources to Support Learning

These families have numerous strengths and a variety of personal resources for managing their daily lives. However, they often do not seem to recognize how to use their skills and talents to best support their children's learning. Many of the participants, the women in particular, are extremely clever when it comes to using their practical skills for accomplishing general home maintenance, crafts, food preparation, cleaning or organizing tasks. Beth and Doug had painted their walls. Natalie was adept at decorating. For example, she pointed out that she:

> like[s] to redo things. I paint sometimes. Actually my bathroom is half painted right now. My living room is still half done. I started in the summer and then I decided I didn't like it so I didn't finish yet so - I have to decide what to do with it. My bathroom's almost finished. I just painted it white but I gotta put my border up.

Natalie confesses that she is somewhat of a perfectionist and adds, "But I gotta do my end table this summer though... I'm gonna strip it down and make it the same colour as my cupboards because it's darker... It doesn't match. It's gotta be just a certain way."

These families have a multitude of opportunities to facilitate naturalistic learning in the course of their daily lives. However, they often do not seem to be familiar with the learning potential of their daily activities and therefore they do not capitalize on them as opportunities to stimulate learning and literacy development in their children. For example, by restricting children from participating in household activities that would

push them to use their literacy skills and develop their language, the parents' actions may unintentionally serve to limit potential possibilities for learning.

Another apparent problem is that some of these parents do not have adequate skills to be able to fully capitalize on the learning potential. These include their own literacy skills, and knowledge of how to establish healthy routines for sleeping, eating properly, and balancing schoolwork and leisure activities. They may lack reliable transportation to allow them to take advantage of grocery store sales and face financial restrictions in terms of the food they purchase and the leisure activities they can pursue. These topics will be highlighted in the sections that follow.

Support for literacy skills.

As discussed, the parents have the potential to use their personal resources and practical skills to support their children's learning, in particular their language development and literacy skills, throughout their regular activities. The likelihood that some of these parents do not possess the literacy skills in sufficient measure to help their children with some of the schoolwork, however, must be considered. Beth's husband, Doug, openly announced that he was enrolled in a special education program in his childhood and he has not achieved a high level of literacy.

As mentioned previously, Julie and Jane were in modified programs in school, while Natalie and Lynne have limited formal education having dropped out before high school. The parents try to offer whatever support they can for their children's schoolwork, but admit that it is often a struggle. Lynne depends on her partner to help her daughter with homework that specifically involves reading since she recognizes her

limitations and points out that "when it comes to her reading she'll sit beside her father and do it."

Jane provides an example of how her limited literacy skills led her to get taken by an enticing offer from a mail order club because she really didn't understand the particulars when she joined, "I ordered a few movies from Columbia House ... it's cancelled now, because like I got caught. Ah ... when it first starts you get that deal. You get ah ... nine movies for a penny ... Then you get that. Then you got to keep your contract for a year." She continues, "It was expensive, that's why I cancelled it ... I thought it would be kind of cheap then going to buy them all the time, it was expensive ... I cancelled it ... last summer I got four movies, like my four movies, the bill was $80.86 ... for *four* movies!" She adds that she "didn't finish paying that bill off yet. I just sent them a little bit of money and I'll have to send them the rest."

Two of the parents, Michelle and Julie, are enrolled in academic upgrading so that they will be better able to help their children. Michelle completed a modified high school program at age 22, after experiencing a tough academic and personal life. The lack of support she had from her family was apparent in her heart-wrenching story:

> Like I failed grade 1. I failed grade 3. And I reached grade 10 and 11, 12 ... I failed English every year ... I've done two years of summer school past grade 12. I was determined I wanted to graduate...but when I graduated I wanted to walk up the stage, and get my diploma you know. It was just something big, you know, thinking that my father was going to be there. But my father didn't show up at my graduation.

Despite heavy emotional baggage from painful past experiences that have been haunting them for years, Michelle and Julie are receiving medical help and are now at a point where they are regaining their lives and can leave some of that baggage behind. As

Michelle states, "I try to take a spiritual view. I see my life ... the pain and disappointment more clearly now ... There were lessons and there are opportunities. I can accept my pain from the past now and I'm trying to move on ... "

Michelle has been in the adult upgrading program for two years, while Julie has just returned to school on a part-time basis about six months ago. According to their instructor, both of these women are studying at about a grade 6 level. Their enthusiasm reveals that they are clearly goal-oriented individuals determined to obtain the equivalency of a regular high school diploma.

Julie reports that she was feeling invigorated by the progress and success she has shown already in the upgrading. Although she readily admits that she still has a low self-concept and feels insecure at times, she now has an accurate perception of her academic skills and progress and a better self-image of herself as a capable learner. She states "And now that I'm learning more. And I'm wanting...I'm very determined and wanting to learn." Further details on the parents' health conditions will be presented later in this chapter in the section on Emotional and Motivational Climate for Learning.

Jane is also an eager learner, particularly if she can learn something practical that will help her with her child rearing. She emphasizes, "I like to learn and explore new things, especially when it comes to like children and stuff ... So if there's a workshop, I go ... like I try to go." She often learns about parent educational sessions through the Parent Resource Centre. Jane also enrolled in a number of courses offered by the local child development centre for low-income families to help her improve her skills as a

parent. These included *Nobody's Perfect*[19] which she had done three times – once for each child; *1-2-3 Magic*[20] which she completed twice. In addition, she participated in a collective kitchen to learn how to cook and manage meal preparation. She admits that she was not much of a student when she was in school and that "... school's not for me. I hate going to school when you know I have to go to school." Unlike Michelle and Julie, she will not consider formal academic upgrading, but is advancing her skills and education through a variety of courses, like the others, to help support learning in her children.

Interestingly, not one parent in this study mentions or demonstrates any role in providing enrichment if their child masters a subject or shows a strong interest in a particular area. Andrea recognizes that her youngest daughter is quick to learn. However, she chooses to periodically keep her at home on school days in the absence of illness or another legitimate reason so that she would have someone there with her. The irregular attendance pattern became a source of frustration for her teacher, but without truancy officers who have the power to mandate regular school attendance, the school is powerless in trying to improve the girl's attendance record.

Kelsey, Andrea's daughter's teacher, believes that Andrea is sabotaging her daughter's chance for success at school with her daughter's unnecessary frequent school absences. When asked about her daughter's missed school days, Andrea indicates that she is lonely. Andrea does not provide her daughter with activities that would enrich school

---

[19] *Nobody's Perfect* is a parenting education and support program for parents of preschool children to help them develop the knowledge, skills and self-confidence for raising their children.

[20] *1-2-3 Magic* is a practical, easy-to-use program that offers families and educators easy-to-follow steps for disciplining children and strategies for encouraging independence and for promoting self-esteem.

instruction, such as having discussions, reading together, or going on outings. Typically, the two watch the soap operas together on television or rent adult movies. Although Andrea never outwardly admits that her husband is controlling and imposes restrictions on where she goes on her own, Andrea's good friend had disclosed this to me on one occasion.

Establish good health routines.

Good health and physical well-being are important for both adults and children to enable them to function at optimal levels. Some healthy habits include eating well, getting an appropriate amount of sleep, exercising regularly and limiting television and movie viewing. There is a range in the families' attention to these general health behaviours. Teachers in the study report that some of these children yawn frequently in class and sometimes put their heads on their desk. They feel this behaviour suggests that these students are tired and may have been up late the previous night or they had not eaten an adequate breakfast to satisfy their nutritional needs. Some routines will now be outlined.

Healthy eating

Parents are responsible for the health and well being of their children and by ensuring that they eat nutritious foods on a regular basis, they will help their children stay healthy and grow strong. Some parents have a well-established morning routine, while others struggle to organize one or simply do not try. Julie is one parent who wakes up early each morning to ensure that she has time to prepare a good hot breakfast for her

three children before they leave for school. She also makes sure they are out the door in enough time to be punctual at school.

Other parents try to organize a similar routine but sometimes experience difficulties, such as one parent who speaks about her attempts, "uh I try go get my kids out the door on time and stuff like that but you know you can't get the things together especially after the weekend on Monday...It is a hard time because the weekend and then Monday comes, and God ... school ... I'm not a Monday person!" Other parents did not indicate making any serious attempts to set-up a routine. One parent expresses little concern about providing breakfast for her children and leaves this responsibility to the school, "I'm too lazy in the morning and don't get up ... Well my kids, they don't have breakfast home, they can have it at school [in the free breakfast program]."

One day, in viewing the lunches of some of the students, I was taken aback by the number of sugared drinks and packaged sweets that the parents had given their children to eat. The grade 2 teacher, Kelsey, explained to me how challenging it is for these families on a limited budget to buy nutritious food, and therefore they are often forced to buy cheaper items which are less nutritious. Without access to reliable transportation, the families are not able to take advantage of grocery sales and as a consequence, frequently end up purchasing less costly processed foods which are high in fat and sugar content, or food which will keep longer, while sacrificing fruits, vegetables and sometimes milk. Kelsey verbalizes her concerns that many of the low-income children are not always getting all of the nutrients that they should have in their diet for healthy development.

The families report buying some of their groceries in the small high-priced neighbourhood store several times a week for convenience reasons, including regular purchases of snack items like potato chips and soft drinks. Jane points out the practical reasons why she often does not have milk for her children, "Pepsi is cheaper and it keeps longer." Without access to a vehicle to pick up fresh milk, Jane routinely offers her children soft drinks when milk runs out before she goes shopping again.

Julie and Natalie enjoy cooking balanced meals for their families; the other parents state that they do not enjoy cooking and often eat fried or processed foods that are quick and easy to prepare. Although they live within walking distance to a popular fresh fruit and vegetable store, none of the parents go there. Doug commented on his dental problems which prevent him from eating crunchy foods, such as fruits and vegetables, that require chewing and strong teeth. Consequently, Beth, who does the grocery shopping, tends to buy few of these items that would have been healthy and manageable for her children and her.

It is not surprising that heavy consumption of high fat convenience foods has resulted in a weight problem among many of these low-income families. Lynne's and Beth's children were assessed by their physicians and told that they are overweight. Beth, Michelle and Andrea are also heavy set and get little physical exercise. In contrast, Jill and her son are both lean and physically active. Likewise, Julie is active with her children in various sports, "There's a lot of parents around that sees me always constantly doing things with my kids outdoors... Baseball, soccer, you know. Hockey... Even in the winter time, I go skating with the kids."

Bedtime routines

In terms of establishing bedtime routines and ensuring that their children are well-rested for school, this too is an area of little concern for some parents in the study, while for other families there are well-established routines. Several parents in the study participate in evening activities outside of the home, such as darts, bingo and bowling leagues, and are often out on school nights at their children's bedtime. They also did not have a consistent babysitter with whom they could establish the routines. Jane, however, is one parent who ensures that her children are on a schedule. She describes the bedtime routine as follows "we read bedtime stories every night, we say a little prayer and then we give a hug and a kiss goodnight, and 'see you in the morning'".

The home visits reveal that all of the families have at least two or three large colour television sets with cable, a videocassette recorder and extensive videotape movie collections. Many of the children have television sets or electronic games in their bedrooms and stay up late at night entertaining themselves with these. Natalie has provided her sons with video games, "He's got Sega Genesis in his room so he plays a bit with that." Lynne and Jane have two television sets in their living rooms with one connected to a Sony Play Station video game. Jane reports that she and her children typically watch at least one movie a day, often to settle them down after supper, "It's like a quiet thing they ... they watch a movie."

Lynne indicated that she had purchased 42 movies for her daughter, plus has a similar collection of movies for herself. Jane has over 100 videotapes displayed neatly on three bookcases. The families also rent popular movies and new releases sometimes

repeatedly. The *Titanic,* a movie that was all the rage at the time, was seen ten times by Lynne's daughter and Andrea explained that her father was "supposed to buy it [for her family] hopefully soon! I have rented it 4 or 5 times!" Jane has already purchased her own copy. Although Natalie allows her children to watch television unsupervised after school and in the evenings with no restrictions, she is not happy with that arrangement and says:

> He's gettin' too much into TV. I don't like that. They have cable in the oldest one's room. And cable in the living room. So when they get home, it's usually programs they wanna watch. And then it's supper time and they don't want to tear themselves away from the TV... Then it's like, "oh my, they didn't do homework."

Summary.

The parents in this study have personal resources to support learning, but there are a number of barriers that limit their ability to support literacy skills in their children and establish good health routines. Although they are well-versed with practical skills, they may unintentionally overlook opportunities to facilitate natural learning or to help their children develop specialized skills in an area of interest through enrichment. Overall, the parents have a low level of literacy achievement; some are in the process of upgrading or taking courses, with the primary motivating factor being a desire to be better able to help their children with their schoolwork.

A difficult past has left many of the parents with emotional issues to address. Their restricted financial situation and no reliable transportation prevents them from buying groceries on sale and leads them to often purchase lower cost food that keeps longer, while sacrificing good nutrition. Their entertainment activities are also limited

due their financial situation. All of the families have extensive collections of movies, electronic games and television sets. Their ready availability has the potential to impact on not only homework time, but also other more active and healthier types of leisure pursuits that support learning.

Extend Literacy Activities

Children's language and literacy are shaped by their experiences with significant others in their lives. As they interact with family members they learn how language and literacy are valued and used in meaningful ways for their situation. The parents play a primary role in socializing their children to literate ways. The parents hold specific beliefs about how best to educate their children and extend literacy activities. A summary of the home literacy activities that were reported or observed is contained in Table 4 on the following page. All of the parents state that they have some reading time together with their children, check their children's homework, and talk to their children about their day at school. Some participate in play activities, such as sociodramatic play, play games together or do crafts. With the exception of Michelle, all of the parents listen to their children read. Some of the parents tell stories, use everyday routines like preparing meals or going shopping, or model literate behaviours in the activities in which they engage at home. I discuss these activities in more detail in the next four sections.

Read and talk together.

It is well known that much learning occurs in informal ways outside of the classroom setting. Further, speech and language are important precursors of literacy and the foundations for successful reading and writing. Therefore, both reading and talking

Table 4

Home Literacy Activities Reported or Observed

Literacy Activity	Family[21]							
	Julie	Lynne	Natalie	Beth	Michelle	Jill	Andrea	Jane
Talking to child about his/her day	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Singing together	x			x				
Playing games	x			x	x	x		
Sociodramatic play	x			x			x	
Reading stories	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Telling stories, fairy tales, etc.			x				x	
Writing and/or drawing	x	x		x				x
Making craft items	x		x			x		
Listening to child read	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
Helping child with homework	x	x	x					x
Signing/checking homework	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Shopping/going on outings	x	x		x				
Cooking/baking			x					

[21]Families are named by the female head of the household.

are important for extending literacy activities at home. Natalie and Jill make it a habit to talk to their sons when they arrive home from school. Natalie states "I always ask them how their day was... And how they do on their tests... or "what do you have for homework?"

The parents in the study consistently report that typically the three books that their children borrow from their weekly class visits to the school library are read to them at bedtime. Parental reading styles range from concentrating on the text of the book while providing few comments or questions to a high level of verbal participation with their children around the book, including comments linking the book to the child's real-life.

Reading together affords opportunities for parents to extend literacy activities and for their children to use language in literate ways. Julie stresses that parents "should want to be interested in wanting to read to their children, not just leave it up to the teachers." Natalie reads or tells original bedtime stories a few times a week to her boys while Jill considers bedtime stories a privilege that her son earns for good behaviour that she defines as "if he listens and does as he is told." In his case, he has stories anywhere from one to five nights a week. Jane and Andrea offer stories unconditionally every night to their children. Michelle also speaks about reading her children bedtime stories on a regular basis. Beth does not routinely read bedtime stories to her three children, but generally leaves that task to her husband Doug, who reads to them from time to time. Doug emphasizes that he read more frequently to the children when they were younger and now that they are older and involved in more activities, he does not have as much time to read stories to them.

In the videotaped interaction, Beth reads a story to her children. She makes a few spontaneous comments about the book that she is reading; however, these are not at the appropriate level for her children to grasp or to allow them to respond. For example, when her daughter has a picture of an elephant, she jokes about it and refers to the animal being a "good picture of [candidate] from the [political] party."

Michelle adjusts her story reading behaviour depending on the level of the child with whom she is reading. For example, when reading with her daughter who is only at the beginning stages of reading, she explains, "I read the books to [her] from the library", but for her son who is capable of reading independently, "he reads them [independently] ... or sometimes, we go half-and-half." Pellegrini (1991) points out that when this adjustment is made, it demonstrates that the parents' have a level of competency as teachers. Jill also discusses reading with her son:

> I read them and every so often he'll sit there and he'll ... like if it's an easy, quite easy book he'll repeat the words after me. Now ... he's been bringing home these books from school that he has been reading on his own. Um ... but if it's a long book ... Ah ... Like I get him to pick out the book ... but he's got books up there that are quite long...So he loses interest in the book ... And then he's all over. Like he's not into the story whatsoever. But if I try to stop ... he gets mad and takes a little temper tantrum.

Jane's reading is, likewise, somewhat unnatural and strained. Although, like Andrea, she was not under any apparent time pressure and her daughter is a patient listener, she appears to be highly task-oriented and focuses on getting the book read cover to cover as quickly as she can. Her daughter, similar to Andrea's daughter, remains a passive participant in the experience. There is no dialogue about the content of the book or any attempt to talk about the content and how it might relate to her daughter's life.

Further, she does not discuss the book title or identify the author or illustrator, which would have been familiar literacy events from school. Upon completion of the story, I discussed this exchange with Jane; she indicated that this example was typical of a book reading event with her daughter.

Andrea seems to be far less responsive to her child than other parents in the book reading scenario. In reading one of her daughter's favourite books to her, *Mini Mysteries and Mini Mouse,* Andrea stays focused on the book, only once lifting her eyes from the page and looking at her daughter. In her interaction, she follows the text, and does not stop to answer the questions posed by her daughter nor expand upon the text. She redirects her daughter to the story when her eye gaze drifts, but does not engage her in book reading activities such as asking questions about the story, having her predict what might happen, talking about the characters outside of the textual wording, or relating the story to personal knowledge or life events. She only focuses on the print. Andrea does not pay much attention to the phrasing of the text and her pacing is rapid. She uses only slight variety in intonation with her voice sounding relatively monotone. With very little dramatic effect and the lack of interaction through related book reading activities, the reading seems rather boring. The child's squirming behaviour reveals that she gets restless with her mother's presentation style even though this is a well-liked book.

Andrea does not look upon the home, and more specifically the bedroom, as a potential social context and important venue for exposing her children to literacy, she views the bedtime stories merely for practical purposes, such as a means to help them settle down. She has some reservations about whether this is an appropriate reason to

provide a story to her children, "Sometimes when they are a little bit wound up when they go to bed... I probably shouldn't do this... I lie down there and I tell them a story... or I read them a book."

The parents reveal an awareness of their past literacy experiences and growing up, but frequently fail to see the effect of their early lives on subsequent literacy activities in their own homes. For example, Andrea is also able to draw on her past experience of having been read to as a child and can recite such classic stories as *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, *The Three Little Pigs* or *Little Red Riding Hood* from memory. Jill speaks about having stories read to her at bedtime, and she does the same with her children, but she has no recollection of ever having any fairy tales read or told to her and is unfamiliar with these.

Share in play activities.

Yaden, Rowe and MacGillvray (1999) state that one of the most researched areas of early literacy learning in recent years has been the play-literacy connection. They point out that children often include literate behaviours in their invented scripts and adult mediation will serve to increase the amount of literacy-related play and also help to develop vocabulary.

Julie's role in the sociodramatic play sequence with her two children is limited. While she helps put dress-up clothes together for her son and daughter, and she offers a label for the costume, "You're dressing up as a hobo", she quickly detaches herself both physically and verbally. She moves away from the children allowing them to play on their own. It appears that she sees her role to simply pick up the cast off clothes and

reorganize them for her children. When Julie's daughter's pajamas fall down in one routine, her son points this out to Julie while he laughs hysterically. Julie simply acknowledges the incident with a smile but there is no verbal comment. Julie allows her children to experiment with gender without commenting. Her son chooses to wear a pair of women's high-heeled shoes and his sister's pink nightgown and at another point he pulls a doll, like a baby, from his belly. His younger sister then dresses in her brother's army attire and states that she is pretending to be a boy.

Julie's two children are involved mainly in parallel play with repetitive loops. That is, the activity seems to involve a child choosing something to wear, the mother or child labelling the character portrayed, the children role playing a short stint, the children casting off the clothes, the mother picking up the clothes, and the loop then repeating. Julie remains disengaged and detached with the children's actual play until they start singing rather animated Elvis Presley-like versions of "Jesus Loves Me" and "Jesus Loves the Children". At that point, Julie is quick to express her dissatisfaction and say "Sing like you were taught to sing... come on guys." She then accompanies them to try to refocus them on singing in the more traditional style.

Julie indicates that she enjoys playing with her children and likes to get involved, "Like we'll play house and I'll be the baby." In the videotaped interaction, Julie's two youngest children play a charades board game with her. For the entire game, Julie sits planted on the floor, even for her turns to act out an action, changing the position of her legs only once. When her turns come, she uses just her arms for the actions. In contrast, the children get up from the floor each turn to demonstrate their actions with lots of

general body movement and animation and they use the nearby furniture as props. When her son uses the couch to show balancing on one foot, Julie, who is mindful of the safety hazard responds "Excuse me ... you're standing ... get down. You're going to jump."

While Julie smiles throughout the game and laughs occasionally, her affect appears to be quite flat and her body seems rigid. Overall, she does not appear to be enjoying herself. It seems that she does not know what to do to make the game more fun or involved or to tap into or extend the children's knowledge. She makes numerous verbal attempts to keep her boisterous children calm, by making requests like "Okay settle down." Later, in a discussion about the play routine, Julie states that she never really had much of a childhood and really does not know how to play. Likewise, Andrea remains a detached observer when she is involved in a play routine with her daughter and friend. She puffs on a cigarette and instructs her daughter to "smarten up" when she feels her behaviour is getting too rowdy and she wants her to settle down.

A make-believe play sequence with Beth's family is quite repetitive. They role-play a routine with which the family seems quite familiar; a family member has an illness and visits the doctor. The children repeat the scenario several times alternating roles as doctor and patient, with both parents always portraying patients with various ailments. As the script unfolds, they wait for their turn in the waiting room of a doctor's office for a long period, have a short appointment with a nameless doctor, the doctor prescribes a medication and the patient takes the prescription, thanks the doctor and leaves. It is noteworthy that two of the young children could appropriately prescribe the antibiotic Ceclor for the conditions described by the patients. This is likely indicative of the

frequency with which they had been treated with this drug, as Ceclor would not otherwise be expected to be in a healthy eight year old child's lexicon.

When it is Beth's turn to be the patient and she is called in to see the doctor, she stands up, crosses her arms, makes reference to the immediate event in her role-play as she might as an adult in a real life situation. When the play doctor comes in she sighs, "God almighty... I waited 20 hours out there and 20 minutes in here - God I love doctors. They *love* their money... they take their time!" In contrast, Doug stays more at the children's level by asking them questions that are pertinent to the event at hand and keeps the conversation going. For example, when told he is being booked in the hospital, he asks, "what time?" and when the doctor looks down his throat, he points out, "But you didn't put the light on."

Jill views her role as a strong disciplinarian with her son to set the limits regarding how he should behave at school and with others, including his little brother and parents. To Jill, obtaining behavioural compliance from her son is important for his education. In the videotaped interaction with her son, the two are involved in play outdoors in the backyard, while the father repairs an old car in the driveway. Jill makes sure that her son respects the rules of the game, which means that she sets all of the rules "because [she is] bigger", including who gets the biggest and best toys to use. She is clearly setting the limits and there is no chance of wavering from these or negotiating new terms, even if this is supposed to be a fun play activity. In fact, Jill either fails to even respond to her son's requests like, "I want to use that [squirt gun]" or her responses are blunt refusals with a simple one word "no" when he asks again "Can we trade squirt

guns?" When her son wants to stop this play and says, "I don't want to get wet, I'm cold", Jill's response is simply "Too bad."

This play sequence shows no real turn-taking and the function of Jill's language is to dictate short commands in which she expects immediate compliance without a challenge by her son such as: "Leave it alone", "Turn it on now", "Get away from the trailer", "Leave it by the garbage can", and "Move." In a home interview, the interaction between Jill and her son seems to be disciplinary in nature, with Jill continually correcting her son. When he tries to get up on the kitchen counter to see what is going on, Jill continues to reprimand him like a broken record until he responds, "Please ... No! Put that back. Thank you, you know better than that to be on that shelf. Yes and you know better than that too. Don't you? ... You know better than that, don't you? ... You know better than that don't you?"

Although Jill appears rigid in her behaviour with her eldest son, this may be viewed as her attempt to help her son manage his attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Jill has received some guidance from health care professionals regarding providing high structure and being strict in enforcing rules for helping those with ADHD. Thus Jill's behaviour, such as her repetition of statements and requests, may be her way of follow-through on the management strategies and suggestions she has.

Use literacy in daily routines.

Some familiar everyday routines hold potential as educational experiences. For these households, regular routines include grocery shopping, meal preparation, and meal times. Each of these instrumental activities of daily living will now be discussed.

Grocery shopping

With regards to shopping, Andrea fails to see the purpose of involving her children. When asked if her children accompany her when she goes grocery shopping, she replies, "Don't talk about that! Not any more! ... My father had come up for Christmas one year so my husband wanted to take him out to [the store]. Had fun all right! My husband and father were chasing the three kids while I was doing the shopping." She is adamant that taking children shopping is definitely "not a good idea!" which explains why she usually tries to do the shopping herself.

Likewise, Lynne feels that grocery shopping is not a task to be shared with her daughter and typically her partner takes the shopping list and goes to the grocery store "where it's opened 24 hours. He goes in the middle of the night when he rides the cab on - usually it's every second Thursday. You're looking at 2 - 3 o'clock in the morning."

Meal preparation

In terms of meal preparation, Julie explains: "the kids stay out of the kitchen... they like to help, but I don't let them...They get me all confused when I have three of them there. It's not a good idea here." Similarly, cooking is viewed by Michelle as sole charge for her, with her children being sent out of the kitchen.

Of all the parents, Natalie appears to be the one who has the best understanding of how to use the resources she has to support her children's learning through everyday routines. She enjoys reading recipes in her cookbooks with her children and at least a few times a month they try to make something new. She explains, "I have cookbooks. We'll look through [the recipes.]. Well...I think I can make that. I'll try like the other day. Like

the other day I made la stew...beef stew." She also recognizes the importance of literacy skills for being able to cook or carry out household tasks, "You gotta have those skills [of reading and writing] to cook or do anything. I mean if you wanna follow a recipe, you gotta have those."

Natalie mentioned that she often involves her two sons in meal preparation with her and uses this time as a true learning opportunity, "like I'll say, 'Okay, need a cup of that' and he'll put a cup in." In her videotaped interaction with her two boys, she displays patience and tolerance for little spills and there was much gesture, sharing and talking between the family members. She actively involves both of her boys at an appropriate level for their needs, making the activity literacy-embedded. She later states that her work with those with mental handicaps has given her the skills to know how to break even complex tasks down to a simple level that would be appropriate for her young children too.

Meal time

Julie likes to not only cook well-balanced meals for her family, but also have them eat together at a quiet kitchen table:

> ...we usually sit down but I find - I find if I am talking with them... That slows them down with their eating and that takes them almost a half an hour or an hour to eat... And then their supper, I have to warm it up two times... So...so I try not to uh - like I'll try not to talk because it - what it does to them is that it -it distracts them.

Lynne also says that her family eats meals together, but they don't chat because they like to watch television programs while they eat. Similarly, Beth wants her children to sit together at the kitchen table to eat their meals. However, Doug points out that Beth,

often ends up going in the living room to watch a television program once the meal is on the table and her children typically follow her.

Natalie and Jane disclose that they have trouble getting their children to sit at the table at mealtimes preferring, like Beth, to sit in front of the television. Natalie explains:

> [My son] got some programs. They start at 4 o'clock and they never stop 'til 6... So it's a battle to get him to come to the table. Usually he comes in the kitchen, "I'm hungry Mom. I'm hungry Mom" like for two hours before supper. And soon as supper is ready for him, "I'm watching TV." And I get upset because I don't want them into the TV... The last week's been quite a bit of TV... "

Natalie admits that this routine of having dinner while watching a television show was what she grew up with as a child and she feels it is not appropriate, "It's gotta change 'cause I like supper at the table." She expresses how she likes to talk to her children and sitting with the television on prevents this from happening. Beth also tries to get her family to sit down together at the table and eat. When they are together she indicates, "Oh, we talk... and laugh and we um have... arguing because [my son] had three crackers, [my daughter] had two... stuff like that".

Model literate behaviours.

Although they often engage in literacy activities in their home, parents usually separate themselves in both time and space from their children at these times. Very often they engage in these activities alone after their children are in bed. For example, Lynne states that if there was nothing on television that interested her, she would "sit in the kitchen and do [her] crossword" while her daughter is in the other room. Jane also enjoys doing crossword puzzles and does these several times a week when her children are asleep. Jill enjoys her word search puzzle books when her sons are in school or asleep.

Michelle works on her alcoholism recovery program on the kitchen table while her children are playing elsewhere in the house or watching television downstairs.

Both Jill and Andrea enjoy various crafts by following patterns and directions in books. Jill has four large binders filled with various craft patterns. When the children are present during parental activities, the parents often describe the situation as being stressful because their children are demanding of their attention. For example, Lynne mentions that in the evenings her partner likes to read his *Readers Digest* books or the newspaper, while she is doing her crossword puzzles. Her daughter is then "bugging her father or something."

Some of the other literacy-related activities involve additional people outside of their homes. For example, Andrea sells products from a catalogue home business:

> I sell [mail order Company 1] to a few people coming in and stopping... It's cards and ornaments and a few toys... I used to sell both [Company 1 and Company 2] at once but [Company 2] around here...hmm! I'd get the orders and stuff from people and then they don't want to pay for it when it comes in so I gave it up. I didn't have the money [to pay]. Now right off I collect the money. I send the order in with the money.

Andrea describes how she completes her business paperwork and book keeping at home in the evenings in the living room away from the children.

Beth makes calls from her telephone lists to recruit volunteers for a political candidate in an upcoming election:

> I was on the Calling Committee... [The organizer] said ... "If I give you some more numbers for your area, would you call 'em?" And I said, "Sure... no problem."... So she gives me these bunch of people's phone numbers, eh... when I called for [the candidate] I said... I'm [gives her name], I'm calling on behalf of [the candidate] can we count on your support? Well you get a few that say "Oh yes", or "I'm [political party 1]" or I'm [political party 2] or I don't know or you

> know, ... It's kinda yeah ok whatever... And then ah... I worked the election... I get paid 75 dollars for that!

Andrea indicates that these calls are done while her children are in school and her meticulous notes, lists and records are kept in a secure place away from the children.

Jane is the only parent who mentions deliberately modelling her own reading, writing, or learning or seeing this as valuable to a child's learning. She remarks, "I guess [my children are] like imitating me if I'm having the paper and I'm reading. They see me reading." If they receive a notice from school, Jane states that she consciously reads it in the presence of her children, "'Oh you've got a notice today' and I'll read out loud what the note says... They'll say, 'well what's that?' and I'll explain the note to them." For the church bulletin, Jane states that "sometimes I'll read it in the church and then I bring it home and sit down and really read it when I get home. Sometimes I'll read it with the kids."

Jane goes on to say that to her this type of modeling is the best way that she knows how to help show her children about the value and importance of reading. Some researchers have come to believe in the importance of affect or making literacy enjoyable. They feel that if parents model literacy as something that is enjoyable, rather than a required task, the children will adopt this attitude and be more likely to become engaged in literacy (Svensson, 1994). As would be expected, more enjoyment with an activity could result in added time spent involved in the activity and thereby obtaining additional practice. This, obviously, would result in an increased likelihood of success.

Summary.

Table 5, presented on the next two pages, offers a summary of the perceived support and limitations of low-income parents in providing for literacy experiences in the home. Parents in this study extend literacy activities with their children by spending time reading and talking together, playing together, involving them in their everyday routines and by modeling literate behaviors. Sometimes the parents fail to see the purpose for the child's involvement or presence in the activity and thus limit the activity's potential for extending literacy learning by separating themselves in space and time from the child. The parents may engage in an activity which holds potential for literacy learning, but use it for an alternate means. An example that was presented was Andrea using bedtime stories as a way to calm her children. Another problem is that the level must be suitable for the child and the parents need to keep the activity going by displaying interest, asking suitable questions and relating to the child.

Discussion

The interpersonal interactions occurring in these low-income homes comprise one aspect of the literacy experiences at home. Parents place a high value on educational attainment and support their children by overseeing the completion of their homework assignments and practicing reading with them. Their use of personal resources to support learning in these homes, such as literacy skills and establishing healthy routines, is variable. As outlined in the preceding section, talking and playing with children are not frivolous activities, but ways to help build children's language skills and provide good support for literacy learning. Adult-child language experiences build connections for the

Table 5:

Perceived Support and Limitations of Low-Income Parents in Providing for Literacy Experiences in the Home

Parent Role	Activities in Support of Literacy	Limitations in Achieving School Literacy
Value Education	Support for Homework - encourage and help child - sit with child - provide workspace - support school for keeping child late to finish work	- unable to recognize and capitalize on teachable moments - afraid of doing it wrong, confusing the child or upsetting the teacher - allow television during homework
	Reading Practices - regularly listen to child read - say words child does not recognize	- do not use questioning strategies to prompt for more active learning - emphasize fluency and clear articulation over comprehension
Use Personal Resources to Support Learning	Support for Literacy Skills - eager learner especially for practical skills (home maintenance, crafts, cleaning) or child rearing	- low literacy achievement - emotional baggage interferes - miss opportunities to facilitate naturalistic learning - lack skills to capitalize on learning potential and provide enrichment

Table 5: continued

Parent Role	Activities in Support of Literacy	Limitations in Achieving School Literacy
Use Personal Resources to Support Learning	Establish Good Health Routines - eat healthy meals and snacks - get sufficient rest - balance leisure and school activities	- transportation problems - inconsistent in following routines - financial restraints - lack goals for wellness practices to maximize present and future health
Extend Literacy Activities	Read and Talk Together - regular bedtime story - talk about day at school	- bedtime stories used as a privilege - little dramatic effect - inappropriate for child's age level
	Share in Play Activities - develop vocabulary	- flat affect - disengaged or detached
	Use Literacy in Daily Routines - make and use shopping lists - follow directions and recipes	- unable to recognize the purpose - allow television on during meals - carry out activity alone
	Model Literate Behaviours - read in front of child - do paperwork and book keeping (cheques, forms, cards and notes) - do crossword puzzles	- separate self in time and space from their children - do not show enjoyment or positive affect

child between oral and written modes of expression. Although the parents have ample opportunities to extend literacy through activities such as reading story books, playing together, engaging in everyday routines and modeling literate behaviours, often they fail to recognize opportunities to facilitate naturalistic learning and may miss many teachable moments. In the next section, I discuss the physical environment and how it relates to literacy experiences.

Organizing the Physical Environment

In this section, I look at how the organization of the physical environment can support and promote literacy experiences in the home. I took detailed field notes about the environment to help me develop an awareness of the multitude of challenges and barriers these families face in their environment on a daily basis. Snow and her colleagues (1991) have pointed out how financial and psychological stress and disorganization within homes may serve as underlying factors contributing to reading difficulties.

In the following sections I discuss a variety of aspects of the physical environment. I open with a description of the characteristics of the neighbourhood and follow with more specifics about the housing situation and the use of addictive substances and dangerous items in the homes as they relate to health practices and coping strategies. Although the parents set aside a place for their children to do their schoolwork, there are still limitations in resources in the physical environment to support educational pursuits. I include a brief discussion of resources for writing and artwork, resources for

reading, computers and education-oriented resources, and affordable transportation. The key findings are summarized in Table 8 at the end of this section on pages 206-207.

Present Neighbourhood and Past Locations

Houses in this low-income neighbourhood are situated close to one another and most yards are small. The overall noise level is high with approximately 400 children in this crowded neighbourhood of about 110 homes. The children gather in the open courts or in the park area between the houses. Jill discusses some of the problems, "But like the officer had said the other night ... 99.9 percent of the children in here are all trouble ... In this area, they're all trouble. They think that they rule the neigbourhood. Like the bigger ones love to pick on the younger ones ... "

Natalie wants to earn enough money to enable her to eventually move into a "better neighbourhood" for her children. She complains that she does not like her sons to be out alone due to all of the aggression and violence that they could witness. Natalie wants desperately to move away from this neighbourhood to one that she feels would be a better place to raise her children. Many of the other families also mention that it is difficult for them to have any privacy under these conditions.

When describing the area where she lives, Beth says "And I see too much. And it's really upsetting to me ... You gotta watch your kids. Yeah ... you really gotta go outside ... " She adds, "Like I mean [my daughter] at one time she didn't want to go outside. She'd go outside somebody would pick a fight with her." Then Beth complains that her children are becoming "mouthy" and she blames that on the neighbourhood children, "I think a lot of their attitudes has ... got to do with it around here. I really do."

Beth is considering a mobile home as a low-cost alternative for her family:

> I'm gonna call a friend of mine ... and - and see about a trailer. Like they say, you don't want to move into a trailer park. Well what's the difference, moving into a trailer park or living in one of these places? ... You know ... I mean ... you-you-you tell me, what's the difference? You don't have to associate with your neighbours [in a trailer].

In looking at their lives before moving to this neighbourhood, many of the families had been quite transient. Beth speaks about how her family had lived in one low-rental neighbourhood for a couple of years, moved to another town where they had "a beautiful home" and then moved back to the city. At that time, while waiting for affordable housing, the family of five was forced to share accommodations temporarily with Beth's parents, her brother and her father's friend and three children. Beth recalls vividly the noise and chaos with twelve people residing in one cramped three bedroom home. She explains how they had made a request to the housing authorities. "We asked to be not put back in [the same low rental neighbourhood] where we started but that's where they put us." When their name came up for a home, they had to get out of the overcrowded situation in which they were living and so returned to their old low-rental neighbourhood for a few years while waiting for a home to become available elsewhere. They then moved to their present home in what Beth describes as a "slightly better neighbourhood" than where they had been.

Jane's family had been very transient when she was a child. Although there were a number of moves within the same area which allowed her to stay in the same school, she nevertheless listed six different schools that she had attended. Jane realizes that the

problem was that her parents could not pay their rent when it was due. They would then uproot the family and move to a new temporary home.

Natalie speaks about numerous moves prior to settling into her present home:

> I was in [the nearby village]... Well, before we separated, we lived... with his [her husband's] Mom. Then we bought a mini-home in [trailer park]. And then we separated and then went to [the north end of the city]. And then I went to ... downtown, subsidized units. And then uh - there is so much racket going' on with their father and I that I moved to get some peace. So that's when I moved to [nearby village]. I wanted to get as far as I could - But you know - away from it so I could have time to sort things through with the kids' stuff. So I moved there for six months in a little bungalow...

Natalie believes the impact of this frequent moving was felt by her older son who ended up repeating a grade because he missed parts of the curriculum since the programs were different in the schools, "He was supposed to be done in grade 4 and they didn't do it... It [his cumulative student record] got lost somewhere. It got sidetracked. So he lost out on all that."

Unfamiliar with where to turn for assistance at school, and feeling like she had little or no voice there, Natalie complained to her Member of Parliament[22]. Natalie explains that she was told that if she was not happy with what was happening at that school that she should move to another neighbourhood and enrol her children in another school. This lack of support did not sit well with Natalie, as she pointed out:

> But that there was not the answer. Why should children from this area get less - or settle for less than a child that lives up in the rich part of town. Do you know what I mean? Like a good area? Why should they get it? To me, I feel like the government is a big part of it... And they don't wanna - they don't wanna invest the money at the time in the school here because they are thinking, "oh well these

---

[22] A Member of Parliament is an elected official of the Canadian House of Commons and represents regional and local concerns of the constituents in his or her riding.

> children all come from low rentals. They all come from a family that's on welfare. They're not going to do any better than the parent. That's their environment they live in so why waste our money...taxpayers' money." That's not fair. Not every kid is gonna turn out like that.

Homes

The participants live in subsidized housing, many in small duplexes, with the size of the home assigned dependent on the size of their family unit. Some waited up to four years to move into these coveted low-rental homes. Two of the participants, Lynne and Michelle, are living next door to where they were raised as children. Typically, their homes have three small bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs; a kitchen, living room and entrance way with a closet on the main floor and laundry facilities and a play area in an unfinished basement where the children often keep their toys and ride their bicycles.

None of the homes appear to have any major structural defects or obvious hazards. The kitchen cupboards have been recently replaced in some of the homes and the kitchens in these units were freshly painted in a variety of soft pastel shades. Several of the participants, including Natalie and Jill, maintain their homes in immaculate condition. Jill keeps everything in its place and expects all of her son's belongings to be in their proper place. These women appear to take great pride in maintaining the upkeep of their homes. Another participant, Michelle, had decorated her kitchen around a cow theme with everything from her curtains to canisters and a wall calendar in a designer cow motif.

By contrast, a few of the other homes that I visited are at the other end of the spectrum. For instance, on the first day that I met one participant, I found the home was in disarray, cluttered with piles of clothing, laundry and toys on every flat surface in

view, leaving little available floor space. Moreover, the floor was littered with debris of all kinds, suggesting to me that the room had not been swept in a long time. While moving items from a chair to find a place to sit, the participant revealed that she was in the process of sorting through clothing that her children had outgrown to be given away to charity.

In the course of the interview, this participant informed me of a rather demeaning incident in which authorities from New Brunswick Housing had come by to inspect and had given her a warning about cleaning her premises. As she described, nobody had bothered to discuss with her the reasons for the state of her home. They merely arrived and, in a rather humiliating manner, ordered an immediate clean-up. In my follow-up visits to this home, the cleanliness and organization of the home had improved.

In another home, the parents had also been informed that they needed to have higher standards for cleanliness or they would be asked to move out. Again, nobody had felt it was necessary to discuss the reasons for the state of the home at the time of the inspection. The parents disclosed to me that their son had recently had surgery, leaving them too tired and stressed to maintain or improve the state of cleanliness of their home. Furthermore, some of these participants seemed to have a difficult time complying with these expectations; they were unable to understand why they failed to meet the standards set by the social worker. In retrospect, this seems plausible. For example, when this woman spoke about her childhood, she described conditions where rodents were not exterminated. She recalled "I don't remember much from 0 to 6 [years of age], other then

from 0 to 6, I remember ... going into my bedroom it was - it was bedtime and I'd see rats, I remember seeing rats in my bedroom."

In their initial attempt to comply with the request for cleaning their home, one family sponge-painted the living room walls. It was not until the social worker had told them they would need to mop and vacuum their floors and clean the kitchen counters and cupboards with a cleanser that they seemed to know what tasks had to be done. Once these were understood, they willingly completed them.

Following mention of this unwelcome ordeal of home inspections by a couple of other participants, I reflected on this process of house inspections with the housing representatives. This situation seemed to reveal a structure of domination and the forces of hegemony at work keeping these low-income families oppressed. Housing officials were performing a gate-keeping role by deciding who was permitted to stay in the neighbourhood. I wondered if I also would not have felt uncomfortable, and somewhat violated having a stranger take on a patronizing role in entering my home, and passing judgment on it by telling me if I was keeping it clean enough to keep living there.

I thought about how I would feel if I was told that I had to clean up and they would be returning to inspect again. I reflected also on the variety of homes I had visited in my job working in the community over the years. From such visits, I have found that the range in housekeeping standards seems to be unrelated to class, although it is often possible for the middle and upper class to use some of their disposable income to pay for cleaning services so that they do not have to do the cleaning themselves. Clearly, this whole process of uninvited house inspections is grounded in a political system that

promotes classism and supports conditions that perpetuate a marginalization of those who are dependent on income assistance. Home inspections only happen to those without sufficient income to afford better homes and not live under the authority of social workers.

Despite the often noisy and chaotic neighbourhood within which these families live, they generally try to arrange a quiet consistent place for the children to do their homework in their own homes. Jane provides a quiet room at homework time by turning off the television and sitting with her child on the living room floor. Lynne and Natalie both have a desk upstairs for their children to do homework in their bedrooms and Julie has sturdy child sized plastic furniture in the living room for her younger children to use for their homework. Andrea offers her children the use of the kitchen table.

Personal Health Practices and Coping

At the time of my study, it seemed that all study participants had at least one adult smoker in their home and I noticed that the air quality in the homes was often poor if the windows were not opened. I wondered how many of the parents smoked in the presence of the children, thereby exposing them to this dangerous carcinogen. In my initial interview in this community, the mother sat sprawled across her couch in a nightgown with a cigarette in her hand and an overflowing ashtray beside her. Indeed, smoking was such a natural phenomenon that, as I was setting up my tape recorder, she pushed her large container of tobacco toward me and invited me to help myself. I continued the interview without availing myself of her generosity. Then, she suddenly stopped talking after about ten minutes and asked, "You don't mind rolling your own, do you?" Although

this woman had no qualms about the state of her dress in front of a stranger and she was certainly cognizant of a code of courtesy in sharing, she was concerned about my possible dis-ease[23] with her offer since I had not yet started rolling my own cigarettes. Certainly, it seemed at the time that it might not have crossed her mind even that perhaps I was a non-smoker. Afraid of making my participant feel uncomfortable or of not being accepted because I did not smoke, I chose not to disclose to her that I was a non-smoker.

There was an incident that suggested to me that smoking may be linked to domestic violence in the life of at least one of the participants in this study. When this woman noticed a small round scar on my hand, she asked who had inflicted such a wound and if it was from a cigarette burn. Later, as the interview proceeded with this participant, I learned about the violence that she had endured in her life from her former husband. She openly retold stories of being wrestled and restricted against her will and having her sleep intentionally interrupted. As I listened to her, I found myself undressing this fully clothed being in front of me and imagining scars on her naked body that served as reminders from her years of beatings.

At times, during the interviews, there were incidents in certain homes that caught me off guard when they happened, reminding me that, despite the fact that I was readily able to gain entry to the homes of the participants, I was still an outsider unfamiliar with some of the norms in this community. For instance, while I was interviewing a participant in the middle of the day, her partner arrived home and offered me a cold drink. He

[23] dis-ease is used here to refer to the lack of the sense of comfort or ease.

opened the refrigerator first and then the cupboard and announced, "I have rum, gin and a little vodka left. What would you like?" Then, without missing a beat, he added, "Or would you like a cold beer instead?" Such an offer seems to point to an acceptance of alcoholic substances as part of the normal fare since there was no offer of a soft drink, juice, glass of water or a hot beverage such as tea or coffee. However, it is also possible that this might be a form of courtesy for guests in the home, or a perception that this is what is expected in such instances. On another occasion, while I was videotaping a participant preparing a dessert in her kitchen with her children, her boyfriend arrived and pulled a switchblade out of his pocket. Holding the video camera, I stood frozen in my spot while my heart skipped a beat until I realized he was just being helpful in opening the mail.

Resources to Support Educational Pursuits

Educational resources present within these low-income homes for helping their children are often limited. The reality of those living in poverty is that they do not have the same access to resources or life opportunities as the more affluent middle and upper classes. An inventory was taken to assess which types of household resources were readily available to the children to promote literacy pursuits. The results are presented in Table 6 on the next page. Briefly, all families have pens, pencils, children's books, a dictionary and purchased paper for writing, printing or drawing. Other materials, such as scrap paper, magazines, bible, or newspapers are in half or fewer of the low-income homes in the study. I discuss these results in greater detail in the subsections that follow

Table 6

Availability of Household Resources to Support Children's Literacy Pursuits

Resources	Family[24]							
	Julie	Lynne	Natalie	Beth	Michelle	Jill	Andrea	Jane
Scrap paper								x
Purchased paper	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Pens/pencils	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Crayons or markers	x		x		x			x
Newspapers		x		x	x	x		
Magazines				x	x			
Calendars	x	x			x			
Children's books	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Dictionary	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Bible	x			x	x			x
Computer								
Discussion opportunities	x	x						
Other reading material[25]	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

[24] Families are named by the female head of the household, but also include other members not named.

[25] Other reading material included word search and crossword puzzles, cooking and craft books.

under the categories of resources for writing and artwork; resources for reading; computers and education-oriented resources; and affordable transportation.

Resources for writing and artwork.

Adults may play a role in helping children with their writing through their cultural practices. They may not only provide materials, but also encourage and value children's writing. Yaden et al (1999) suggest looking at how the power relationships at home and school impact on children and their writing. Many of these homes seemed to have a scarcity of materials to support children's literacy development, as these were not visible. Sometimes, it was difficult to find even a pencil or pen in view and children did not have scrap paper available on which to doodle or draw. One parent when asked about pencils said, "Pencils...I don't know where they went...I think they're probably in their [the children's] room now, but... they kinda disappeared."

The families purchase packages of construction paper and loose leaf on which to write and draw, but these are often kept out of reach of the children so as Beth says, "they wouldn't waste it all scribbling." Andrea reports how she dealt with her lack of scrap paper by letting her children doodle on her envelopes, "They love drawing pictures. What they do is use up all my envelopes."

While these families describe having an abundance of crayons and markers, along with pencils and pens, it was not evident and they are often not easily accessible to the children. Jill states that for safety reasons she keeps these items in a container away from the baby. Some of the parents express fears about the children writing on the walls so they keep them out of reach for a purpose. Lynne states, "I don't trust her to keep upstairs

markers and crayons. [I keep them] underneath my TV..." Jill also explains that she does not allow her son to have markers, "because he takes them and writes all over the walls, and floors. He's done that more than once." Andrea emphasizes that when she finds crayons lying around, she gets "mad at them [her children]. I have to buy crayons every two months. Yes, because I am trying to teach them to pick up after themselves. And if they don't do it...in the garbage." Jane mentions "since school started, [her daughter] went through two boxes of 96 crayons... where I don't know where... Well there's some here somewhere... probably in her messy room." In Beth's house, "Right now they don't have any [crayons] because they lost them all. Well they let the kids come in... especially the ones across the road. They come over and destroy them on them... But I'm gonna go and get them some."

I realized that these homes lack scrap paper on which the children could write, draw or simply doodle on the back. Since computers are beyond their means, there is no old computer paper to reuse. Only Jane makes scrap paper available. She has a large roll of newsprint that had been purchased from the newspaper office and given to her. In the course of my study, I provided many of the participant families with scrap paper and the children were extremely appreciative. While I was talking to the parents, the children often drew pictures of their families, favourite television characters, hearts, flowers and trees or wrote short notes with messages like "I love you Mom."

Jill displays some of her children's artwork from school in the kitchen, but there was no other sign of any of the other children's works in view in the kitchen, living room or entrances in any of the other homes. Lynne shares that her daughter likes to write

stories and draw accompanying pictures. When I asked to see something she had made, it took Lynne some time to locate a page that was tucked away under some papers on the kitchen table. Michelle also saves many of the pictures and stories that her children make; she keeps them in her bedroom closet.

Both Andrea and Julie say they enjoy writing. The teachers of Andrea's children marvel at Andrea's fine penmanship and the well-written notes to school. Julie started a journal as a way to relieve stress. In contrast, Natalie reveals that she writes very little, "I wrote a letter I think once in my life. I *hate* writing! It's not something for me...I'd never gotten into it."

Resources for reading.

The families in the study all have a variety of print resources in their homes. Four of the families have members that read the newspaper. Lynne, Beth and Michelle subscribe to the newspaper daily, while Jill has home delivery on Fridays and Saturdays. Jane had been getting the newspaper on a regular basis, but discontinued her subscription because, as she said "I found it-it was getting expensive so I just stopped." Beth states that she likes to read and looks forward to her morning paper, "That's the first thing I do when I come home from [her job delivering] the papers... Sit down and pour a glass of pop and read the newspaper." Her husband, however, says that he only reads the local newspaper a couple of times a month.

Beth mentions, "once in a while I'll splurge and buy myself a couple [of magazines] at the grocery store." Other times she trades with friends. She particularly enjoys the soap opera guides and women's magazines. Michelle indicates that she

purchases women's magazines like *Cosmopolitan* or *Chatelaine* once every few months. Lynne reports that she sometimes picks up the magazines or newspapers that are left in the motel rooms where she works as a chambermaid and she reads these on her breaks at work, but she doesn't bring them home. She explains "The *Enquirer*, stuff like that... People leave them in their room and they're no good... We bring them on dinner times and we have a chance to look at it."

Andrea, the participant with the highest level of formal education of any of the women interviewed, occasionally buys tabloids at the store if the cover story interests her. She has copies of the *National Enquirer* on a table in the living room and talks about "read[ing] the junk papers sometimes... I read the *Enquiry*, *Star*, *Midnight*. I buy them at the store." She states that she does not subscribe to the local or other newspapers, but maybe three or four times a month she buys these "junk papers" for particular stories that she likes to follow, "Well, I don't pick them up all the time. It's only certain stories I'm interested...especially Princess Diana... and [murdered child] case."

The activity of reading, serves as an escape to another world for Natalie, Beth and Andrea particularly when they are reading their favourite genre of romance novels. Natalie articulates:

> I'll read a book. If I start reading it and it's a good book, I'll stick with it and I'll read it... the problem is I won't put it down 'til it's all read. I have to read - I'll read for like five hours at a time. My head's pounding and the words are blurry and I can't put the book down. First thing in the morning, I got the book in my hand...And that's why I try to stay away really because they are addicting. Once you pick one up, you can't. You get right into it. You don't want to put it down. Then nothing gets done.

Jill also talks about escaping with a book when she was a child, "when I was growing up I used to love just to sit down, go home after school, sit down, grab a Nancy Drew book and sit there and read it and not put it down until the book was done!" As interested as she is in reading, she states that she feels time pressures and there simply is no longer the time to relax and enjoy a book like she had done when she was growing up.

Reading for Michelle was difficult when she was a child and she was not interested then in books. But now, as an adult, she turns to reading as a support, "And it gets me through... I get very emotional, um, what it's getting me through now is these [books from the 12-step program about living sober]." Doug reveals that both as a child and presently he "didn't like to write. [And] I'm not a reader either." Jane states that she was not much of a reader as a child and at the present time "I don't read very often, maybe oh, read a book maybe, eh, well I start reading a book and it might take me a month to read it." Nevertheless, she still goes regularly to the library to borrow about three books every month. Typically, one romance novel would be for her and she would read this at night, while the other two books would be ones that she could read to her children.

Table 7, on the next page, contains a summary of the variety of print media that adults in the study report that they use regularly in their homes. In addition to her "junk papers", Andrea reveals that she has "75 romance books up in my room I haven't read yet." She also has been involved in home sales for a general merchandise company and a beauty supply company and has their catalogues and record keeping with which to contend. She does the paperwork when her children are asleep or at school. Julie was just

Table 7

Print Media Used at Home by Adults

Print Media	Family[26]							
	Julie	Lynne	Natalie	Beth	Michelle	Jill	Andrea	Jane
Newspapers		x		x	x	x		
Tabloids							x	
Magazines[27]				x	x			
Catalogues/flyers				x			x	
Church news[28]	x				x			x
Bible	x			x	x			x
Dictionary	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Diaries/journals	x							
Puzzle books[29]		x			x	x		x
Mystery novels						x	x	
Romance novels			x		x	x	x	x
Readers Digest		x						
School books[30]	x				x			
Cookbooks	x				x			
Craft patterns	x		x		x		x	x

[26] Families are named by the female head of the household, but include all adults in the household.

[27] Most popular magazines were women's magazines like *Glamour*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Chatelaine*, followed by soap opera magazines and childcare magazines like *Parenting*.

[28] Church news includes bulletins, newsletters and any other item from the church.

[29] Puzzle books includes crossword puzzle and word search books.

[30] School books includes books for academic upgrading programs or other programs.

starting to get into reading. She struggled in school and is just beginning to read for pleasure. In her academic upgrading, she is at about the sixth grade level. She discloses, "I'm just starting to get into it... I never did before... because I couldn't understand it. It took me a long time to - to understand what it was all about. And now I'm just starting to -uh- starting to enjoy it really." Natalie indicates that she would like to take advantage of garage sales to pick up some books but there are not really any garage sales in her neighbourhood and she does not have a way to get around town to them. Both Andrea and Jane know that that they can access the school library from a notice they got from the school, but by the conclusion of the study, neither one had yet taken advantage of this and stated they were not even sure how the library operated.

Julie points out that she bought books for her children through a mail order book club and at the time of the study had about 25 books, while Natalie was sharing her love of reading with her sons and already her two boys have a collection of 60 books. Natalie reports getting some of her books from yard sales and trading between friends. Jane orders from the book clubs at school usually a couple of times a year. Beth indicates that the total of her three children's collection of books was about fifteen, some of which she had purchased through a mail order company after receiving information flyers and order forms through the mail. Her children also receive books as gifts for Christmas and birthdays. Michelle keeps some of her children's 50 books on the microwave cart in the kitchen and the rest are on a set of shelves in the basement. The source for her children's collection is mail book orders plus some books purchased by her mother. She also borrows books for her children regularly from the area child development centre.

However, she states that if she wants a book for herself, she is more like likely to go and buy it instead of borrowing.

Lynne spent $246 on a series of books that she was saving for when her daughter was older "for when she turns maybe a teenager for how to approach friends at school. And how to pick the bad side or the good side." Likewise, Jill appreciates books as valuable tools for learning. She purchases educational workbooks for her son and also has books tucked away for when her son is older. She adds, "Like every chance I get, I try to get him a different variety of books. Ah whether it's ah... teaching him his shapes, to counting, to ah... how to make pancakes!"

Computers and education-oriented resources.

None of the homes have personal computers which could serve as a tool to allow families to experience other worlds of possibility, at least vicariously. Jane takes the bus to the Parent Resource Centre downtown and uses the computer available there. Both Andrea and Lynne express a deep desire for their children to have access to a home computer. The notion of the computer as an important educational tool seemed to be heavily influenced by its promotion as a learning tool at school. The parents know, however, that they are restricted in purchasing one due to their financial situation.

These parents acquire toys and books for their children that they feel are educationally oriented. Lynne, one of the few participants with access to transportation since her partner drives a taxi, goes to great lengths doing the Saturday morning yard sale circuit to buy books, puzzles and other toys at church bazaars and summer yard sales:

> [I] pick up all kinds of books there and puzzles [at the yard sales]... And she [my daughter] come with me to yard sales in the summer time... My day off, she'll

> come with me... Like she saves up her money and she'll say "Mom let's go shopping at [the yard sale]"... 'cause now they got like a store. The [church] they sell to help families that can't really afford the basics...a shirt they sell it for a dollar... a toy for 50 cents. She goes there and looks at the clothes and toys. To her it's new. It's the first time she weared it [or played with the toy], she says it's new.

Affordable transportation.

Transportation needs restrict the families' access to educational resources by limiting their outings. All of the parent participants mention the lack of accessible public transportation. The cost of travel seems to be a significant issue for these families. Only a few of the participants venture regularly out of their immediate neighbourhood. Their main activity is looking after their home and family and any travel that they take is closely linked to the tasks associated with this role, such as shopping or going for medical appointments. Natalie and Jill state that they own a library card, but no longer visit the library. When they lived closer to the library it was convenient for them to use; now that they live at the opposite end of town, they both concur that it is not feasible to get there. Beth indicates that "it's kind of out of the way... it's way down Main Street."

Those with other means of occasional private transportation, such as Lynne, and Beth who relies on her brother to take her family out on a regular basis, have more outings from the neighbourhood than others in the study. Jill's husband has a truck, but it is not reliable and is constantly needing repairs. When it is functioning, her husband takes her son out to fast food restaurants on the weekend. Jill explains that she does not like taking the bus so simply goes to places where she can walk. Similar sentiments are put forth by Lynne when her partner is not available with his vehicle. Andrea and her

husband have a van, but "it's not on the road" and they do not have the money for repairs. As a result, Andrea explains, the family really does not have much opportunity to go out.

Even though Jane does not read that often, she has a card for the public library downtown and enjoys the privilege of borrowing library resources about once each month. She travels by bus on her own to the library. She has never taken her children with her, but expresses a desire to do so, "they've never been there so that's ah, something I'm going to work on to bring them, cause we do go on outings..."

Jane and Natalie are forced to rely on the limited schedules of public transit to get to volunteer jobs, because they do not have a vehicle and cannot afford to take a taxi. When she has time, Jane volunteers once or twice a week at the [Parent Centre]. Natalie's schedule is tight to be able to complete her full day volunteering and to be home for when her two young sons arrive after school. As she describes:

> I have to take two buses in the morning... Pretty hectic to catch because have to catch this at 20 after 8. The boys leave at 10 after 8. I have to catch it to [the north end] Mall. I have to make sure the bus gets there for 8:30 because I have to transfer onto another bus at 8:30 to get me downtown.

She continues:

> I feel like if I have to go somewheres it's a big rush 'cause I have to be home by 1:30 for [my son]... The buses don't run enough. It's scary - I mean the thought of him coming here and me not being home ... So, for me I would have to leave first thing in the morning to do what I gotta do and make sure I'm back. Like today I went to the grocery store with my friend and it was like looking at my watch. "Okay we only have only got 10 minutes..."

When Beth's friend got ill, Beth's participation in activities outside of the neighbourhood ceased. She reveals, "I used to go to the... Women's [political party]

Association meetings... And I stopped going. Well I stopped cause [my friend with the car] had stopped there cause she wasn't feeling good and I had no other way there."

Without a reliable means of transportation, the children have to depend on activities in their neighbourhood for some diversion from the routine of school and home. Michelle emphasizes that she "use[d] to go to [the] Park a lot with a friend of mine but she don't have her car no more. So that's out of the question now!" She adds that if she had a car the first thing she would want to do is go on a vacation.

Like many of the children in this neighbourhood, Andrea's and Beth's children go regularly to the neighbourhood youth club, which they describe as primarily a social gathering place for children in their community. Andrea is always conscious of finances and she reveals, "Like for me for my...the three kids it's $25. It goes from September 1st of one year to August 31st of the following year... They draw pictures. They can play games. They can listen to music." All of the parents report the Club scheduling more trips outside the area in the summer. Their children have planned activities with the youth club in the neighbourhood and many also participate in church groups. Andrea feels the range of activities offered is quite limited, but being economically dependent, she feels that she has no voice in this matter and has to take what she can get for her children from those who have the power and authority to make the decisions.

Neither Andrea nor her husband are religious or go to church, but like many families in their neighbourhood, they take advantage of the church bus that makes stops in their neighbourhood and allow their children to participate in the "Church up [the] road... they go to [church group] on Wednesday nights and they go to church on Sunday

morning... A bus goes around and picks them up and drops them off." The program offers additional literacy activities as Andrea elaborates, "They have memory verses and stuff they gotta remember... On Wednesday nights they earn badges and stuff." Michelle's children also participate in this church program, but she admits that she uses [church group] as a privilege and says "but if they're bad, I take it away from them." In the summer, special activities are also offered by [church group], although Andrea is quick to point out that like the [youth club], these are limited and she has to accept what is offered since "beggars can't be choosers."

Discussion

Table 8 on the following two pages offer a summary of perceived factors in the physical environment impacting on literacy of low-income children. The organization of the physical environment may have an impact on literacy experiences at home. The neighbourhood and housing offer much more than physical shelter. The parents express an uneasiness about the violence and aggression in their overcrowded neighborhood. Despite the chaos surrounding them, the parents manage to arrange a quiet place in their homes for the children to work on their homework.

Transience in the lives of low-income families due to housing problems, the demeaning process of home inspections in the low-rental homes and limitations in resources to support education affect the social environment of the participants. As presented previously, many of the families lack basic household resources to support literacy like scrap paper, crayons, markers or a variety of reading material.

Table 8

Perceived Factors in the Physical Environment Impacting on Literacy of Low-Income Children

Factors in the Physical Environment	Barriers and Limitations in Achieving Literacy
Present Neighbourhood and Past Locations	- crowded and noisy - small yards, little privacy - high aggression and violence - do not know where to turn for help - transient families - children attend many different schools
Homes	- demeaning and humiliating inspections - difficulty complying with cleanliness expectations - structure of domination - sometimes crowded and chaotic - financial stress
Personal Health Practices and Coping	- smoking; poor air quality - domestic violence

Table 8: continued

Factors in the Physical Environment	Barriers and Limitations in Achieving Literacy
Resources to Support Educational Pursuits	
- Writing and artwork	- need scrap paper - writing resources (pens, pencils, crayons) are not readily accessible - writing, including scribbling, is not promoted
- Reading	- too expensive to subscribe to newspaper or magazines - unable to get to garage sales in other neighbourhoods to access second hand items
- Computers and education-oriented resources	- do not own home computers - need transportation to take advantage of bazaars and sales
- Affordable transportation	- transportation needs restrict access to educational resources - do not have "vacations"

The families use books as tools for learning, and some of the parents purchase books for future gifts for their children including educational series on specific topics. To some of the participants, reading is seen as a support and a pleasurable escape to another world. Although the parents are interested in computers as an educational tool, their cost is beyond the families' limited means. None had computers which would, as mentioned, also have allowed them to open doors to explore other worlds.

The adults have a limited assortment of print media at home. While Michelle reveals that she uses at least ten types of media, over half of the other women use a mere five or fewer types. All of the women say they use dictionaries periodically, but only half of them read newspapers, the bible, puzzle books or craft patterns. Further, the low-income homes are clustered together in their community and the families face limitations in affordable transportation. Thus, they are not readily able to participate in activities that are outside of their neighbourhood with people from other areas. With these limitations, they become more isolated in their community and stigmatized by those who have limited or no contact with them.

Emotional and Motivational Climate for Learning

This section presents five stressors in the emotional and motivational climate for learning perceived to impact on literacy development in families living in low-income circumstances. First, I discuss the stress produced from trying to balance financial and family needs. The impact of health conditions and behaviours on the parents and their children is then featured, followed by discussion on the effect of having a present time orientation. Parental attitudes regarding how children learn and parental aspirations for

their children is then presented. Finally, the importance of meeting affiliation needs concludes this section. A summary of these stressors is contained in Table 10 at the end of this section on pages 243-244.

Stress from Financial and Family Needs

Natalie emphasizes how challenging it is for families struggling to survive where the income from a low skill job is less than what the family would receive being on Income Assistance, "You ... Yeah ... You go out and you get a job and you make $6.50 an hour ... Okay, so you work 40 hours a week ... Okay ... even at six dollars an hour that's 240 dollars a week, well that's about 800 dollars a month." On Income Assistance, this family is receiving 881 dollars per month, plus have their health card. Cheryl Brown, an experienced adult literacy practitioner who is active in New Brunswick's family literacy movement has estimated that in New Brunswick an individual must make at least $13.00 an hour to have the same lifestyle they have on income assistance with their health card (C. Brown, personal communication, March 23, 2003).

Many of the parents have short-term employment in low-skill dead-end jobs at the bottom of the pay scale. They know that their jobs are not secure and they offer little hope for a better future for them. Beth had previously worked "a couple of places as a chambermaid and as a waitress." Doug had worked limited hours for low wages and no benefits at the newspaper stuffing the flyers in the papers. When one parent making minimum wage in her job learned that she would have to contribute to Employment Insurance, she expressed her great dissatisfaction, "so I told them all to go to H - E double hockey stick [L - L]!" and she quit.

Although at one time Lynne had a better job than her present part-time position as a chambermaid, her old position was no longer practical. She explains, "Like I was workin' at this job before this job here - I was workin' at [grocery store]. But the thing is, I quit there because they switched to nights. They called me at 1 o'clock in the morning. I've got a kid. It's kind of awkward to find a babysitter."

Lynne is also aware that she lacks skills and education that could lead her to a position providing economic self-sufficiency to succeed in today's knowledge-based society. She and her partner both have part-time low paying jobs and are struggling to make a living wage. They believe that a household computer would best support their daughter's learning and they are willing to make sacrifices to save for its purchase. They intentionally try to work opposite shifts wherever possible to reduce babysitter costs.

Lynne states that Thursday is her day with her daughter because her partner "Like he won't be home now 'til probably before 4 o'clock or 5 o'clock in the morning." Their time together is limited and Lynne remarks that, "the only thing we do together, is we go down to granny and grampy's." In the interim, until they save enough for the computer, they purchased a small toy one, the Quiz Biz computer. However, they did not buy the cards for it because Lynne assumes that "if we were to buy the games, she wouldn't want to like learn how to spell and do math... 'cause it's got math and spelling and spelling bee and words that - it will say a word and you gotta spell it." Instead, Lynne has her daughter use the toy to practise her keyboarding.

One mother reports that she was involved in upgrading a few years back, but felt the additional demands at home in raising small children plus attending class were just

too much for her to handle. The social workers were pushing her to continue with the upgrading, but she believed that she should be at home and this was causing too much tension for her. She feels they just didn't understand her situation. Consequently, she decided to quit, "So I said, 'piss on you too!' Now I can't stand none of them!"

Similarly, Natalie had started academic upgrading and successfully completed the first level and had planned to continue until she obtained her high school equivalency. However, when she began the next level, she found she could not balance the demands of her life, "And at that time it was too much stress going on with the separation and the kids. And my kids are first. I don't care. They have to be settled. And I know that they are getting what they need." When she felt ready to enrol in a course, she sought assistance from her social worker, who instead told her she should apply for a student loan. Natalie, however, felt that she could not afford to take the risk. She knew she had two young children in her care and if she did not get a job upon completion of her course she would not be able to pay off her loan or care for her children. It was too much of a financial risk for her to take.

Natalie is trying to manage a transition from poverty to self-sufficiency. She describes the obstacles she is encountering in trying to change her life and class position. She complains that she has spoken numerous times with her social worker about various courses to no avail:

> I've always asked my worker, "Is there a course I can take? Is there something I can do to improve myself?"... In four years with them, I went on a six week course...a pilot course... That's *all* they put me through in four years. They had my résumé of all the courses I took for single parents. I took my first aid, my CPR...

Natalie recognizes that her education is limited and she needs volunteer experience before she can hope for any type of paid position since she has no support from Social Services to enable her to enrol in courses being offered. She continues:

> You don't get any further ahead. It's like right now, I'm going to go volunteer full-time ... They only pay so much for childcare. They won't pay for the van to pick up my son at school. That's uh - gonna cost me I think twelve to thirteen dollars a week out of my own pocket that I don't have but I'm going to have to find because I need to better myself by getting this training and getting myself out there.

Jill has worked in a variety of jobs including video stores, fast food restaurants, and a government-sponsored job as a project worker in a school. The latter was aimed at helping her to acquire some marketable skills. Her role was "answering the phones, doing secretarial work, and just being the gopher." Michelle babysits for some of the neighbourhood children in her home after school while Beth holds down an early morning job as a newspaper carrier in her area with a friend. Beth's husband, Doug, takes the occasional odd job at the [arena], working in the coat check. Doug mentions that he once had a job working for a recycling company, but financially it just was not feasible for him to work there and so he quit. Doug tries to dispel a myth about welfare when he states, "Everybody thinks er ... ah ... that we enjoy being on income assistance. I don't, I hate it with a passion. If I had a chance ... I told 'em one day. I said I like to burn it 'cause I hate it so much ... I'd rather be working full time than on welfare."

The participants were specifically asked whether or not they felt their activities were restricted in any way due to financial reasons. The issues explored in the interviews encouraged respondents to make clear references to instances when they had been unable to do something they wanted to do. Beth states that it was hard for her to manage

financially. She feels that something beyond her control that cost money was "always coming up" with one of her three children. For example, her eldest was scheduled to start an anger management and violence prevention program and she had to pay the registration fee of $64.

For others, it was difficult to determine how much impact that finances had upon their perceptions of their opportunities as many of the participants appear to accept their situation. For example, Beth says, "you learn to live with what you have... what else can you do?" In discussing Easter gifts for their three children, she is clearly shopping around and looking for the best deals:

> You know I was gonna get them a splash suit. But I've called [Store 1] and they want $25.97. And I called [Store 2] and they want $29.99. So, I'm going to see... I think [Store 3] had them on sale. So what I think I'm gonna do is I'm gonna call [Store 3] and if they are on sale, I think I'm gonna get them that.

Financial matters remain in the forefront with Beth and Andrea. Beth talks about how many things that she cannot afford and her need to follow a budget. Her children participate in baseball in the summer and a reasonably priced bowling league through the year. Andrea is cognizant how her limited finances restrict her children from participating in some of the activities that she had enjoyed as a child, such as girl guides, or from frivolous purchases, "[My daughter] wanted me to pick her up one of those glass balls with the ladder in it at Christmas...And I priced it... I don't think so! I could buy three outfits for that price!...$77!" Andrea knows that she must depend on activities that are less costly for enjoyment. When asked if she ever goes to the theatre to see a movie she replies:

> No! It cost eight bucks for an adult and then half price for a child under 12 and then plus they'll want popcorn... and pop and chips. So what I do when I want to see a movie that comes out I go rent it and I'll go get some pop and chips and popcorn and we'll sit at home... I'll be married 14 years in February...not February but June...And my husband and I - and we knew each other for a year before that - and my husband and I only went to the theatre once.

Andrea also speaks proudly about what she and her husband are able to do to save money, "My husband does a lot on his own... Like my washer or dryer breaks down, we don't have to call a repairman. He fixes it himself... Like he doesn't have a license for it. We save $35!" When talking about her own attempts at saving money, she states, "Well I can buy them [romance novels]. There is a place in [the city] you can get them three for a quarter... and some of the books are worth $2.99 and $3.99... So usually what I do is when I get two or three dollars, I'll go up and buy them and put them away." Lynne also marvels over her ability to get her partner his coveted *Readers Digest* books from a neighbour, "She gets them. When she's done with them, she passes it on to me. He saves them. He collects them."

Beth is careful in her grocery spending. She describes how she and a friend with a car make a day of grocery shopping when she gets her government cheque:

> Oh we get the flyers. Like I get the newspaper too. So what we'll do is she'll check her flyers and then I'll look at mine and I'll say... well jeez they've got this on sale at [Grocery store 1], I wonder if that's a good buy? Well wait, we'll go to the [Grocery Store 2] cause sometimes they might have it a little bit cheaper...

Doug admits that finances have an effect on his family's activities. He wants desperately to be able to go on a vacation with his wife and children. As he says, "summer's so beautiful - stuck around here. There - there is times that I'd like to take the

kids and go... but different spots, but... I'd like to go away. I really do. The only thing that's stopping me from going away is money."

Although finances also limit what these families can do, some mention the simple activities in which their families engage. Julie reports "I enjoy doing things...exploring things with my children. Like during the March Break, we went um...outdoors and we made a snowman...tried to make a snowman. It took us almost an hour because the snow was soft..." Jill admits that she finds it hard to bring her son to public places:

> Just me and him - me taking him out into a public place. To the mall, for ice cream, and to the corner store... it's a no, no. Because I try to explain to him before we have to go somewhere, "Look... Mom doesn't have the money today... but... when Mommy has some extra money, Mommy will buy you a treat." He'll stand there; he'll take a temper tantrum.

Doug takes great pleasure in the low-cost activities for himself "I like to play cards. I enjoy that. Somethin', somethin' different. It's cheap... It only costs $6 to play. I enjoy it." Natalie also manages well from day to day by cutting her cable or telephone service if she is running short in her finances. However, she states that she needs help to manage at Christmas, "Christmas time is very hard - very hard. It's the only time of the year that I will ask for help though. The rest of the year I will survive."

Impact of Health Conditions and Behaviours on Family Members

The prevalence of physical and mental health problems in these low-income families is staggering, as shown in Table 9 on the next page. Without a doubt, these problems influence the atmosphere in the home and the psychological well-being of both the children and the adults. It should be pointed out that there is at least one smoker in each of the homes. Consequently, all of the children are exposed on a daily basis to

Table 9

Prevalence of Health Conditions and Behaviours in Families

Health Condition And Behaviours	Family[31]							
	Julie	Lynne	Natalie	Beth	Michelle	Jill	Andrea	Jane
Smoking	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
History of drug or alcohol abuse – parent		x	x		x	x	x	x
Sub-acute condition[32]– parent				x			x	
Sub-acute condition[32] – child	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Psychiatric disorder[33] – parent	x		x	x				
Parasitic infection[34]							x	
Learning disabilities			x	x	x	x	x	
Obesity – parent				x			x	
Obesity – child		x		x				

[31] Families are named by the female head of the household, but results reported include information on all family members.

[32] Sub-acute conditions in this study include chronic health conditions such as asthma, diabetes and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

[33] Psychiatric conditions include multiple personality disorder, manic-depressive disorders and obsessive-compulsive disorders.

[34] Parasitic infection includes head lice.

second-hand smoke. The link between the hazards of second-hand smoke and asthma has been well-documented in the health literature. Further, many of the children have also been diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and half of the children are reported to have learning disabilities.

In the adult participants, there is a high incidence of psychiatric disorders among the women in these families. The management of unstable mental health or sub-acute conditions, such as asthma, can be demanding on family members and affect the overall family functioning. Undoubtedly, the socialization of children in homes with parents suffering from emotional problems has an impact on the children. Julie recognizes this when she says, "My husband that's all he kept saying is how it *doesn't* affect them. It doesn't affect them. I said, 'Excuse me.' I said, 'I am the mother.' And I said, 'I see it. I feel it.' And I said - and I said - and I - and I said, 'it does, I can tell just by their actions.'"

Parents.

The preponderance of health conditions in the low-income parents cannot be overlooked. Some of them suffer from physical ailments. Michelle complains about limitations from her heart condition and Andrea was forced to discontinue her volunteer work at the school due to problems managing her diabetic condition.

In the present study, many of the parents disclose having psychological problems; these presumably interfere with their ability to find or keep a job as well as their general parenting. One participant who had grown up in a home with a strict alcoholic father had

been in treatment herself for an alcohol addiction. She indicates that in their adult years, she and all five of her siblings have had problems with alcohol addiction. She claims:

> I wasn't a drinker, I use to drink socially, never, never drink in front of my kids until I met my ex... and he was an alcoholic. And it was either like join him or leave him or join him, something like that, I don't know the saying but anyways, more or less I joined him and I shouldn't have. But I never drank like you know until he started drinking and then I started...

At the time of the study, this mother was involved in a treatment program. Her ability to work and play with her children varied, "Sometimes I do [work or play] sometimes I don't, just depends on my mood I guess." She reveals that she had been working on her own to overcome her alcohol addiction and had left the alcohol successfully for six months, but circumstances in her life created so much stress for her that she turned back to the alcohol as a way to try to help her cope with the reality of her world, "I started getting well. But when I found out about [my youngest daughter] being uh -uh- being uh really uh - not advanced, but devanced or whatever like she's not comprehending and just a whole lot of problems piled up, so I kind of like slipped." She goes on to say, "My middle child, she goes to Mental Health... it's just counseling... She was sexually molested... I just found out, but I knew, I knew... She blurted it out at school and uh... I had an idea anyways." She said that her sister had been molested by the same family relative and when he died, her sister "never knew until he died, then she started having flashbacks."

One could see the pain on this woman's face as she tells her story and I could hear the guilt in her trembling voice from not having acted on her suspicion about her young daughter being molested. Eventually, alcoholism overtook her life and she had to check

in to an alcohol detoxification program. Although she puts up a front in public, she cares about her children and knows she has to get past this addiction to parent them properly and recognizes that she could not do it on her own. Beth also discloses that she has just recovered from a complete "emotional breakdown a few years ago" and was now "on the right track again".

Another participant gave details why she cannot do some activities with her children, "I've ahhh...gone through a bad depression... so I just...But I'm starting to - I'm starting to slowly come around." She later adds, "Like it took me a long while to uh - took me awhile to just trust people." She was being followed by a specialist in psychiatry from out of province and had been diagnosed with multiple personality disorder for which she was seen for weekly therapy. She attributes the cause of her present problems to her traumatic childhood where she suffered from physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Although she never named her condition as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, her descriptions parallel those of the women who experienced violence in Horsman's (1999) study and it is possible that this was the cause of her struggling. She describes the situation in her childhood, "Yeah like my mother she left my father because he was very abusive and alcoholic and - and she left him and um - met somebody else." Her large family of twelve children was split in pairs and sent to various foster homes when she was seven years of age.

This participant spent her formative years after the family separation with another sibling in a foster home; she saw her mother on occasional visits each year and had no idea where her other siblings were living. Eventually, the children were brought back to

her mother, who had remarried and began a new life. She was one of the last ones to return to her natural mother because her foster parents had fought to try to adopt her and her sister. She continued, "I never had much of a background. I never had much of ahhh...upbringing there. It was a struggle... So I'm just starting...I'm just learning now. I find it's like at times there it can be very hectic and overwhelming... especially if I'm going out."

With limited marketable skills and low education achievement, Natalie is the first to admit that finding employment will not be easy. However, she realizes that she not only needs the financial benefits of working, but the consequences of working. She wants to feel useful and productive in completing tasks successfully, and more importantly she sees a need to extend her social networks.

Natalie strongly believes that employment would go a long way in helping her with her psychiatric condition beyond all the medication that she has to take. She therefore sees work as a personal need and knows there will be some sacrifices that she will have to make. There are a number of obstacles, including the time-consuming public transportation system and her limited education, that make it a challenge for her to get the volunteer experience that she sees as a stepping stone to eventually finding gainful employment:

> And I am prepared this time because I have already been down that road. And I know how financially it affects me. 'Cause it already affected me when I went to upgrading. So I know this time what's in store for me. I'm not going to rely on anything. So it's going to be hectic but I need to do this for me. And then I need to have a job. I need to get out there Well it's going to give me experience... And if I do well, it will give me a good reference. It will further me.

To Natalie, the key to making this work lies in her organization:

> Once I get the routine down, I'll be okay 'cause I like to be organized. I'll prepare the night before. I mean their clothes are always laid out for them at night before I go to bed. Their lunches are always made at night in the fridge because I am not a morning person ... I need to get up and have my coffee. I try to get up before them.

One mother's recollections of her early years in school were of a very trying period for her mental health. Her experiences were anything but playful and positive. As she says, "I wasn't allowed doing anything." She retold stories of abuse at home and the physical pain and mental anguish she was forced to endure as she slowly withdrew:

> So for me in school, I was not there ... Like ... Ah ... there was ... all types of abuse. You name it, it was there ... Grade two, I can remember sitting at the kitchen table ... trying to do my math homework. I had asked her [stepmother] how to do it. She took my thumb, took it back and broke it. Um ... like it's all just little things that kept on building up and building up and by the time I was in school I was so frustrated like in grade 5, I only passed one test out of the whole year.

When asked if she got any extra help at home, she replied that she was punished and spanked when she didn't succeed and that to her stepmother, whom she only learned at 16 years of age was not her real mother but a relative, "I was ... the pile of poop!"

She then described the situation with her own mother:

> Mom had her first child when she was fifteen and had to give it up for adoption cause she was sent to Montreal ... That's what they had to do back then. Then Mom got married, had two kids, which was one brother and one sister. Divorced. Ended up with three more kids. All had different last names. Except two more of them had the same last name. And then all of a sudden, I'm in the picture. And I'm under the married name.

Participants in the study who are parents and who suffer from various psychiatric disorders, reveal that they feel social workers and others trivialize and misunderstand their illnesses and the effect on their children. This is summarized best in a quote from

one parent, "Like I've got a [Child Protection social] worker involved with me and uh – and we all had a meeting at the school. But they just don't understand it. I'm trying. But sometimes I just can't [do what they are expecting me to do because of my illness]." Another participant speaks about the aggressive and physically abusive actions that her child has witnessed and the effects that it had on him, "Like he's uh - he's uh...seen like with his father... me being pushed away all the time... And - and he's seen that. He's grown up with that. That - that really done something to [his mental health]."

These participants also add that they do not feel that they are treated respectfully by social workers. They cite examples of trying to contact them and finding the social workers have been reassigned to other cases and nobody had made any effort to inform them of the change. Natalie mentions that she had six different social workers in four years and partly because of all of these changes and constantly having to "tell [her] story", she finds it difficult to rely on people in positions of authority.

Beth discloses that she feels her social worker does not understand her complicated life, nor realize what life is like for her raising three children in poverty. She comments:

> I haven't been feeling good. I've been nursing a headache for over a week... Okay... [my son] was in the hospital on Monday and had surgery done. Okay, by the time I got home with him... You know... I was tired... Like I'm up like I said at 4:30, I go do the papers, I get the kids off to school... Well sometimes I don't feel like cleaning the house... Instead [the social worker should be] finding out, you know, what the main cause of... why the house looks like this.

Children.

Many of the children in the study also suffer from health conditions; chronic conditions like asthma and attention deficit disorder are common. Jill describes the types of health problems that she has been through with her older son when he was young:

> Well when he was 18 months old, it's when everything started. He ended up with double pink eye. He ended up with double ear infections, throat infection, and high fever. They put him in the hospital. He ended up being there for six days because there was some air going to him but not enough...Now, gradually after a little while I got used to it like I was able to go again. Uh - see their main concern of when they do put him in is that when he gets a fever, it won't break. He's gone to 105!

Jill also outlines how she feels that others are looking at her as if she doesn't know what she is talking about and is overreacting when she brings her son to the doctor,

> [I] take him in there [and the doctor says] "Oh no he's fine." Like there's a few times that I've taken him into the doctor's office and explained to the doctor what was going on. Oh he's fine all right... End up in Outpatients that same night and they admit [him]!"

Jill wants to make a better life for her children than she had and she enrolled in academic upgrading at the Community College. At the time of the study, she had to leave her course to care for her sick child. Her infant son also has his share of health problems and at one month of age he spent time as a patient in the hospital for an extended period. She describes how Public Health staff questioned how she deals with these health issues with her children, and as a result she is being given support from a Public Health nurse to come to her home. Jill feels she was doing fine on her own with the baby, but admits that her older son is a challenge:

> So anyways I ended up having the Health and Community Social Services at my Door... And I'm saying, "like what's this for?" Now I'm stuck with the Public Health coming into my house once a week to do observations on [the baby] and

> they try to help me to correspond with [my older son] cause they know that just dealing with him alone is 20 times more stressful than it is just taking care of the baby.

Jill states that she is tired of trying to sort things out with her older son and really doesn't know what more she can do. She shows signs of frustration in dealing with him, "I'll tell him something... and five minutes after, he's back to doing it again... I keep telling him the dangers of what he does and he just doesn't seem to want to realize... that there is dangers involved. Like, and I'm at my wits end with him."

At the time of the study, Jill's son, as well as Julie's son and eldest daughter, and Jane's eldest son were all being treated for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Jane's son has an additional diagnosis of Tourettes Syndrome and she also describes him as suffering from "a lack of memory [and damage affecting] the left side of his brain." In describing his conditions, she readily rolled off her tongue the names of the three drugs he was prescribed, one of which he has been taking since he was four years old. Jane adds that her son has been a "handful" and monitoring her son's drug regime requires vigilance because there have been a few incidents, "We had to take him off because there's too much, si-side effects for him. He was uh - really off the wall and out of control at school so we had to take him off his anti-depressants. He was taking outraged burst fits... tantrums." She states that her son has regular appointments at the Mental Health Clinic after being referred by the social worker. His treatment also includes courses in anger management and violence prevention.

Andrea, Natalie and Michelle all have children with learning disabilities. These children are receiving a variety of support services each week at school, such as speech

therapy and occupational therapy from support staff that travel to the school. Additionally, the children each have individualized special education plans and receive remedial programming from Tess, the Methods and Resource teacher at school.

Like many families with chronic health conditions, Andrea and Beth recognize the need for their provincial health card to cover their medical expenses, which is provided to all low-income families at no cost. Andrea reveals how she feels trapped, "You can't... being on welfare... ok... you can't get ahead. If you're working... you lose your white card... your health card." She recognizes that both she and her children have long term health needs and need health coverage "for the sicknesses" to ensure that she can get the prescriptions and health care that they need. Andrea knows that she cannot cover health costs on her own, "Like I'm a diabetic and for the month of February I am lucky I have a drug plan because the test strips and stuff for my blood machine come up to over $400!" She also faces ongoing expenses for her children's care. Both of her special needs children are scheduled for regular medical follow-up at an out of province pediatric clinic, "they go every 18 months to two years... I don't have to pay nothing... I take the train down and take the train back."

Like Andrea, Beth relies on her health card to cover the costs for expenses that she incurs related to a health concern with her son. Some inconclusive test results suggesting that her son might have cancer set her into turmoil. When she planned the out-of-province trip to see the specialist with her son, this required a considerable amount of organization on her part:

> I had to call [our Member of the Legislative Assemby (MLA)[35]] to speed it up so I could get my voucher. Then there was the shopping for underwear and pajamas for both of us ... I had to buy a couple of new T-shirts. And he wanted a toy to take, so we had to go to another store ...

Present Time Orientation

An interesting finding is how the lives of the low-income families in the present study appear to be predominantly orientated to the present time and space. Their reality encourages them to live in the here and now with a kind of innocent simplicity dealing with one immediate crisis after another. This was readily apparent in the early data collection when the parents were not at home when I arrived for scheduled interviews. When I first began scheduling appointments, I had assumed that it was courteous to allow some time after my call before the interview and so I scheduled appointments for at least a few days from the date of the telephone contact. When I arrived at the agreed upon time, the parents were often not at home. There were no notes of explanation posted to give reasons for their absence nor telephone calls as to why they had to cancel the appointments.

Sometimes I questioned whether their behaviour came from growing up in a family where calendars and day planners are not important, not modelled, and not seen as having a purpose. At other times I thought their absence simply had to do with their priorities; my study was just not important to them. When questioned about their absences, one parent mentioned that she had accompanied a neighbour to the hospital and another had helped a friend to pack her belongings in preparation for a move. Later, I

[35] An MLA is an elected person in each electoral district that represents constituents' views in the provincial legislative assembly, and participates in committees and debates on provincial legislation.

reframed my thinking about their behaviour, which I had erroneously interpreted as a sign of the parents being unreliable. I then concluded that what I observed was simply a sign of our differing temporal and spatial perspectives. While I am planning for the future, they hold to a present time orientation. Once I learned to accept their time orientation, rather than try to impose mine, I called at times when I was prepared to drop whatever I was doing and go immediately to their homes for an interview.

I learned that their time and space orientation also play out in school and cause conflicts there. Teachers describe students who are not punctual day after day, and their parents who arrive unexpectedly at school, are seen as rude and inconsiderate. The teachers consider this to be unacceptable behaviour. Sometimes what happens is that the parents become engaged in an activity that was important to them at the time (a present time orientation) and simply miss the appointment or meeting (future orientation) at school. At other times, there is an all-consuming crisis with a relative or friend that may suddenly change their path. Teachers erroneously interpret these no-shows as not caring. In the reality of their world, these parents simply do not follow the school clock or an agenda as the teachers do.

I note that only a few of these homes have calendars that are visibly displayed. The families appear to not receive the plethora of free calendars like the middle class from their insurance companies or financial institutions. None of them has personal insurance and when it comes to their use of banks, they are not regular clients. Although they have bank accounts, they tend to use the automatic tellers at the corner store to cash their cheques.

Michelle has an expensive calendar purposely chosen to match the cow décor in her kitchen, but it is not turned to the correct month. She says the reason she keeps it on the selected page is because "I like that cow with the shades... he's so cute." Julie's home has a calendar hanging on the living room wall and it too is off by several months. This is also a purchased calendar that contains religious sayings that Julie says inspire her. In her case, she keeps her calendar on the page with the saying that is most meaningful to her. Lynne has a free calendar from a service station tacked well above her daughter's eye level on the living room wall. Her partner, a taxi driver, received this from a station where he regularly purchases gas for his taxi. None of these calendars has any markings on them.

It is noteworthy that not one of the other homes has any calendars displayed conspicuously in their living rooms or kitchens. It is therefore not surprising why many of the families miss events at school if they are not noting these in writing in a systematic way or even being aware of the day of the week. In one interview with Beth, when she realizes the day, she says, "Shoot. I was supposed to go to the school last night...Oh...I forgot all about it." Then she starts having doubts about the day of the actual event, "Or is it tonight?" On another occasion, Beth announces, "Actually I gotta call the dentist again cause [my youngest daughter] got a dentist appointment and I can't remember what the date is." Another parent says, "she's moving... tomorrow... There's a - what's today ...Tuesday or Wednesday?...See, I've lost a day cause I thought today was Tuesday."

Although the families all have radios, they say they rarely listen to a news station. On my visits to these homes, I noted that the local country music station was often

playing on the radio. Lynne's husband pointed out that he listens to the news occasionally while he is driving his taxi. In general, many of these families seem quite oblivious to not only events of the world, but also to local news until they touch their world in a more direct way. For example, in the course of the study, a city-wide recycling program was implemented. The program had a long lead-up time before actually commencing. Flyers had been distributed to homes and there was ongoing discussion in the media on how to sort the garbage and the corresponding garbage bag colour to use. For Julie and Michelle, this was a stressful time. They both indicated in interviews how difficult the sorting was going to be for them; they clearly had not paid attention to the information on the program when it was initially presented and then panicked when they realized they had to begin the program.

Finally, in terms of their sense of time in the day, it is commonly based on television programs or knowing when certain routine events occur such as when their children come home from school or go to or return from the [youth club]. Jill and Natalie are the only two parents who wear watches. In Natalie's case, this is not at all surprising, given that she appears to be the most future-directed. Her image of a brighter future for her children has a dramatic effect on what she chooses to do in the present. She is the only participant who appears to see a clear connection between her goals and what needs to happen to turn her goals into her reality. Natalie speaks about having "a master plan" to ensure a brighter future for herself and her children. She highlights that she is being careful not to miss any opportunities that might present and she is not letting any obstacles get in her way.

Parental Attitudes

Leichter (1984) shows how parental attitude towards literacy and parents' aspirations for their children must be taken into consideration when looking at the emotional and motivational climate in the home for learning. Meanwhile, Snow and Tabors (1996) highlight how familial behaviours and characteristics promote literacy achievement in children. Scarborough, Dobrich, and Hager (1991) report that children of parents with poor reading skills become poor readers in school because they are exposed to less reading and book experiences and lack special routines for book sharing at home. In contrast, their findings show that children of parents with at least average reading ability acquire more positive attitudes about reading, are exposed to more reading and become better readers in school.

Beliefs about how children learn are closely tied to child rearing philosophies, influenced by that which a parent has been exposed in his or her own upbringing. To generalize, parents in this study do not see learning as a continual, naturally occurring process inherent in daily activities. They hold to the belief that what is learned in school is important and must be done in a certain way or harm can ensue. Therefore, some of them are reluctant to work with their children and do not prepare them for school, for fear they would, as Andrea describes, "do it the wrong way" and they want to make sure that the teacher does it "the right way." The reality, however, is that these parents may be unwittingly jeopardizing their children's potential. By having them start school at a disadvantage compared to those children who have been exposed to a variety of school-like activities, these low-income children may potentially face greater challenges ahead.

Natalie describes a difficult life growing up in a large family with a mother who was not well and did not have time to spend with her children. "We had it hard. My mother had five of us. My mother was quite sick all her life. It was very difficult. She had cancer. She had open heart surgery. She had migraines. She was 42 when she passed away." At 16 years of age, Natalie severed all ties with her family, with the exception of her younger sister who has special needs. Natalie held various low-skill jobs including chambermaid, waitress, cook, and sales positions before she was married. After she got married, her husband brought in a steady income and she did not have any financial worries. Fear of poverty, however, kept Natalie trapped in a violent situation. She says she had never planned to be living in a low-income situation, but she knew that leaving her husband and getting out of her marriage was the right thing to do for her and her sons even if it meant going on public assistance.

Natalie understands that leaving her husband precipitated her situation, but she considers it to be temporary. She takes her own initiative to try to get out of poverty and to give her sons "what all children deserve." Her life resolves around her two sons: "I try to give them ...what they need and then some because I didn't have it growing up." Natalie plays a strong role in encouraging her younger son: "You don't know how to read? Oh yes you do! You're learning to read. Oh yeah. It takes time. Remember what I said practise and practise and practise and it gets better every time you practise."

Similar to Natalie, Michelle also recalls limited involvement of her parents in activities to prepare her for school, "Uh I didn't know much in grade 1. I didn't know my numbers, my letters, nothing. Uh my mother didn't teach me." She admits that she does

not know what to do with her own children since she has no role model from her childhood. Michelle explains, "That's why I found it difficult, when my kids were in school. When I started doing homework with him, it was hell! I yelled!" Dedicated to her family, Michelle indicates that her prime motivation for going back to school is a recognition that she does not have the skills to work with her children and she "need[ed] something because [she] just wouldn't have been able to handle it." Now, after having completed some parenting courses and academic upgrading, she believes it is much easier working with them; she feels she has acquired some of the skills that are needed.

The personal histories of the individuals in this study highlight the ways in which literacy is a part of their home life. As Potts (2003) points out, "Every family lays its own path to literacy, and some families develop a sophisticated road map. Others do not, but depend upon the system to develop a plan for them." There is no consistent profile. They all recall some early experiences with literacy. Some participants speak about hearing stories being told or read to them by older family members, while the earliest recollections of activities associated with literacy by other parents centre around experiences with literacy when they enter school. These findings are consistent with those of Morawski and Brubaker (1993) who found in their study that proficient readers recall their first reading experiences as preschoolers with a parent at home, while the earliest recollections of remedial readers are with a teacher in school.

In general, with the exception of Andrea, the dominant recollection is that of learning primarily to read in school. Although the parents speak about activities outside of school or prior to school entry that might be considered school readiness activities or

precursors to literacy development, the parents did not consider these to be as important as what happened within the school walls. For those who had difficulties in school, they are quick to blame their impoverished home life. They also point fingers at the teachers, claiming poor teaching resulting in school failure as the reason why they had not learned to read well or become a high academic achiever. They report that rarely were they given extra help.

In examining the emotional and motivational climate for learning in their homes, it was clear that many of these parents are survivors of abusive childhood experiences, suffer from various health conditions, or live in arrangements that are emotionally less than ideal. The silence and intimidation suffered by Andrea is not openly expressed. She is cautious to meet with me only when her husband is not at home. On one occasion, however, he arrived unexpectedly and Andrea signaled for me to leave immediately. While she had never described her living conditions, it is apparent that her husband does not trust strangers in the home alone with his wife. As I hastily departed, I overheard Andrea trying to explain my presence to him, "What? She's just a student doing a project."

Results from this study reveal the language variability in the parent-child interactions. Natalie's use of language in her interaction is the richest in terms of content and most varied in terms of purpose. Natalie seems to be highly responsive to her children in the exchange. She not only comments on what she is doing as she is preparing a dessert with her two boys, but she answers their questions. She keeps the conversation

going by asking them questions throughout the activity, ensuring that the boys are fully engaged, and by expanding upon what they say by adding new information.

While the activities selected by the parents vary and may account for some of the differences in the interactions, there are opportunities for parents in book reading exchanges to predict or relate events to real life experiences. However, the parents speak predominantly about the story events, without pausing for discussion. When Andrea is given a book, she appears to have the single goal of reading the required words on each page from start to end. She fails to engage in book talk that might include a discussion of the title, author, illustrator or genre. When her daughter begins chatting, Andrea quickly tries to refocus her on the task at hand, simply listening passively to her mother read.

As already stated, the parents in the present study verbalize that they care deeply about their children's education and articulate to me that they want them to be successful in school. Andrea is the one parent who mentions a specific goal in relation to her aspirations for her daughter beyond high school. Already having two children with special needs in the family, Andrea's youngest daughter is her shining star. Andrea provides numerous examples to show that she recognizes her daughter's ability, "She brings home the book. Oh I can't remember what it's called...the green duotang[36] I think twice a week. They have problems to do. Not very often she gets any wrong."

Andrea also notices her daughter's ability at home, "She can pick up anything real easy... I have a certain way of doing *Goldilocks and The Three Bears*... And I told it to her many many many times and if I miss something she'll say 'Mom you missed

[36] A duotang is a loose leaf cover with fasteners that allow pages to be readily added or removed.

this...you missed that.'" In her explanation, Andrea offered a comparison of her children: "I'll read to them. And I'll pronounce a word the wrong way... Oh she will get mad at me [and be the one to say] 'Mom, that's not the way it sounds!'" Andrea also recognizes that this more precocious child is interested in learning:

> One thing with [her] though is that they are starting to learn how to write this year and she wanted me to teach her how to do her name... Well, we were at it for two hours until she got it right! She is very stubborn like that... She's like my grandmother that died last year. She's like her...stubborn and very independent!

Clearly, Andrea recognizes that this child has ability that her other children do not have and she holds high aspirations for her, "Hopefully [this daughter] will go to college. She would be the only one that would be really capable [and] become a doctor." My classroom observations lend support to Andrea's belief that her daughter is bright and very capable. She appears to catch on quickly when new material is introduced.

It becomes evident in one interaction that Julie knows that her son is bright, but feels others have trouble seeing past his attention deficit disorder. She says:

> ...when he was three, maybe 3½ at [the childhood development centre for low-income families] he read the map like you know... Like the teacher was stunned ...They couldn't believe it. They were amazed like a 3½ year old reading and remembering. He looked at it twice and remembered the map.

Julie recognizes that her son likes to talk and at one point jokes that maybe he could become a pastor. She sees the limitations from her education and wants her children to have more education than she has. Although she discloses that she has given up a daughter at birth as a young teenager and made many errors in raising her older daughter, she is determined to "get it right" now with her younger two children. "Like at times with my therapy I say it's very - it's very hard. It's one of the hardest things ever

like uh...But um...gradually, day by day... Like...especially trying to be patient with my children... and trying to listen to what they have to say." Julie knows what she missed as a child and states, "It's very important there that you build that bond with your children there. And you see them for who they are... as a person...as a child."

Beth also recognizes that her oldest two children are capable students. When talking about her son's reading ability she points out, "He's ah...He's one of the smarter ones in the class" and Doug adds proudly, "He's really good in school!" The oldest daughter also shows promise in being an excellent reader. Beth announces smugly, "she's one of the top readers in her class right now!" If her child is having difficulty reading, Beth describes what she would do, "I mean if they're reading a book and they don't understand it, they can come to you or if they need help with the words."

Affiliation Needs

The final area I address in the emotional and motivational climate for learning is affiliation needs. First I look at the family structural composition, particularly the impact of single parent households. Then, I discuss the role of spirituality in providing guidance.

Family structural composition.

The structural composition of the family and the social support is important for family functioning. Half of these families are headed by women with no partner to offer them financial and emotional support. Further, they often lack help with domestic and child rearing tasks. As one participant says, "Mom does the homework. Mom does the bath... Mom, Mom, Mom... there is nobody else *but* Mom!" Julie left a husband with a gambling addiction and wavers between living in the fairy tale world that things will one

day resolve: "Right now we're separated. Trying to work things out... been 17 months since we've been separated," and her reality:

> Like he said he can outcome this gambling. That's a lot of garbage... that's bull crap... I wouldn't be in this situation if it wasn't for my husband there. This gambling and all that crap!...He had a good paying job at the hospital. And he was there for 6 ½ years and then all of a sudden they laid him off... He was a monster because of the gambling.

Many of the participants have severed ties with at least part, if not all of their extended family, even if they live in the same city. In the absence of regular contact with extended family members, they manifest a need to feel connected to a group. Their affiliation needs are therefore being met by forming strong ties with their neighbours or connecting to a spiritual force, which will be discussed in the following section.

Although Jill's son has grandparents living in the city, he rarely sees them. They do not come to the house to visit, nor do they take their grandson out. Friends serve as an important source of social contact for these participants and they are dependent on them for support. Only Beth has regular contact with a family member; she keeps close ties with her brother. Since he has a vehicle, he often takes the family to visit places that they would not have been able to visit otherwise. He is able to bring Beth's two daughters to their Brownie group every week and he takes all three children to church each week. Beth discusses the falling out with the rest of her family:

> Uh... my family well... they're a bunch of crack pots... I kinda pulled away from that situation... It's... ah...I mean you musta heard about it... I mean it's - it's nuts... He [my father] brought his girlfriend in to live with him and his wife... there was my mother, my father, my brother... ok that's who was living in the house. In come [the girlfriend] and her three kids...

In terms of Beth's husband's family, he has two parents still living and three brothers and one sister who are all married with families of their own and living in the area. When asked if his family gets together with the other members, Doug replies, "Once a year if they're lucky... Christmas time."

In general, the families' limited access to transportation and low level of education appear to narrow their social horizons. Without their own means of transportation or a good public transit system, they are largely restricted to participation in activities in their neighbourhood and thus their social contacts are limited. Further, at the time of the study, most of the participants did not have regular employment and therefore did not have work colleagues with whom to associate. Networks are not varied and they suffer a form of social exclusion. Andrea and Natalie have a strong friendship and rely heavily on each other. Natalie suffers from a mental illness and when she is not feeling well, Andrea takes care of her children; Natalie, in turn, offers to play hair stylist for Andrea, colouring her graying hair, cutting her children's hair, as well as helping them with treatment for head lice. She also has a role to safeguard Andrea's money from her abusive husband who has a gambling addiction.

Spirituality.

Another interesting theme that arose from several of the conversations is what appears to be an affiliation or connection to something on a higher plane or different level than the links with other people. I classify this as a type of spirituality because it seems that a few of the participants are turning to elements of faith or a kind of higher order for comfort and guidance in their lives. Although only mentioned specifically by two of the

adult participants, it appears that incorporating an element of faith to solve some of the problems in their lives provides these individuals with important emotional support and gives them a message of hope. One child also turns to her cherished bible when she is "cranky, miserable, seems everybody's picking on her." According to her mother, she "reads [the bible] on her own... she just goes up to her room, closes the door and reads... and then she seems to be calmed down."

Michelle speaks about her involvement in a 12-Step Program to deal with her alcohol addiction in terms of the search for and discovery of meaning in life. Her comments suggest that she looks to a higher spiritual being to help her through her addiction with alcohol. In one interview, Michelle draws my attention to a favourite quote in her alcoholism program book borrowed from a song by the musical group, The Eagles, "Often times it happens when we live our lives in chains and we never even know we have the key."

In giving this line more thought, it occurs to me that the chains could easily be interpreted as a metaphor for Michelle's life. Perhaps at this point in her treatment program, Michelle has reached a spiritual plateau and is looking introspectively at her past life of physical, mental and emotional suffering as heavy chains that bound her. It is possible that her attraction to this quotation reveals that Michelle realizes that she is trapped by past circumstances and that she is beginning to understand how to improve her situation and her life circumstances. She is, quite likely, beginning to recognize that she has the key to the padlocks on the chains and could free herself from this bondage, heal herself and move on.

One cannot overlook that the foundation of Michelle's treatment program for her alcohol addiction places blame on the alcoholics as the victims. Her program is based on the belief that participants will have the key to their own destiny if they only follow the guidelines of the program. Although Michelle's physical health would likely improve without her addiction to alcohol, the poverty in her life will not miraculously disappear. She may still need to learn to cope with the stress associated with her life conditions or she could be at risk for turning back once again to her dangerous addiction. Having faith could serve to replace the alcohol addiction by offering her something outside herself to turn to when needed to help her deal with her life.

Michelle goes to church regularly and insists that her children attend weekly services and youth groups at her church "whether they like it or not." She describes how some of the neighbourhood children attend a church that provides a free bus pickup in the neighbourhood but since this is not her church, she makes her children walk the 20 to 30 minute trip each way every Sunday.

Julie has some of the most disturbing stories of growing up of all of the participants. As already discussed, she endured an abusive childhood. She and her siblings were separated at a young age from their family and sent to live in foster homes. She asks rather solemnly, "Do you know what it's like to arrive at a foster home with only the clothes you are wearing and all your possessions in a garbage bag? It's like they are telling you you're garbage..." Julie describes a heart-wrenching young life filled with neglect by her foster parents and having to fend for herself. In our meetings, she says she

is doing the best she can as a single parent raising three children while coping with a serious psychiatric disorder.

Not surprising, given that her past was full of stories of rejection, abandonment by her parents and being left even in the foster home to her own defenses, Julie is fearful of those in positions of authority. As a single parent, she looks to her friends to provide her with emotional support and information. Julie also marvels at the openness and non-judgmental nature of the bible. Julie states, "I am starting to see a little bit with Christ beside me. He's the biggy - the main one in my life ... He's the one that gives me strength to keep on going." Julie appears to be looking for guidance in her complex life and to help her come to terms with her past trauma.

Julie's reading centres around finding answers: "I read a lot about uh - well, I haven't read in awhile there but I was interested in reading like uh - different books about ...God and ... the bible ... " Her home features various religious artifacts, including crosses, statues of Jesus and a wall hanging that reads, "Jesus said: I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me – John 14:6." Unfamiliar with the New Testament, Rev. Ronald Maund (personal communication, March 18, 2003) highlighted for me that this passage is a well-known quote from the Gospel of John. It is often read at funeral services, giving the assurance to family members that if the deceased person has believed in Jesus, there will be a place for him or her in God's eternal kingdom. It basically conveys the truth that faith, which includes commitment and belief, in God's son Jesus is the only requirement for admission to everlasting life with God. In reflecting upon this piece of the scripture and Julie's life circumstances, it could mean

that Julie is looking to Jesus to show her the way to help her to keep her faith for a reward in the hereafter.

Discussion

A review of the data confirms that the emotional and motivational climate in the home is affected by various stressors. A summary of these stressors and the perceived barriers and problems which affect literacy development is contained in Table 10 on the following two pages. Poverty status is a significant factor, although alone it does not necessarily signify a risk factor for literacy under-achievement. There is a need to look closely at the social context to understand how literacy is embedded in their lives and how children are enculturated into literacy practices. The families suffer from many health conditions, some as a result of traumatic events in their past. The emotional problems of the parents casts a dark shadow over the children and affects their socialization. The parents may also lack effective role models from their childhood to help them in their child rearing.

What the families do with literacy at home and in their daily lives is important to note. Financial restrictions and the lack of accessible transportation limits their ability to participate in activities outside of their immediate neighborhood and thus they may suffer from social exclusion. Some of the participants turn to religion for guidance or seek a kind of spirituality to help them cope with the stress in their lives.

Pedagogical Influences on Literacy Development

The pedagogical influences on the child's literacy learning include the social organization of the school, as well as the effects of the culture of power. In this section, I

Table 10

Stressors in the Emotional and Motivational Climate for Learning Perceived to Impact on Literacy Development in Low-Income Families

Stressors	Perceived Barriers and Problems Affecting the Emotional and Motivational Climate for Learning
Stress from Financial and Family Needs	- lack job skills and education - low-skill dead-end jobs at the bottom of the pay scale - need health card and unable to take financial risks - tension balancing family demands and need to upgrade - restrictions in activities and purchases
Impact of Health Conditions and Behaviours on Family Members	*Parents* - physical ailments and unstable mental health affect psychological well-being - difficulty finding and keeping a job - lack of trust in people from past trauma - social workers trivialize and misunderstand their illnesses - negatively affects parenting of their children
	Children - chronic conditions and learning problems require specialists - socialization affected by parental emotional problems

Table 10: continued

Stressors	Perceived Barriers and Problems Affecting the Emotional and Motivational Climate for Learning
Present Time Orientation	- live in the here and now with little advance planning possible - calendars, day planners and watches are not regularly used - often tardy or miss appointments - rarely listen to the news - base sense of time on routines or television shows - difficulty setting goals for the future
Parental Attitudes and Aspirations	- lack positive role models from their childhood - blame learning problems on poor teaching or impoverished life - afraid to do something wrong so may do nothing
Affiliation Needs	*Family Structural Composition* - many single mother led households; no help with domestic and child rearing tasks (or finances) - often severed ties with extended family - reduced contact with others, suffer social exclusion
	Spirituality - turn to a higher order to help cope with stress in their lives - fearful of authority figures - turn to the non-judgmental nature of the bible for guidance

highlight the importance of recognizing schooling, not just as a humanitarian act, but of a political act with notions of power and control. Table 11, presented on pages 265-266, summarizes the key points in this discussion.

Social Organization of the School

In looking at the social organization of Parkview School, three broad, overlapping areas are examined: (a) the curriculum, (b) the school environment and (c) the teaching. Delpit (1995) points out how educators make assumptions about families that are different from theirs based on stereotypes that they may hold. She argues that a problem that teachers face in teaching children from other cultures is in not understanding the "worlds of others" (p. xiv). I address the curriculum, school environment and teaching as individual topics in the sections that follow. However, it must be recognized that these are difficult to separate since there is considerable overlap.

Curriculum

The core curriculum at Parkview School, is the standard curriculum that is used throughout the province of New Brunswick for children to acquire certain basic skills, values and bodies of knowledge in a variety of subject areas. Although the majority of the curriculum is defined by the province, there is also room for some locally developed curriculum to help meet student needs. The teachers complain that every year something new is being introduced that an expert claims is the answer to help all children learn.

More experienced teachers like Kelsey and Stephanie use a range of pedagogical orientations. Although they participate in workshops and professional development opportunities, they tend to pick and choose aspects from new programs to augment what

they are doing and feel is effective, rather than completely toss out one program for a new one. They go to their classrooms, evaluate the expert claims and teach confidently with already proven instructional methods and techniques that they know from their experience will work.

Amira allows for the inclusion of a variety of authentic learning tasks, including having students share expertise within small groups in class, conferencing, and additional purposeful writing, such as letters, to augment the standard program. The three classroom teachers who were observed, Amira, Stephanie and Kelsey, all promote individual reading time with volunteers when possible. They also encourage their students to think independently by giving them repeated opportunities to problem-solve in class.

Delpit (1995) argues that the answer to improving education for all children is not in bringing in new reforms, but rather in understanding the realities or worldviews of all of the students. She suggests that educators look through the "haze of [their] own cultural lenses [and] understand that power plays a critical role in our society and in our educational system" (p. xv) while "accepting their [minority students'] culture and language and helping them build on it" (p. 9).

Delpit (1995) sees powerful educators not identifying with some of the minority students and yet unfairly determining how these students should act and be judged. Some of these children are simply not accessing the codes of power in the classroom and she feels that these must be taught directly, such as ways to talk, dress and interact with others. For the curriculum to be meaningful for all children, the schools must recognize diversity and value the alternate home cultures that come to school with the children. The

only way to do that is to step outside of one's own beliefs and allow new ones to come in to be studied and understood. Then, the needs of these children would be better understood and could be addressed.

Educators' reflection on their practice will help them to better understand their own assumptions, biases and values such as diversity and sensitivity to difference. Examining the relationship between the teacher and the students and ensuring that there is a comfortable classroom atmosphere, will go a long way for all students to feel free to let their voices be heard. While postmodernist pedagogy encourages strategies of empowerment and debate, Ellsworth (1989, p. 306) finds deficiencies as it gives the "illusion of equality while in fact leaving the authoritarian nature of the teacher/student relationship intact."

In talking about the often repressive liberatory pedagogy with the privileging of teachers over students, Ellsworth points out the need for dialogue in classroom interactions. She stresses the importance of "what they/we say, to whom, in what context, depending on the energy they/we have for the struggle on a particular day, is the result of conscious and unconscious assessments of the power relations and safety of the situation" (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 313). It is only after we have addressed social identity and power/social relationships articulated through "identities" that we can begin to talk about student participation and the creation of new roles for students and staff. Ellsworth (1989) highlights how curricula in a postmodern approach to pedagogy are built around students' needs and interests with emphasis on classroom analysis, and the rejection of oppression, injustice, inequality and the silencing of marginalised voices.

Parkview School offers children a unique opportunity to engage in learning outside of the school through their creative and unique literacy program. The principal, Robin, has a vision to improve literacy outcomes in her school. She believes that if they really want to see positive changes, they must continually push the boundaries that affect students and their lives. Thus, she created a supplemental literacy program with the belief that action at the school level has a wider impact than just on the students within the classrooms. The program aims to make the case for lifelong learning and literacy and it rallies support and commitment from families to transform these children's homes into ones that provide more opportunity for literacy development. In addition to helping their students, and addressing the power differential, the program is designed to help all family members become more involved by valuing their participation in the program.

This project has tremendous possibilities for extending literacy into the neighbourhood families. Goals are set for the number of projects the school aims to complete within a specified period. Upon completion of an activity, the child is required to fill out a page summarizing the highlights of the project. Each project is valued and counts toward the total.

School Environment

A diverse body of research outlines the role of environmental factors associated with not only fostering literacy, but also school success. Parkview School clearly promotes literacy as its most important school improvement goal. Like many schools, their mascot is displayed on the front of the school. They updated this by adding well-recognized symbols to characterize their school's literacy focus.

Inside the school facility, children's artwork, as well as commercially available educational posters with slogans promoting the importance of reading and the value of schooling, adorn the school walls. Copies of the mascot are also strategically placed around the school building and proudly adorn the outfits of staff to remind the students of the school's heavy focus on literacy.

Without a doubt, Robin recognizes the importance of literacy in the lives of both children and adults. Her school has adopted a holistic approach to education by offering its students more than an academic education. Obvious efforts are being made to promote literacy and demonstrate a commitment to providing education for all students. At the time of the study, the community-school link was being carefully examined. Parkview School staff redefined this link by working with a committee of community workers to establish a centre for young children within the building. Funding was obtained through government grants to hire staff to prepare programs for its young users.

Parkview School students are aware of what literacy is and often use the word literacy when talking to their parents about events at school. During one of my interviews with Beth and her family, all three of her children spoke about some of the literacy projects that their classes had done. They also talk proudly of being able to go to the principal with a completed project sheet. Clearly, at this school, visiting the principal has taken on a meaning quite different from many schools where generally negative reasons prevail for a visit to the office.

Teaching

Teachers in this study are striving to do their job better and are clearly teaching with heart. They work well collaboratively and demonstrate positive regard for each other. The teachers are caring and committed and possess a passion for what they are teaching and for their students. They incorporate a range of pedagogical strategies and offer students a rich literacy environment filled with books, posters, art and samples of children's work on display. Further, the school staff embrace a school-wide philosophy where students are taught to take responsibility for their own actions.

Tess presents as an instructional leader for language and literacy for the staff. She is continually trying to explore new options and is always willing to share the knowledge she has. She shows positive regard for the students and a belief in their abilities to accomplish their goals. She regularly loans materials to other staff and researches new programs, continually seeking a more effective way to teach the more challenging students. During the time of the study, a new supplementary reading program was being introduced in grade 1. Tess offers the classroom teacher additional support and some assistance to get the materials prepared and the program operating in a timely manner.

The overall pedagogical approach among the Parkview School staff is to provide the content in their teaching and allow all students to try to learn. Those who experience difficulties are automatically referred for resource help. There is a wide range of academic abilities in the classrooms, but according to the three early-years' teachers in this study, a higher percentage of the low-income children experience exceptional

learning needs then the middle class students. Those with learning needs are typically segregated for remedial programs conducted in the resource room.

Culture of Power

The teachers want to be responsive to all of their students. However, it is evident there is a culture of power and some students who do not share the dominant middle class cultural background of the teacher are unwittingly silenced (Delpit, 1988). In this section, I show how some middle class teachers look at life through their middle class lens and may fail to recognize the perspective of low-income families. This culture of power serves to maintain the more powerful middle class group above the low-income families.

The school, as an institution run by the middle class, promotes middle class values, beliefs and ways of acting. Delpit (1995) feels that the educators are oblivious that this is even happening since they cannot see those different from themselves, looking through "their own culturally clouded vision" (p. xiv). At times, these teachers become frustrated trying to understand and explain the behaviour of low-income students, often not fully aware of the circumstances of their lives and the many challenges and barriers that they face on a daily basis. Data from this section was drawn from my field notes, classroom observations, informal discussions I had with the school staff and interviews with the parents.

Delpit (1988) proposes the inclusion of the following five aspects of power in her definition of the culture of power: (a) enacting power issues in classrooms; (b) learning the code for the culture of power; (c) defining the rules of the culture of power; (d)

acquiring power; and (e) recognizing the power. Each of these will be discussed individually in the sections that follow.

Enacting Power Issues in Classrooms

Many issues of power are enacted daily in classrooms; a power imbalance exists between the dominant group and those who would be considered the "others". The particular curriculum that is used, the texts that are selected, the viewpoints which are supported and how the testing of the students is conducted all suggest decisions made by those in a position of power. Unfortunately, those who come to school with less cultural capital are relegated to a lesser position than those who arrive with more cultural capital and have already internalized some of the culture of power. This serves to perpetuate a power differential and maintenance of the status quo for those in minority positions, such as those from low-income homes.

In my study, the teachers assume that when they assign homework the children are properly equipped at home to complete the assignment and to reinforce learning that has taken place at school. All of the parent participants indicated in their journal entries that homework time is either stressful or very stressful. Many of the parents are not able to adequately support their children and sometimes children return to school with homework not completed or improperly done. The parents express their frustration that the teachers may get upset with their children and rarely, if ever, look at the child's circumstances and family situation to see what may have transpired to allow that child to return to school with incomplete work.

Sometimes teachers refer to the parents as being uninterested in their children's education or not supportive. My study findings did not support this perception. All of the parents in this study have high aspirations for their children to get more education than they had. They express a desire for their children to succeed and want them to do better in life than they had done. However, in general, the parents do not specify what being successful means to them. Some parents, such as Lynne and John, make sacrifices in their own lives to purchase a computer so that their daughter will have the advantage of having this middle class educational tool at home. Despite their lack of long term planning for their own affairs, some of the parents make plans for their children.

A number of these parents describe very negative experiences they had when they were students and then dropping out of school. Jill recounts stories of her schooling and feeling disempowered because she could not keep up with her classmates. She lacked support from home as well as school. Finally, she gave up completely and dropped out of school after grade 10. Julie also had a difficult and non-supportive home situation. Although she managed to remain for high school, she was moved to a modified program. As an adult, she was tested and rated at a sixth grade equivalency level.

The low-income parents' level of educational achievement places them with lower educational qualifications than the middle class for the most part and they may not have the academic skills to support their children if they require assistance with schoolwork. Also, many of these families have serious health issues, as outlined previously, that cannot be overlooked. For some, their stress level may be high and at

times they simply are not in a physical or mental state to be able to offer support for the children, even though they are capable of doing the work.

These parents who were not successful with their own educational endeavours may be ill-equipped to encourage and support their children's educational pursuits. It is evident that Jill's negative feelings about her own schooling have carried over to give her a sense of uneasiness towards the school and she expresses a kind of apprehension or even fear about her son's education.

Beth describes how she really loved school as a child until she missed time in grade 4 due to an illness. As she says, "Then I failed grade 4 because I was sick and then after that it just started going downhill...I was in the hospital for 49 days ... because I missed so much they wanted me to repeat." That started a downward spiral in her interest in school. As the years went by, Beth missed more and more classes, but by her choice this time rather than illness, "I missed more time than I was there ... Yeah ... jigged [skipped classes]. There was only one course that I really liked [in high school]. And it was about the only course that I passed [at the regular academic level.]" Beth was then placed in a modified program with fewer academic demands. Her husband, Doug, also had a difficult time in school. He claims that "A lot of people were picking on me so ... one day ... I had a lot of trouble at school so I quit. And I told them, "you're all crazy, I quit!"

Delpit (1995) defends the parents' reduced involvement with the school, by explaining that schools simply need to understand that these parents are not part of the culture of power and therefore do not live by the same rules and codes as the school staff.

The parents transmit, instead, another culture to their children which is important for survival in their communities. The problem arises when this is seen to be at odds with the school's culture, and educators cannot understand these differences in behaviour.

Learning the Code for the Culture of Power

The unwritten code of those in power states that the parents are expected to be regularly involved with activities at school, should monitor their children's academic progress and must initiate contact with teachers if there are any learning difficulties. Involved parents are then believed to be in a better position to support their children's education and participate more fully in the school affairs through volunteer activities or helping with special events.

Only one of the parents from the low-income homes in the study had been regularly involved in supporting any of the school activities as a parent volunteer, although on occasion, others took part in selected special events at the school. If the parents did make a commitment to help with a particular program or activity, they often did not participate on a regular basis. Again, it is difficult for them to make such a commitment, since events in their lives could be all-consuming and the volunteer job would then take a secondary position.

For the teachers who count on the support of a parent who signs up to help, they become frustrated when the parent does not come for the activity. It appears that the teachers, however, do not typically try to explore if there is a reason for the absence or break in the commitment. They then tend to make assumptions and statements about the parent being irresponsible.

Parents, like Jill, have a mismatch with the school expectations for supporting their children's learning. Jill feels it is the teacher's job to identify problems that her son is having and that it is then the school's responsibility to initiate the appropriate remedial assistance as might be required. She does not see a role for herself in her son's education beyond arranging a suitable spot for him to do his homework.

As another example, Andrea often keeps her daughter home from school simply to keep her company. The school staff try to impress upon Andrea the importance of regular school attendance and how she is jeopardizing her daughter's chances for success by keeping her at home periodically without a valid reason, like an illness.

For lower class children who are accustomed to the use of direct orders, when they arrive at school often they do not understand the indirect requests made by the teachers. Snow et al (1991) point out that the working class tend to be direct in their requests using keywords that specify what the child is to do. In contrast, the middle class may be more accustomed to responding to indirect requests at school as direct commands since they have experience with decontextualized language with no immediate context at home.

Heath (1983) outlines that when lower class students hear indirect requests at school they may not have had much experience with them and may not understand how they are supposed to respond. According to Delpit (1995), this is precisely what these children need to be taught in order for them to understand the culture of power and not be labeled as having a behaviour problem. She suggests that teachers avoid taking on a gate-

keeping function, by taking responsibility for teaching students about indirect requests, while still respecting that those from different cultures maintain their own culture.

Defining the Rules of the Culture of Power

The rules of the culture of power reflect those who are in power. One unwritten rule is that teachers will be courteous and allow parents at least one week notice for any upcoming special event, such as Picture Day, a special visitor coming to the school, or the class participating in a special event. For the low-income families who tend to live day by day without using an organized system such as a calendar or planning diary, they may completely forget about events by the time they arrive. Thus, as Kelsey mentions, a problem arose when a student arrived at school on Picture Day with his hair dirty and not combed and wearing a shirt with a stain. Stephanie speaks about parents being required to send money or consent forms to school in advance for a special outing. She states that some of the children from low-income homes are typically the last ones to bring in their permission slips or money, which is a source of great frustration for their teachers.

Another unwritten rule is that a parent will ensure that his or her child prepares in advance for kindergarten entry. A message that comes out clearly in the interviews with the parents is that several are afraid of taking on a teaching role with their children for fear that they might be teaching something the wrong way. Thus, they rationalize their lack of action in not preparing their preschool children for school. They hold to the belief that they could end up confusing the child or having the teacher "angry at them". The teachers do not see the lack of parental initiative in the same way. They frequently label the parents' lack of or limited involvement with their children as simply laziness. The

teachers do not seem to realize how hard it must be for some families to carryout what they see as everyday activities that they routinely expect.

It was also apparent from my classroom observations and interviews that some parents do not recognize or understand the school routines and appear to be oblivious to the time and need for school schedules. As presented earlier, among the parent participants in this study, Jill and Natalie are the only ones who wear watches. Incidents of student tardiness or parents delivering lunches throughout the morning are reported by the teachers to be extremely disruptive. Late arrival seems to be a common practice at this school, even though many of these students live within a five minute walk from the school.

Some parents arrive at the office not even knowing the name of the child's teacher or their child's grade level. On several occasions, I witnessed one father arrive in the late morning at his daughter's classroom with her lunch and expect the teacher to stop teaching to meet with him and discuss his concerns at that time. He had not made an appointment and seemed unaware that the teacher was in the midst of teaching a class of young children and could not stop everything to talk with him for any length of time. An alternative arrangement might be for parents to deposit the lunches in a designated room, rather than go to the classrooms or office. Students could then pick up their lunches from a volunteer or teacher assistant at noon.

Delpit (1995) stresses the need for educators to effect social change; they must "push and agitate from the top down" (p. 40). She feels that it is the teacher's responsibility to assess the students' needs and those students who do not have the codes

of power need to be taught them by the teacher. She emphasizes that simply having the children passively adopt a new code is not effective. The students must understand the value of the code they hold and recognize the power realities, to understand the need for the new code.

Acquiring Power

Delpit (1988) makes it clear that it is necessary for some of the rules to be taught explicitly for the person to understand the expectation. One cannot assume that they will otherwise learn the rules simply by exposure to situations where the rules are enforced. She argues that teaching decontextualized subskills is not a sound teaching practice that allows carryover to enable the child to participate fully in the mainstream. Instead, she stresses the importance of teaching in meaningful contexts, while learning about the arbitrariness of the codes and the power relationships they represent (Delpit, 1995).

The adults must also learn how to acquire power. The adult literacy instructor made a point of telling me how she helps to prepare some of these adults for interacting with others on a job or in an interview for a job. For example, she can not take for granted that these adults know how to dress appropriately for a work situation, so she teaches this very specifically to them. She says that they may not have learned about the culture of power and yet want to be able to get and keep a job so need to understand this.

A number of teachers at the school spoke to me about a parent volunteer who they felt did not adequately meet their unwritten dress code. The parent's job has high visibility, since she goes from class to class and hands out cups of fluoride mouth rinse to each student in the Fluoride Mouth Rinse program. This matter of dressing

inappropriately was never addressed with the woman. In this instance, the volunteer would benefit from specific direction regarding what she needs to change in her attire. Otherwise, she remains unaware that she is not meeting the school standard since it is not consistent with her standard of dress and will continue to be criticized behind her back.

Robin, the school principal, and Tess, the resource teacher, lament that in general, parental involvement among the low-income families is limited compared to their middle-income families, despite the great value they place on home and school relationships and the emphasis on parent involvement. The principal makes efforts to draw these parents into her school in the hopes that the parents would feel more a part of the decision-making that occurs, rather than feel that decisions at school are imposed on them. Nevertheless, there appear to be barriers that prevent optimal family involvement.

Tess recognizes the need to strengthen ties between home and school amongst the low-income families at Parkview School. She regularly loans her students appealing colourful and lively books and fosters an excitement in them about reading these with their parents. Tess is not one to point fingers and blame the parents. She expresses some understanding of the situations of these families, and knowledge of concepts of diversity and their implications. She has a sense of the community, the resources and the norms of the culture. Nevertheless, she is still searching for ways to better understand the situations of the low-income families and how to help promote a greater understanding and sensitivity to cultural differences and their effect on learning amongst all of the Parkview School personnel.

When students come to the Resource Room, Tess is friendly and open. She often jokes with them to help them feel relaxed and comfortable before offering assistance with academic work that is difficult for them. The students seem to like coming to her room and it is always observed to be a centre of activity. Tess engages literacy learners in reading authentic texts for genuine purposes and offers them the chance to bring these books home to read to their parents to extend the school learning. In turn, she is helping them to acquire power.

Recognizing the Power

Many educators erroneously assume that the school setting is a power-neutral environment. Some of the teachers in my study internalize negative stereotypes about the lower class and do not even recognize the power relations in existence. In one situation, when a mother did not attend a parent-teacher meeting at school, the teacher was quick to suggest that the parent was not interested or did not care about the child's schooling. In reality, the parent may not have the resources to be able to attend the meeting. Lower-class parents are just as interested as any parent in their own child's education, but some lack the support needed to enable them to remove barriers for their participation. They are also poorly-equipped financially, psychologically and socially to compensate for deficits they perceive in their child's education. That is, they cannot afford to buy computers or other educational resources, pay for a tutor, offer their children opportunities for outings with a broad circle of people or support them adequately emotionally.

Some general factors affecting the schooling experiences of these children from low-income circumstances include the high number of family separations and frequent reorganization of the family unit with temporary adult members. These low-income families have fewer resources and less power than the middle class parents to be able to directly influence their children's schooling. The women also appear to lack the same sense of entitlement as the middle class mothers. Due to their reduced familiarity with educational practices compared to the middle class, they are less effective than the middle class in following through with educational practices, or in trying to influence school policies and practices.

Natalie, however, is one parent who recognizes the power in the school system after many years of being trapped herself in an abusive relationship dominated by her husband. Thus, she does not hesitate to fight for what she feels her children need and she is in frequent contact with the school. Delpit (1995) speaks about the special kind of listening that is needed with these families, "...listening that requires not only open eyes and ears, but open hearts and minds" (p. 46). She stresses that educators must never forget that individuals are the experts on their own lives and for educators to understand the lives of others, they must be willing to give up their sense of who they are and turn themselves around to see another perspective and understand the power.

The educators at Parkview School are all in the white middle class majority. Although they try to understand those who are different from them, their ready acceptance of hurtful stereotypes, such as being lazy and not caring, may work against efforts directed at supporting the parents in their hard work to help the children become

literate. As discussed, there are challenges that accompany the families living in poverty circumstances and the uneven power balance in literacy tipped toward the teacher is evident.

Discussion

Table 11 on the following two pages offers a summary of the pedagogical influences on literacy development. Problems and barriers related to the social organization of the school and the culture of power are outlined in the table.

Families are where many cultural traditions are taught, practised and internalized. Literacy is just one such tradition and parental print exposure clearly influences literacy development of children.(Symons, Szuszkiewicz & Bonnell, 1996). The reduced support, lack of time and energy for children, plus limited material resources work against parental efforts to achieve school literacy. This study has revealed however, the occurrence of a great deal of literate behavior in the home of low-income families although much of it may be for practical purposes and not school literacy. Once this is recognized and promoted, families may be regarded more as an educational resource rather than having a deficit.

Life circumstances, educational attainment and literacy achievement are undeniably interrelated and mutually dependent. Becoming better informed about non-mainstream home literacy events and practices will help educators to better understand the child's learning needs as they are enculturated into literacy practices. One cannot overlook the effect of power relations on learning. Knowledge of how this plays out in the classroom will help educators to teach all students more effectively.

Table 11

Pedagogical Influences on Literacy Development

Influence	Area	Problems and Barriers
Social Organization of the School	Curriculum	- too many changes and new reforms - not enough authentic learning tasks - diversity in home cultures and differing worldviews of students not understood - need for reflective practitioners who understand their own assumptions - codes of power are not being taught - insufficient dialogue in classrooms
	School Environment	- no well-defined school-community link - commitment needed to provide education for all
	Teaching	- range of pedagogical strategies required - insufficient collaborative involvement - must maximize use of all available resources - may lack "passion" for teaching

Table 11: continued

Influence	Area	Problems and Barriers
Culture of Power	Enacting Power Issues in the Classroom	- view life from middle class perspective - unaware of circumstances of students' lives - perpetuate power differential by relegating those with less cultural capital to a lower position
	Learning the Code for the Culture of Power	- unwritten code has expectations for parents - parents unable to commit to be a school volunteer - reasons why parents do not show for planned activities not explored - teachers act as gate-keepers
	Defining the Rules of the Culture of Power	- rules of the culture reflect those who are in power - lack of parental involvement labeled as laziness - parents appear oblivious to school schedules - parents seem unaware of time and are often late
	Acquiring Power	- arbitrary rules need to be taught explicitly - need to teach in meaningful contexts
	Recognizing the Power	- failure to recognize the power relations - negative stereotypes may be internalized - existence of barriers to participate

In the following section I look at the process of children's enculturation into literacy practices. I discuss three key factors in this process for children growing up in low-income circumstances.

Children's Enculturation into Literacy Practices

Being enculturated into literacy practices is a dynamic process of construction and reconstruction through the daily activities of parents and children in the home, as well as through the social dynamics occurring in institutions such as schools. The key role of mothers in this process is well-recognized due to the gendered nature of their involvement in child care and schooling. In the final section of this chapter, I look at how families living in low-income circumstances enculturate their children into literacy practices. I begin by discussing factors related to growing up in poverty followed by findings on learning to be impoverished and then schooling for poverty. Table 12 at the end of this section on page 274 offers a summary of the process of children's enculturation.

Growing Up in Poverty

Many of the children in this study come from families who grew up in similarly impoverished life circumstances; some even lived in the same neighbourhood. As pointed out, the low-income parents in this study, have a variety of practical skills that might serve as tools for improving their lives and their children's education.

Literacy is part of all home situations from hearing stories and having reading materials on hand, to their perceptions about the process of learning to read and write. From the perspective of participants in this study, poor home life, inadequate teaching,

and school failure are perceived as reasons why they had difficulty learning to read. Thus, these parents show a great deal of awareness of their antecedent literacy experiences and the effect of these experiences on subsequent literacy activities. They also see schools as the place where children learn to read. As previously discussed, however, it seems that they do not recognize how their everyday interactions such as cooking, baking, shopping, or financial management might provide opportunities for learning and facilitating literacy.

In cases where parents experienced limited educational success, or struggled with learning disabilities, they may lack the skills and knowledge to engage their children in a range of literacy activities at home, or to participate fully in their children's education. Lynne states, "I didn't really like school!...I just didn't want to learn... I'd rather play." It appears that Lynne did not see the connection between staying in school longer and having different outcomes. She proudly reports however that she has always been able to find a job and really has not had to use many skills from school, "Well I worked in the dish room so nobody really...didn't have to get involved with anybody. You're just stuck in the back room doing dishes."

It seems that, for Lynne, to be employable despite her incomplete education is a matter of personal pride. While this attitude may encourage her daughter to follow a similar fate, it is not certain that this will necessarily be the case. The fact that this mother has always worked despite her limited educational achievement is likely to have a positive effect in showing her daughter the value of self-support. What is important in this case is that the mother exhibits pride in securing employment in spite of her lack of

higher education. This participant's employment in low-paying occupations may serve to highlight the value of achieving a higher level of education and encourage her daughter to pursue more education than her mother in order to secure higher-paying employment opportunities.

A distressing finding from the present study was not only a concern from the mothers about "doing it the wrong way", but that by working with their children, they would be too far ahead of their peers and the perception that this would upset their teachers. Andrea mentions that if her daughter "wants to learn at home, like I won't let her go too, too far ahead." Natalie saw a role in helping her sons with their schoolwork, but adds that "if I can't do it the right way, someone else should show him the way." Therefore, some of the parents in this study sometimes feel that literacy activities are best left to the school and teachers. While this belief is not compatible with that of educators in the field or the academy, it may be a function of a society that places far too great an emphasis on schooled literacy.

Although there is no doubt that higher education may equip children from low-income homes for improved prospects in securing employment with greater earning power given the gate-keeping function of educational attainment in the employment sector, there is no evidence that schooled literacy enhances the skills needed to sustain gainful employment in the trades or service sector into which many of these children may well find employment. For such employment prospects, it is certain that functional literacy may enhance not only their employment prospects but their personal situations in

being able to read for enjoyment and to guard against personal abuse through inability to understand the wording of contracts of various kinds.

For children who aspire to attain higher levels of education and employment, however, it is equally certain that this will not happen without achieving schooled literacy at the very least since this will ensure that they will attain a high school diploma that has become the minimal standard required for most employment situations. Gone are the days when a young man with only a grade seven education may work his way up to amass a fortune through hard work and innate intelligence as one very dear gentleman of my acquaintance (now departed) once managed to do. Nevertheless, for children aspiring to attain cultural capital of any kind, schooled literacy may be a condition of that result but it will never suffice. According to Kelly (1997) what is needed in this case is "multiple and enabling literacies" that "provide for possibility and empowerment," (p. 79). Kelly (1997) adds that to achieve this, it is necessary that educators:

> begin with the acknowledgement and understanding of how it is—in what specific ways and through what specific practices—that the work of schooling, curriculum, and pedagogy is implicated in the making of social differences that make an unjust difference. (p. 117)

Learning to be Impoverished

The low-income families in this study do not choose to passively reproduce their own educational disadvantage for their children. In fact, many mothers act diligently to try to ensure that their own educational experiences are not replicated, but often simply do not have the means to let that happen. From my observations, these low-income parents try to provide educationally stimulating activities for their children and a home environment supportive of learning, but often they do not feel that they have the ability to

become more involved with the school, particularly when the system has failed them. Natalie illustrates this point when she states:

> Some [children] can't learn it though. Like my oldest son like I said, he's got a short attention disorder. It's harder for him to learn. He writes backwards. If it's "Y-E" he puts "E-Y". He has words mixed up. His ps are different than bs and ds. And they kept telling me, "he'll grow out of it. They all go through it."

For this participant, the fact that educational authorities believe that her son will grow out of a learning problem about which she is concerned negates her personal fear that he will not be able to overcome his disability and attain success in school. When a parent who seeks answers to her child's learning problems receives such an answer, that the problem is natural and one that he will "grow out of", the parent has implicitly been informed that her concern is inconsequential and, possibly, a nuisance. Hence, it is hardly surprising that low-income parents have little faith in their ability to participate in the educational experiences of their children when this perception is corroborated by the system itself.

Natalie describes how at times she has also had problems understanding. She was short $60 on her rent one month in the winter and relays her frustration that she was unaware that she should have been receiving a heating allowance. When she complained to her social worker about not being informed, she explains, "I did not know. I did not understand it. I did not know at the time [to apply for it]. Excuse me, no one told me about this heating allowance thing."

It seems to me that perhaps the difference in school experience between the participants and teachers has to do with perceived capital. The subtle differences in the way they talk was noted and may result in perceptions of reduced capital. For example,

the participants' use of the vernacular versus a more formal language is evident and clearly distinguishes them from the middle class. It was not uncommon to hear the parents curse or use an expression such as "damn it" or "that's bullshit" naturally in their everyday conversation. On the other hand, the fact that social workers and educational authorities fail to inform them of their rights or entitlements certainly does not disenchant them of this perception.

Some of the participants get nervous or emotional when speaking with teachers or authority figures. They are often hesitant and dysfluent as evidenced by the use of many fillers in their speech such as "ah" or "like", with part and whole word repetitions noted to disrupt the smooth flow of speech. Their non-standard grammar is evident in their oral expression. Errors with subject-verb agreements and misuse of objective pronouns are common in some participants. Finally, their tendency to use a concreteness in their language versus abstraction is evident. The children may be penalized at school for using the non-standardized language forms that they hear at home.

There are times that these participants are treated differently than those who walk into the school, follow the school rules and may be considered to be acting and dressing appropriately by the mainstream teachers. I think that some teachers focus on trivial matters such as the differences in practices among parents, and pass judgment due to classism. Some teachers make comments about the style and grammatical accuracy in the notes that these lower class parents write to them. Clearly, there needs to be an understanding that there are many adults who do not read or write at a high level, and that

it is incumbent upon school teachers to assist learning, not to condemn learners for perceived deficiencies.

The school dictates which literacies are important and often the literacy practised in the home is not valued or validated. Those children who do not grow up in a home with the dominant culture's values are marginalized by the school and the government as a result. Reading and writing activities need to be more in-tune with their minority experiences. If the low-income families are not literate, they are not able to participate fully in the many aspects of society that demand literacy competencies.

Schooling for Poverty

Paratore (1995) and Delpit (1995) note that teachers continue to hold many false assumptions about the literacy experiences and attitudes toward learning in non-mainstream families. Teachers in this study view parents' poor attendance at parent-teacher meetings as a shirking of their responsibilities. In one home visit, immediately after a parent-teacher night, I was asked by Michelle what day it was. When I informed her of the day, she replied, "Damn, I missed the meeting at school last night. I wanted to go ... I was thinking it was tonight." This response seems to tie in with the theme of present time orientation discussed earlier and the difficulty that parents have with long term planning. Although notices are sent in advance to inform parents about upcoming school events, Michelle does not make note of them and is not orientated herself to the day. Natalie also stresses the importance of these meetings, "Gotta go for updates...find out what they need...find out what's going on. It's very important." Yet, despite what Natalie says about participation, her attendance is noted by school staff to be inconsistent.

Natalie knows that she is not part of the majority and mainstream of schools and society. She feels that this is one problem she faces in dealing with school staff:

> I think everybody would treat you differently if you had a better education like if you didn't grow up with the life that you had, or if you had a good job or lived in a different area. I feel that you are looked down upon because of where you live ... because you're on assistance I mean.

Both children and adults who do not have the culture of power need to be provided with the knowledge so they have a fair opportunity to acquire it. Then, they must have non-threatening contexts in which to practise. Delpit (1995) says one cannot force a new form onto someone. They can only be given the information and then when the situation arises, it becomes up to them to decide what choice they make.

Summary

It is well-recognized that children experience different educational realities prior to school entry for a number of reasons. They go through a process of enculturation into literacy practices as has been previously outlined and is summarized in Table 12 on the following page.

Heath (1983) outlines the contrasting ways that black and white children in her study engage with print. For example, the black children use print for real life purposes, to learn things, while the others use print more in the ways that schools demand. Thus, in Heath's research, the latter group was better prepared to enter the school setting and complete the required decontextualized reading tasks. In contrast, the black students in her study, found the reading tasks to lack a purpose without a real-life context and they were not successful in learning to read without context.

Table 12

Factors that Influence the Process of Children's Enculturation into Literacy Practices

Factors	Cultural Influences
Growing up in Poverty	- many children are second generation of living in poverty - have practical skills, but do not know how to use these skills to facilitate literacy and learning - literacy is part of all homes – poor home life, poor teaching and school failure are blamed for reading problems - may lack skills to engage child in literacy activities - some feel literacy is best left for school so that it is done the right way
Learning to be Impoverished	- parents try to provide educationally stimulating activities and a supportive environment for learning - parents may feel unable to be involved with school - speech and language differences include: more dysfluent, use of vernacular expressions and use of non-standard grammar
Schooling for Poverty	- teachers hold false assumptions about literacy experiences and attitudes towards learning in non-mainstream families - families need to be provided with the knowledge about the culture of power if they do not already have it

Enculturation occurs through practices which may serve to support middle class children's schooling and give them an educational advantage over the lower class. For example, students with financial means are able to participate in extracurricular activities such as music lessons, dance classes and sports activities. Their participation in these activities also serves to extend their social networks, while cchildren from low-income backgrounds who have not had these experiences are vulnerable to feelings of "outsideness".

An opportunity for educators to develop appreciation and understanding of the rich resources families bring to the learning process is vital to developing a view of families as assets to the schooling process. Although educators have good intentions in wanting to help children learn, as has been discussed in the previous sections, they may not recognize their own position of privilege and power. Involvement with these families outside of school settings provided me with a glimpse of the range of literacy experiences parents and children share on a daily basis. It would serve educators well to see this side and try to understand the worldview of others and the importance of context for teaching and learning beyond the simple promotion of technical skills.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart.
And try to love the questions themselves.

- Rainer Maria Rilke

Introduction

Research for this thesis was born out of my desire to expand my awareness about family literacy and make an original contribution to the book of knowledge in family literacy. In this final chapter, I present an overview of my research followed by an interpretation and discussion of the key findings presented in Chapter 4. As I write this chapter, I remain committed to seeking the truth and representing fairly all the voices I heard in my research while passing no value judgments since as Horsman (1999) reminds me, my own knowledge is only partial and all knowledge is "shaped by [one's] own social location and multiple identities" (p. 29).

My choice of title for this dissertation, *Voices from the Heart*, and my practice of overlaying the chapter titles and description of each participant with a carefully selected quotation containing the word heart was intentionally done. I took much time and care to select quotations that encapsulate a key point or theme pertinent to the section or person for which it was intended. Further, and more important was my reason for the choice of the word *heart*. I wanted the repetition of this word to serve as a continual reminder that

this study is about individuals who are alive, as represented by the heart. Additionally, the word heart serves to prompt the reader for the need to listen to the voices of the participants to access their thoughts and sort out the experiences they share. As outlined in Chapter 1, heart is viewed as the seat of all emotions and to understand how the participants' thoughts contribute to who they are once must be reflective.

The findings of the study serve to heighten the reader's understanding of literacy skills and early schooling, family influences on literacy development, the impact of adult life experiences, and the organization of literacy education in general. Conclusions generated in response to the three research questions that drove the inquiry are followed by recommendations for practice and implications for public policy. Areas for new and expanded research directions that emerged in this study are then put forth.

Summary of the Research

Through this qualitative case study, the following research questions were posed:

1. How do family literacy practices and events unfold in these low-income homes?
2. How is literacy embedded in families' social practices and relationships between schools and homes?
3. What conditions and factors within the family contribute to family literacy and the enculturation of children into these practices?

In order to answer these questions, my research plan included the following processes: (a) define the study through a review of related literature; (b) conduct a pilot study; (c) gain entry to the selected research site and consent of participants; (d) gather data; (e) analyze the data collected; and (f) formulate conclusions and recommendations.

The history of the family literacy movement and the inherent difficulty in defining the term literacy was highlighted at the outset. A definition of literacy adopted for this research was stated. The literature review indicated a need for theoretically framed research in family literacy of school-age children. In my thesis, I have also entered uncharted territory by extending critical theory to the field of family literacy. Critical social theory brings together disciplines such as economics, philosophy and politics to critique the bourgeois culture and philosophy. By adopting the perspective of the oppressed groups, critical theorists seek social change for sociopolitical transformation. Thus, through my study, I provide a new way of understanding an old problem. I look at the literacy experiences of low-income school-age children and their families while exploring concurrently their home and school environments or their sociocultural context. In my thesis, I have established an important theoretical link between Bourdieu's concepts of cultural fields of power, the existence of effects of practice in family literacy units.

The focus of the study was then refined following the pilot study. Staff and students from Parkview School were selected to participate in this study largely because of the school's commitment to literacy, the principal's overwhelming support for the proposed study and the school's desire to improve literacy performance in their students.

Once approval of the study was granted from the University Ethics Committee and the School District, permission to participate was obtained from families and school participants. The study then proceeded as planned. My case study design applied a variety of observational techniques as outlined in Chapter 3 over a period of seven

months. The data collection methods included an iterative process of multiple interviews, home and school observations, review of parent reflective journal entries and responses to a questionnaire, analysis of videotaped parent-child interactions and field notes. These particular methods were chosen because of their combined ability to provide the greatest amount of data and triangulation to ensure accuracy of the results. This critically needed data focused on low-income children between the ages of six to eight years and their families interacting in their everyday life circumstances of home, school and community environments. This study also reviews the school culture as being unwittingly structured by dominant middle and upper class cultural schemes that are not familiar to low-income families.

The stories I present in Chapter 4 help to connect my analysis with my theoretical reading presented in Chapter 2. The personal and intimate nature of this qualitative research study has brought me as the researcher into the life-worlds of the participants as they took risks in trusting me with their personal, often traumatic, life stories. Their readiness to share enabled me to learn about their experiences and thoughts and to develop rich images and a robust, descriptive narrative for the findings section. I offer a sensitive portrait of the lived dimensions of enculturation and family literacy.

The ability to apply direction over social actions, or what critical theorists call agency, was brought forth in this research. The level of agency may vary depending on the type of cultural context in which it is exercised. Further, an individual's knowledge of schemas affects the types of resources and amounts that can be accessed. In Chapter 4 where I present my research findings, I address the cultural resources by creating a

comprehensive profile of the neighbourhood of the participants as well as the schools the children attend and their individual homes.

Data were then coded and classified. In this final chapter my research questions are answered, conclusions and recommendations are drawn and general themes emerged. My broad conceptualization of family literacy contained in Chapter 2 was revised following the data collection to form an interactive model. The new model will help one to understand the complex nature of family literacy in low-income homes. As such, my model, which will be discussed in detail later on, offers an original scholarly contribution to the field of family literacy on which practitioners may organize their programs. A kaleidoscope metaphor is introduced in this chapter to re-conceptualize the multifaceted nature of family literacy and the dynamic relationships among family members as they actively construct and negotiate their futures with the influence of outside factors during the socialization process.

In conclusion, I believe that this research adds to the literature in the field of family literacy. The traditional deficit view of family literacy with its assumptions about the lack of literacy in some homes was shown to be inadequate. My study offers an alternative platform for thinking about literacy in low-income homes that recognizes the importance of the sociocultural context and values the strengths of families. This model will be presented later in this chapter. It should also be noted that this study had limitations; these will be discussed in detail later, along with implications for further study and practice.

Discussion of the Findings

The response to each of my research questions will now be discussed individually:

Research Question 1 : How do family literacy practices unfold in low-income families?

Family literacy practices are many and varied and are dependent on the family's sociocultural context. Like Barton and Hamilton (1998), Cairney and Ruge (1998) differentiated between literacy practices and literacy events. They subdivided literacy practices into four categories: (a) literacy for establishing or maintaining relationships; (b) literacy for accessing or displaying information; (c) literacy for pleasure and/or self-expression and and (d) literacy for skills development. Each literacy practice was then associated with a number of literacy events. These are summarized in Table 13 on the following page.

One of the central findings of this study confirmed results from previous research that there is a failure to appreciate and understand the strengths of all families and the multiple ways that families use literacy at home. The current findings support the view that all families strive to provide opportunities for their children to engage in literacy and family members regularly engage in Cairney and Ruge's (1998) variety of literacy practices. Further, how parents engage in literacy activities with their families may be a function of what they recall from their own childhood experiences. The research also revealed that non-mainstream parents may hold high aspirations for their children, but

Table 13

Cairney and Ruge's (1998) Classification of Literacy Practices and Home Literacy Events

Literacy Practices	Sample Home Literacy Events
Literacy for establishing or maintaining relationships	- reading and writing letters - making and writing birthday cards - reading bedtime stories - playing school - writing/reading notes to/from school
Literacy for accessing or displaying information	- doing school projects - reading/discussing newspaper article - reading TV guide - reading maps, timetables, calendars - filling in forms - using computers - reading catalogues and junk mail
Literacy for pleasure and /or self-expression	- drawing and labeling pictures - reading books, magazines and comics - doing crossword or word search puzzles - keeping a diary
Literacy for skills development	- completing homework

may overlook opportunities to model literate behaviours for their children and not recognize the importance.

My study provided a glimpse of the realities of literacy in eight families. As Purcell-Gates (1995) has emphasized socio-economic status cannot be isolated as the primary factor in children's literacy achievement. By viewing literacy as more than a set of technical skills, but as a social practice, it becomes clear that children from non-mainstream backgrounds upon entering school are expected to participate in the literate social practices of the institution of the school, rather than learn isolated skills to be able to read and write.

For some children, from non-mainstream backgrounds, the school is a foreign culture to them and regular participation at school will not guarantee required learning. Therefore, teachers would be wise to create conditions that would welcome these learners and facilitate their entry and involvement in literacy practices that are meaningful to them. Strong home-school connections could go a long way in strengthening family literacy. The cultural background of the child, including what he or she has done at home prior to school entry, will influence the child's outcomes in literacy. Financial status alone cannot explain learning outcomes.

Recollections of Early Years

In interviewing the parents, I learned that child rearing practices and transfer of literacy skills are closely tied to the parents' recollections of their own upbringing, including both their school experiences and home situations (Morawski & Brunhuber, 1993). Families construct their own meaning of literacy and what it means to be literate.

The parents' actions reflect their beliefs, often based on how they were raised. Parents in this study typically attributed their literacy involvement to events that had affected their lives as children (Leichter, 1984).

Families in the present study influenced literacy development in the same three main ways that were outlined by Leichter (1984). First, the quantity and quality of their interpersonal interactions, which includes the literacy experiences in which family members share, have a significant impact. Second, their physical environment, which takes account of the literacy materials that are available in the home, will affect how they are able to participate in their children's learning. And finally, the emotional and motivational climate or the relationships among the individuals in the home, are reflected in the parental attitudes toward literacy and their aspirations for the children's literacy achievement.

When the parents feel competent with literate behaviours, including print and speech, Leichter (1984) says that they will be more likely to have more books available in the home. In the present study there was a modest effect noted with those parents who were involved in academic upgrading. They had more resources to support literacy in their homes and used more print media than those who were not involved in academic upgrading.

Morawski and Brunhuber (1993) studied the earliest recollections of learning to read of both proficient and poor adult readers. They found significant differences between the two groups and that people's perceptions of themselves as readers and of the reading process affect their acquisition of reading. In the present study, those parents who

reported that they had reading or learning problems when they were children, like Morawski and Brunhuber's poor readers, had their earliest recollections of learning to read when they were between seven to ten years of age with the teacher being the central focus. These poor readers did not take personal ownership in their learning to read, and the overall attitude about the experience was negative with feelings of discouragement and apprehension.

In contrast, in Morawski and Brunhuber's study, the proficient readers' memories occurred much earlier, commonly when they were three to six years old. In general, the mother, or another parent, rather than the teacher was central in their recollections. These better readers took ownership of their learning and were committed to learning to read. They had a positive attitude about reading with feelings of satisfaction and determination.

There are direct implications from Morawski's and Brubaker's (1993) study. Those with positive self-concepts view reading as enjoyable, motivating, and relevant and are more likely to want to read more. On the contrary, those with negative self-concepts see reading as stressful, discouraging, meaningless, and anxiety-laden. Holding negative attitudes such as these can lead to avoidance or minimally to a reduction in reading activities. When a child finds reading difficult, he or she may enter into a vicious cycle, read less and therefore get less practice and so reading is even harder. Since so many of the parents in the study had reading problems as children, it would be important for them and their children to engage in functional, relevant, enjoyable, realistically challenging, and success-oriented reading to break this cycle and help them become more positive about reading.

High Aspirations

Low-income parents in this study have the same goals and high aspirations for their children as other parents in higher socioeconomic echelons. The difference is that they face more barriers in trying to help their children achieve these goals. For example, with insufficient financial resources and with no reliable means of low-cost transportation, they may lack the means to enable their children to participate in the same activities as the middle class. They are restricted in their ability to take their children on outings where they would acquire cultural capital, such as to the public library, museums, art galleries or cultural centres; or go on trips to places outside their neighbourhood. Their children cannot participate in extracurricular activities that have an associated cost such as music lessons, sports activities or the guiding or scouting movement. Thus they miss opportunities to develop a habitus for these activities and to acquire additional cultural capital.

Reduced Opportunities

Further, with fewer novel experiences to talk about, the children could be assumed to have reduced opportunities for extended discourse with their families. Beals, deTemple, and Dickinson (1994) lend support to this idea in their research findings which stressed that opportunities to engage in extended discourse in the home build the type of skills that are needed for high levels of literacy. Snow et al's (1991) research showed that as might be expected, parents who are involved in a variety of activities from working outside of the home to participating in various social activities will have more topics to

talk about and potentially more interesting conversations with their family members. They also suggest that these children become better readers.

The low-income families in my study could not afford educational technology such as a computer and an internet connection to use as a learning tool and to explore places that they could not afford to visit. Thus, these families were not only unable to readily access the library where free internet connections are available, but also lack computer technology in their homes like the majority of the middle class families. This inequality in access to modern information technology in society is commonly referred to as the digital divide due to differential access by socio-economic level. Finally, as Thomas (2001) points out, paradoxically poor families often face many barriers to accessing programs that were originally designed to help them overcome their social and economic difficulties and improve the general conditions of their lives.

Modeling Literate Behaviours

Parental attitudes are important to promote literacy achievement. The parents participating in this study were all verbally supportive of learning efforts which would promote literacy, but the findings suggest that they were not modeling "school ways" and preparing their children for school literacy in the same way as the middle class parents might. While Snow and Tabors (1996) acknowledge that transfer of literacy skills explanations could account for social class differences in the skills of children prior to school entry, they emphasize that literacy consists of much more than the print skills that can be transferred during book-reading, attention to ambient print, or collaborations on early writing tasks. Furthermore, they are quick to point out that many children who have

not learned their letters or had limited exposure to print prior to school entry will become successful readers.

The findings reveal that some of the low-income parents are afraid of doing things the wrong way and worried about confusing the child or the teacher becoming angry with them. Horsman (1999) explained in her study that such fearful behaviour could be from violent and traumatic past experiences, as opposed to an unwillingness to try or laziness. Based on Horsman's findings, and the stories told by the parents, it is conceivable that they indeed were acting in this manner because of past trauma in their lives.

Snow and Tabors (1996) searched among assorted explanations for parental effects on their children's level of preparedness for school literacy. Their goal was to account for children's varying levels upon school entry. They were also interested in learning how some families continue to support their children's literacy achievement after the emergent literacy level as the children progress in elementary school. Snow and Tabors (1996) went beyond the simplistic commonly held belief that social class differences account for differing results. They argued how difficult it is to sort out the effects of the many related factors involved in defining social class, including parental education, occupational status, income, housing conditions, time allocation, attitudes toward school and schooling, experiences with school, expectations for future educational and occupational success, nature of the family's social network, style of parent-child interaction, and many more elements (Snow & Tabors, 1996, ¶ 4).

Snow and Tabors (1996) point out that much of the research describes a simple transfer of parental literacy skills and behaviours to the child. This would be either

through direct instruction or acquisition through modeling. For example, they cite the practice of shared storybook reading as a common method of achieving the transfer and the justification for promotion of this practice in family literacy programs. They also mention the availability and use of print in the home, such as magnetic letters on the refrigerator, posters, paper for making lists, newspapers, and books, and parental efforts to direct children's attention to environmental print as another effective direct transfer mechanism.

Thus, an alternate view, supported by D. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988), defines literacy as a social practice and views the parental role to generate literate practices in which their children may participate. Literacy is seen as ever-present and used naturally to solve problems. Rather than simply transmitting literacy to their children, the parent's task is then to model literacy as a useful practice for solving problems, and to establish social literacy practices in which children can participate as a critical part of their lives. Thus, literacy involves integrating reading, writing, listening and speaking to be able to use language to think critically.

One finding in the present study was that women, in particular, are often viewed at the centre of family literacy practices. Some women in this study, such as Andrea, use their literacy skills to conduct home-based business. Others, such as Beth, do volunteer work from home, while Michelle and Julie study to upgrade their skills. Although these activities are regular occurrences and they require the use of literacy skills, the parents may engage in these in private when their children are asleep or not at home, so the children typically do not see this literacy behaviour modelled.

One highly plausible explanation is that the parents may not recognize the value of serving as models for their children. Thus, an implication is that many of these parents may need support to show them how to maximize incidental learning opportunities. This unplanned learning arises daily in the process of completing their regular routine tasks such as cooking, shopping for groceries, paying the bills, and reading the mail. Encouraging parents to engage in literacy events in the presence of their children will help them to realize that they can have a powerful influence on their children's literacy development. By encouraging children to participate in some way during these activities through observation, repetition, social interaction, and problem solving, these parents may be able to capitalize on a previously untapped natural way of learning for their children. Since incidental learning is situated, contextual, and social it may be highly effective and could constitute a socialization process and accumulation of increased cultural capital, while helping to form a habitus towards literacy.

Based on this point of view, parents may help by creating a climate that not only fosters incidental learning opportunities, but that also encourages literacy events embedded in play. For example, when children take school literacy home and "play school" with their siblings or peers, they are using role playing as a powerful force to practise what they have observed at school. They imitate what they have seen by practising their script in dialogue. This type of play motivates children by using language in a communicative and authentic context and is appropriate for all age groups and skill levels. Children acquire knowledge by building on previous representations. As they

practise and become more familiar with the experience, their script becomes more complex.

In one of the parent-child interactions captured on videotape, Beth's children were role playing a routine visit to the doctor. The children and parents were alternating among roles and this offered them opportunities to develop their language skills around this particular routine. Likewise, role playing a school routine could be encouraged to help children develop knowledge of the expectations at school such as cooperative behaviour, ability to follow routines, development of independence and learning about the teacher's and students' roles. Academic goals such as providing opportunities to reinforce numeracy and literacy concepts could also emerge from the play routine, particularly if the parents provide selected props for children to use during their role play to enrich the experience.

Positive Attitudes

The literature has suggested that aspects of literacy such as print awareness, knowledge of narrative structure, and vocabulary and discourse patterns are likely to be influenced by the family and home environments (Snow and Tabors, 1996; D. Taylor, 1983; D. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Further, the family may influence how literacy is viewed. For parents who use literacy as a source of enjoyment, they establish positive affect around literacy and this attitude is passed on to their children. A central finding was that those parents who feel that their children are interested in reading are more likely to provide their children with print-rich opportunities compared to those who do not perceive such an interest in their children.

D. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) documented in families living in poverty the patterns within the family structure that promote literacy. The most consistent finding was that students that were most successful in language and literacy came from homes where families made literacy a priority and had positive attitudes and behaviors. During the parent interviews the researchers often noticed that the parents were simultaneously helping their children with homework or offering scaffolding to a child that was reading. By contrast, the low-income parents in the present study frequently stated that they had difficulties helping their children with their homework and very often were not sure what was expected.

Parents are the children's first teachers and children can learn much from them in the context of family-based interactions. In terms of reading and writing, the parents pass on what they were taught and may model literate behaviour by engaging in literacy activities themselves. In D. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines' (1988) study, the children were read to often and also read by themselves. Younger children were engaged with books too; they practised handling them, looking at the pictures and talking about what they might say. The families of the successful students were readers; they read books, magazines, and newspapers for entertainment and often sent letters and notes to friends and family. By engaging in these activities, they build their cultural capital and their habitus for literacy.

Research Question 2: How is literacy embedded in families' social practices and relationships between schools and homes?

A view of literacy as a social practice underpins this thesis. I have adopted Street's (1995) definition of literacy practices and literacy events. Accordingly, literacy practices are more abstract and are inferred from literacy events which are observable and mediated by written text and the social context. In this section, I discuss incongruency in school and home practices with the recognition of what Barton and Hamilton (1998) describe as multiple literacies, gender and class issues, unwritten rules, home-school connections, parent involvement and the curriculum as they relate to Research Question 2.

Incongruency in Practices

The people and social institutions surrounding the child shape the literacy practices. Notably, schools play a significant role in the process of helping the child become literate and acquiring relevant discourses, as well as forming their identity. If the type of literacy promoted does not link with existing literacy practices, the mismatch can be problematic.

While the jury is till out on which approach educators should endorse for promoting literacy, Braunger and Lewis (1997) found the types and forms of literacy that are often practised in low-income homes are incongruent with literacy of the school. One general result was that the low-income parents stress the importance of learning to mechanically decode words, while literacy specialists focus more on reading as a process

of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction of the reader, the text and the context.

Braunger and Lewis (1997) in their comprehensive report offer a summary of practices that they claim to hinder children's development as readers. Their list includes such actions as emphasizing phonics only and no whole language; drilling letters, sounds and words in isolated contexts one at a time; insisting on correct spelling of all words they can read; promoting perfection in oral reading; reducing the emphasis on comprehension and interpretation of text; and overusing workbooks and worksheets. These were all activities that became apparent in my data collection with the parents interacting with their children in the present study.

A key finding of this study was that teachers felt the education system was in a state of flux based on their perception that they were being continually asked by those in power from the Department of Education, as well as their school administrators to implement new curriculum and continually change course. They claimed that no sooner had one program been introduced and implemented, that a new one was following with limited support offered to the teachers to get it up and running effectively. It is well recognized that with school-based reform, school staff may take on tasks for which they may not be prepared. Thus, they need more support to work effectively. The teachers in this study complained that there was sometimes a poor fit between district level in-service training and what the staff needed.

One practical suggestion that arises in my research is to encourage families in their literacy practices. A challenge would be to set up a means to ensure that all children

have ready access to basic literacy materials in their homes that would help support families in promoting learning. My research revealed that many of the children did not have pencils and crayons at their disposal or scrap paper on which to doodle and draw. Clearly, the schools could also play a greater role in making items such as calendars available to families that would not otherwise have these.

Gender and Class Issues

It was immediately evident in this study that not only are there class-based distinctions for women living in poverty, but also gender issues. While literacy is strongly associated with economic life chances, this relationship is not as straightforward when gender is taken into account. Poverty hits women in unequal proportion to men due to having fewer opportunities for employment and more family responsibilities. In many cases, the women are the sole caregivers for their children and have no support from a partner. That is, the caregiver role may also impact on their ability to go into the workforce. It might be surmised that living in poverty, in turn, affects their health, their education, their ambitions and their self-esteem. In many of the homes studied, it was clear that financial problems generated considerable household stress, which may have potentially lead to or contributed significantly to the breakdown of the family structure. The cases of both Natalie and Michelle highlight this point well.

Some women may be silenced by power politics (Giroux, 1988; Lewis 1993). Lewis (1993) uses the term phallocentrism instead of the familiar term patriarchy

> to expand our understanding of male dominance beyond its operations in the economic and legal spheres of our social organization to its functions within a deeper, more fundamental systemic set of relations of inequality. The term signals the inclusion not only of traditional ways in which women have been

> subordinated to the "male head of household" (the father or husband or lacking either of these, the son/brother--young or old so long as male), but also the symbolic system through which our social relations are organized and maintained, extending beyond but still including immediate familial forms of patriarchic dominance (pp. 20-21).

In this same chapter, Lewis suggests that women's silence is not indicative of women's deficiency or "weak political/material conditions" but a "double-edged discourse of speaking and silence" (pp. 21-22). She claims that "women's confinements within the terms of patriarchy had been assumed to be so complete that an act of rebellion had not seemed possible" (p. 33) and that "a significant aspect of men's claims to power through their assumed right to abuse in what has traditionally been passed off as an insignificant social encounter...women are expected to absorb such violation, in the name of joking."

Many of the women in my study, as already outlined, suffer intimidation from their partners. One of the consequences of being afraid of asserting their voices, they are left in a passive and vulnerable position with their partners exerting their power and control over them pushing them into a submissive role. For example, Andrea, who appears to be an astute and perceptive woman, nevertheless, remains trapped in an abusive relationship for whatever the cost. She recognizes that she lacks the skills or education to make a better life for herself on her own and so suffers daily abuse imposed by her husband. Living with a husband who gambles their meager income, she always has money on her mind.

Andrea's husband keeps a close eye over who she associates with at home. Andrea remains a prisoner in her own home, unable to invite others to visit without the

approval of her husband. It is therefore easy to understand the barriers that she faces in trying to enhance her own skills or even to become involved in supporting school activities to help her children. For Andrea, it is more than developing voice; it is making her silenced voice heard.

Similarly, Natalie was living a tumultuous life of domestic violence, but eventually chose to end the relationship. She then escaped to a safer environment with her two young children. By accessing her own voice, she was trying to gain the power she had been denied, along with some formal education and her own income. These are all things she had been deprived while living in her abusive relationship with her husband.

Unwritten Rules

As discussed in the previous chapter, homework and supporting school activities tend to be gendered tasks. Regardless of the family composition, these activities are typically in the mother's domain. Unfortunately, as Nagle (1999) points out, many of these women do not know how to access what they need from the schools to help them perform these tasks as effectively as they can with their children. Consequently, they become confused and frustrated by the unwritten rules of conduct and they may end up feeling helpless when silenced by the teachers.

Jill recognizes that her son was having problems with his schoolwork. When she goes to school to meet with the teacher, she does not make an appointment but shows up in the middle of the morning when the teacher is engaged in teaching the class. Jill becomes frustrated when the teacher does not stop teaching to see what she wants at the

door and so Jill leaves, feeling like the teacher had no interest in her son. Clearly, Jill does not understand that she should arrange a mutually convenient time to meet with the teacher to allow the time needed to discuss her son's needs and concerns that she might have.

Home-School Connections

The present study aimed to recognize schools as institutions that cannot be examined in isolation separate from their sociopolitical contexts. The choice of the curriculum used, the environment itself and the teaching methodologies are all part of the social organization of the school. For instance, as highlighted in the last chapter, schools enact power issues in classrooms and learners must recognize the power, define the rules of the culture of power and learn the code to be successful.

Similarly, schools cannot exist independent from the influences children bring with them from the outside. School personnel need to acknowledge that what happens outside of school pervades everything that happens in school. For schools to be successful in establishing home-school connections for low-income families, staff must come to an understanding that there are many variables in a child's life outside of school subjects that they cannot simply alter. It behooves them to introduce all children to a variety of discourses to increase their awareness.

Research from cognitive science, as summarized by Knuth and Jones (1991), has shown that when the teacher is instructing, the child must continually be trying to make sense of the message. The child makes inferences and interprets the message, linking to past experiences and prior knowledge. The low-income children in this study have not

had as many experiences and are placed at a disadvantage compared to the children whose scope of activities have been much more extensive and will have a rich vocabulary and a stronger language base upon which to draw to facilitate comprehension.

Personal traits in the children, such as persistence, are powerfully influenced by the parents and other family members with whom they interact on a daily basis. Parents who provide exposure to literature and foster motivation in their children take a strong role in maintaining shared reading practices. These parents will help shape their child's attitudes as committed readers and beliefs about their personal efficacy by forming their system of shared dispositions or habitus.

Parent Involvement

During the present study, teachers stated that parent involvement is considered not only desirable, but also essential to effective schooling. Parkview School staff describe the communication with low-income students' families as a significant problem. Kelsey, grade 2 teacher, expressed her frustration that many of their low-income parents appear to be indifferent towards the school and she felt the parents had little knowledge of "some of the great things that are happening at Parkview School." These parents often do not attend the general "Meet the Teacher" session in the fall when school opens, the scheduled parent-teacher sessions throughout the school year or other special events held at the school.

Despite the efforts of the school staff to procure participation of the low-income parents in a range of school programs, few of them participate even though they are not working outside of the home during school hours. As already discussed, school staff

remarked that if these parents begin volunteering, they typically do not continue for the expected period of time. In general, there is a parental lack of involvement in extra-curricular school activities and failure to support programs in operation in the school through volunteering. This is erroneously interpreted by the educators as a sign that these parents do not have much interest in the school or their child's education. Meanwhile, the parents may have the best of intentions to be involved. However, given the nature of their unsettled lives, it is conceivable that they may become suddenly consumed with other activities in their lives that pull them away. Another possibility is that they may be operating on a different time sense that the teachers do not recognize.

Some of the low-income parents revealed during their interviews that they may feel uncomfortable interacting with the teachers and therefore do not get as involved with activities as the schools would like. One might argue that they may also feel that they are unprepared and lack the skills needed to serve in the role of educator to help a child who may be experiencing difficulties or to ensure that the child is "ready" for school as the teacher expects. Andrea expressed concern about confusing her children by not helping in the identical way as the teacher, while Michelle had a fear that the teacher would be upset with her if she went too far and her child knew more than the others. Jill felt she was given a brush-off by her son's teacher and did not feel comfortable going to the school and participating as a volunteer. This lack of congruence between the perspectives of parents and the school needs to be resolved in order to establish desirable home-school connections. As has already been presented, the lack of involvement may stem from these parents having low self-esteem from a traumatic past.

Fostering strong home-school connections contributes to a smooth transition for all children, and is particularly important for children from low-income families where parents may be less comfortable interacting with the school. The school may assume a leadership role in fostering these connections and collaboration between parents and teachers to provide support for children's learning while embracing the values that build strong families and communities. Family members must work together with school staff to facilitate the children's educational development to maximize the child's potential and help the schools understand the family perspective.

The teachers in this study provided anecdotal evidence about the importance of parents being involved in their children's education by checking that homework was completed, limiting television viewing, ensuring regular school attendance, as well as participating in school functions. They also felt that the school would benefit from having parents who are able to provide emotional and social support to their children for learning, and being certain that the parents have the skills needed to extend learning to the home. However, they were unable to make an effective link with the low-income homes. The families need to help the educators see the family perspective and intricate home practices which serve to support children as learners.

Despite limitations set by poverty, there is evidence in the research of D. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) that the families were able to raise successful, literate students. They emphasized that schools need greater awareness of the foundations of students' knowledge and the construction of language and meaning within the students' lives. The authors note that in their study, the school gave little value to the students' home

environment. They suggest that a greater emphasis should be placed on the origins of the student's literacy history and language acquisition. The word meanings and understandings that children construct in the home are a key to their future success in education. Once again, this point holds true for this study. By understanding the intricate practices that occur in the home situation, we allow teachers to assess the abilities of more students from poverty and counteract the deficit model.

Schools have been described in this thesis as sociocultural institutions with literacy as a cultural practice. Education transmits cultural, political and socioeconomic values. Classrooms are dynamic and interactive places where political forces impinge on the teacher's decision making. The role of the school is to bring one generation into the next, with the teacher's job being that of organizing and guiding students so they may acquire skills, beliefs, values and knowledge. Parkview School administrators make efforts to regularly hold fun activities in an attempt to bring parents to their school in a comfortable, non-threatening event. They hope that this will be a first step towards helping to put the parents at ease while teaching them how to become more involved in their child's education.

Curriculum

In looking at the social organization of the school, Knuth and Jones (1991) address the areas of curriculum, environment and teaching methodology. They advocate for curricular approaches that teach reading as thinking, but are quick to add that these need time to develop. They point out that teachers also need to be granted sufficient time to espouse new beliefs, to try the research-based methods being promoted, and to perfect

their new teaching practices. They recognize the need for ongoing staff development programs which would provide mentoring and coaching, and supportive environments that allow risk-taking and experimenting.

Second, Knuth and Jones (1991) stress that performance in reading is enhanced when "schools have semipermeable boundaries" (p. 5). By this, they mean that both parents and others in the community are involved as helpers in the school such as tutors, aides, or reading role models. Students and teachers have opportunities for learning out of school and community members participate in the process of redesigning the programs.

Research Question 3: What conditions and factors within the family contribute to family literacy practices and the enculturation of children into these practices?

Children acquire literacy through a complex process of enculturation which will now be discussed. Gender, family composition and child rearing practices, educational background of family members, health issues, and identity all have a role in contributing to family literacy practices.

Gender

Parents have a role in guiding both their sons and daughters into valued discourses of literacy (Heath 1983). As has been discussed, schoolwork is a gendered task with mothers clearly taking the lead. Boys often do not have the same model as girls in school with mainly female teachers in the early years and many are raised in single mother homes. As Greer (2001) has pointed out, it is important for all boys to have models of their gender so they will learn to appropriate the valued discourses in their

daily lives. Girls, however, may find it easier to develop a set of literacy practices and discursive resources with so many more female literate models around them.

Family Composition and Child Rearing Practices

Many of those living in low-income circumstances live with only one female parent and the mothers suffer a lack of time. Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell (1999) point out that the number of siblings also affects family functioning. They emphasize that each additional member reduces the amount of time available from the parent with the greatest impact felt on children in single-parent homes.

Educational Background of Family Members

School staff recognize that parental characteristics, values, beliefs and practices have the strongest influence on the way children are socialized. As the child's first and most important teachers, parents provide the experiences that promote life skills, abilities and attitudes that underlie school success. Child rearing philosophies and beliefs about how children learn are closely tied to how the parents were raised and taught as children. Adults who may have experienced difficulties learning to read and write in school are more likely to have low self-esteem (Horsman, 1990; Purcell-Gates, 1993a). As outlined previously, many of the parents retold their experiences of having difficulties in school and not having support from home or school to help foster their learning. Some, such as Doug and Natalie, dropped out of school early in frustration. Others, like Michelle, were determined to make it and persisted on their own without the support structures in place.

Jill was one parent in the study who may not have promoted reading and writing at home in the same way as a confident reader would, expecting that her son would

experience the same problems that she had in school. She was afraid of instructing him incorrectly and left the task entirely to the school. In contrast, other parents, such as Natalie, tried to overcompensate for a potential problem by anticipating that her children could have the same type of learning disability from which she suffered when she was a child in school. Therefore, she made all efforts possible to prevent its occurrence or to minimize its effect in her two sons. She worked continuously with the teachers and sought extra resources for her child.

Health Issues

Health issues play out in this study by families dealing with so many chronic and acute health concerns, that there is less time and energy available for supporting the children with homework and school activities. In all of the families in the study, a significant percentage of their income was spent on cigarettes with at least one family member smoking minimally one pack of cigarettes each day. Many of the families also spent some of their meager income on alcohol or supporting their addictive gambling habits. This left little disposable income for buying educational materials or items to support learning in their family members.

It is well recognized that having a higher income allows for better living conditions. Generally those who are at the higher income level have better general health status and fewer sub-acute conditions. The number of mental health and sub-acute health problems among the low-income participants in this study was staggering. However, this is consistent with findings from Health Canada (2001) which reveal that Canadians with low literacy skills are more likely to be unemployed and poor and also have higher

morbidity and mortality than those individuals who have achieved a higher level of education. Gambling and the use of alcohol may be used as coping mechanisms for those with fixed incomes to help them fill some emptiness in their lives.

Mental illnesses, such as depression, were common in the low-income participants and their appearance is not surprising given the association between gambling and depression (Rosenthal, 1993). Lipman, Offord, and Boyle (1997) showed that single mothers in an Ontario study were more likely than mothers in two parent families to be poor, to have mental health problems such as affective disorders, anxiety disorders, psychiatric disorders and to be consumers of mental health services Lipman et al (1997) also pointed out that the single mothers were several times more likely to abuse drugs or alcohol.

Identity

Sociocultural and contextual factors will influence the construction of identity in individuals. Family members who experience much in common growing up together, will have a large impact on the formation of other members' identities. Individuals will socially construct themselves to form a profile of how they see themselves and what they feel they are capable of doing. This applies to both the parents and the children in this study.

Another general finding was that for some of the women living with domestic violence, fear had rearranged their lives. Andrea saw herself as a woman who was trapped in an abusive relationship and failed to recognize her potential. Since she was economically dependent and did not feel she could make it living on her own, she

remained living in fear with her abusive husband who subjected her to his offensive and insulting verbal outbursts and prevented her from seeing people that she wanted to see.

Jill clearly had very low self-esteem and was living in fear with her two young children and abusive spouse. She also experienced a pattern of violence based on power and control that appeared by all accounts to be getting worse. Her stories implied that her spouse treated her as a servant. Yet, there were times that it appeared evident from an outsider's perspective that Jill's upbringing seemed to have conditioned her to believe that this was acceptable behaviour and the abuse she endured was part of love. Thus, Jill continued to live in fear of upsetting her abusive partner and wondering what he would do when he was upset. She was nervous and curt when she spoke; she casually indicated that she dressed in a particular way to please her husband, imposing rules for herself to keep him happy. Although there were the apologies and promises from her spouse that his behaviour towards her would change, the stage was always temporary and the relationship was plagued with tension and fear for Jill.

Employment provides one with more than money, but also important social networks. Having more contacts with others helps one to build an identity. Natalie was the one individual in the study who expressed her need to work for more than the financial aspect. She suffered from a mental health condition and recognized that without employment and the associated social networks her identity centered around the image of the poor single woman raising two sons. This depressed her further and despite the lack of job skills and her low educational level, she aimed to get experience through

volunteering and eventually have a more positive identity of someone who was accomplishing good things with others in this world.

In this study the low-income families appeared to recognize that they were set apart from the middle class, yet struggled to fit in. Perhaps, this recognition of difference placed greater pressure on them to conform and led them to seek highly visible signs of the middle class. Some of the families spent much of their disposable income on middle class consumer goods to possiblyhem identify with the middle class world. For example, their children, even in the primary grades, wore the same costly designer label clothes as the middle class students. Although the parents consistently stated they had a strong commitment to learning, the education of their children was undoubtedly impacted by this spending pattern.

Identity formation for children is also a process that is learned and constantly manipulated throughout life depending on circumstances and people with whom the child interacts. The children in this study began to form their identity by imitating models from their interaction with others in their home, school and community. The family serves as the initial agent of socialization helping children to adopt certain attitudes and behaviours that will become part of their identity. Later, others in the community, such as school staff and their friends, have an important influence on them.

Literacy practices grow from personal identities that exist within a given cultural framework. As a result of social interaction processes, the individual acquires an identity and internalizes it. The present study has revealed how not only culture and literacy interact, but also schooling.

Emergent Themes

Four broad themes emerged from this study to be important in influencing educational achievement and literacy. These included the conflicting time orientation of the low-income families, a cultural mismatch between the teachers and students, the importance of the social environment and the families as powerful conduits for facilitating literacy and the limitations in household resources to support educational pursuits. Each theme will now be highlighted.

Conflicting Time Orientation of the Low-Income Families

A recurrent theme among the low-income families was that they did not engage in long term planning, but lived from day to day. Their lives are clearly not regimented by the same type of schedules, day planners or even clocks that are common for teachers. The management of their many health issues can be seen as demanding and impacts on the family functioning and also how they manage time by suddenly overtaking their day. Educators must respond to the needs of the families and recognize that long term planning is difficult for them and ensure that they understand the need to deal with these families in the same time and space if they truly want to encourage their participation in school affairs.

Cultural Mismatch Between Teachers and Students

Teachers are typically from the middle class and through their socialization are familiar with the culture and ways of the middle class. A variety of parenting practices that correlate with positive learning outcomes have been identified in the literature. One of these practices involves active participation in the child's school. It was shown in this

study that parental participation in school activities was limited compared to the middle class. Sometimes teachers erroneously perceive parents' reduced school involvement or inconsistent participation as a lack of interest or not caring about or valuing education. However, often the parents fall short in their level of academic preparedness, not having achieved a high level themselves, or they may be consumed with their own affairs of life leaving little time or energy to volunteer at school or help their children with schoolwork. Schools also need to remain cognizant of the fact that not all homes are physically or emotionally set-up to support children in doing their homework and not all parents have the skills needed to help their children with schoolwork.

There have been a series of popular myths propagating for a very long time that present poor families as deficient and in need of learning the middle class ways. D. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) argue that it is the lack of social, political and economic support that places families at risk, rather than the family's failure to adopt mainstream literacy practices. The basic assumptions of schools blames the people who are the victims of draconian social policies.

Importance of the Social Environment

Auerbach (1995a) positions the family at the centre of the educational intervention and shows how the members act in relation to their environment. This environment, in turn, shapes the individual. Interviews for the present research were revealing. Clearly, learning goes beyond school books; families serve as important conduits for dissemination of both skills and knowledge. Educators need to recognize that low-income families have strengths that often accrue from learning to survive devastating

social conditions. Their voices must be heard for them to be understood and acknowledged as important for their success.

Limitations in Household Resources to Support Educational Pursuits

The family's financial situation determines the amount of money that can be spent on educational resources. Since there is little disposable income in poor families, planning and saving for even a small purchase is a common practice. I highlighted previously how Lynne and John were saving for a computer for their daughter by working opposite shifts to reduce babysitting costs and how Andrea enjoys reading escapist novels that she has purchased at reduced rates. Andrea also speaks proudly about how she and her husband are able to save money on costly household repairs without hiring others. Lynne enjoys reading magazines, but rarely spends money purchasing reading material for herself. Instead, she collects newspapers and magazines that have been cast off by those staying at the motel where she works.

Although families had a variety of basic materials to support literacy in their home such as pens, pencils, dictionaries and books, often these were not readily accessible to the children or were limited. Even scrap paper was found to be scarce in these homes, although Andrea was able to compromise for her children by offering them her envelopes for writing and drawing pictures.

Insufficient finances also limits access to educational resources including modern technology, such as purchasing a home computer or household resources like books and newspapers (Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). These are considered to be the educational tools that are commonplace in school. When compared to the middle class,

those from low-income situations have no or only limited access outside of school and often no experience with them prior to school entry. This exposure to "other worlds of possibility" (Key, 1998, p.10), is a way of increasing their cultural capital.

Another factor for low-income families is transportation restrictions. They may lack a personal vehicle and the public transportation system is limited and inadequate for their needs. Thus, it is difficult to explore the world beyond their neighbourhood and the families rely on their children being able to attend events sponsored by the church or the youth club because these groups offer transportation from their neighbourhood. The number and variety of events offered, however, were described to be limited.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) elaborate upon the interaction between culture and education, stating that cultural capital contributes to social reproduction in education. In our society, cultural attributes and practices such as trips to the museums, music or art classes and dance lessons are highly valued and are considered important for enhancing academic skills. These activities, however, are either too costly for the low-income families or not available in the neigbourhood of these children, so are inaccessible to them.

Discourses

These four emergent themes will now be analyzed and interpreted for the discourses they frame and constitute in the women's lives (Robertson, 2004). In simple terms, discourse refers to "a body of ideas or ensemble of social practices" that people use to make sense of the world and their position in it (Osborne, 2002, pp. 111-112). While discourse often refers to the language or terms for particular formal disciplines, it

also designates "a whole way of speech ... [as] a historically situated material practice that produces power relations" (Osborne, 2002, p. 112). As Lewis (1993) suggests moreover, "discursive practices are the stories we believe we can tell to and of ourselves and also the practical engagements these stories imply" (p. 113). In practice therefore, discourses constitute language or actions capable of transforming or preserving the way things are, depending upon who tells the story from what position of power. For the women in this study, the stories that they tell include: (a) discourses of hope, (b) discourses of invasion, (c) discourses of time, (d) discourses of space and mobility, (e) discourses of the female body, and (f) discourses of maternity (Robertson, 2004).

Discourses of Hope

The mothers in this study face significant challenges as they struggle on a daily basis for their very survival in a world that rarely accords them any acknowledgement for their contributions, a world in which they are often treated like they are deficient in fact. Continually being told that they were missing something and treated as if they needed to be watched or given a course from the authorities in the system, the stories that these women tell of their lives are wrenching and truly capture the heart. They also highlight their resilience and their great love for their children as they try to make a better place for their children to live. Many of the mothers spoke of not wanting their children to endure the hardships that they had experienced.

The lives of these mothers are replete with talk of problems and needs, as opposed to possibilities and hope. Despite the negative language and tone surrounding them however, the women held high aspirations for their children. Although their education

was limited, they expected that their children would finish high school and achieve greater things than they had. One mother, Andrea, recognized her daughter's intelligence and spoke of her going on to become a doctor some day. Another participant spoke of her son's ability to speak well and felt that he would make a good pastor. The parents of another child consider what can be done to increase her chances of success and decide that the purchase of a computer will provide a useful and required tool for her education. To achieve this, they are willing to make sacrifices to enable them to purchase an item considered a necessity by families with greater access to capital.

Thus it became apparent that these parents adhered to discourses of hope that they might be able to secure cultural capital for their children and provide a habitus that promotes the value of higher education.

Discourses of Invasion

For the women in this study, the privacy of their lives and homes was often subject to invasion by agents of public or government authority. Thus these women frequently indicated that their identity was subject to regulation by dynamics that appear out of their control. Feelings of lack of safety and trust pervade their discourses of unwanted house inspections and visits by health care providers, intent on checking to ensure that the mothers were meeting their standards. Through ongoing situations aimed at subordination by housing authorities, these mothers experience the trauma of being being subjected to invasive house inspections because they rely on income assistance without the resources that would allow them to get into training or courses that would help them to find employment.

Hence, they are confined to this neighbourhood and, with the emphasis on order and control of these families' lives by the external agents, some of the parents seek a mechanical order and control when helping their children with homework, particularly reading. A common thread weaving through the discourses of invasion therefore suggests that the women may be trying to ensure that their children conform to strict school standards in order to deal with high levels of uncertainty in their lives. In this way, they may be able to control at least one aspect of their lives and help their children to aspire to a better life for themselves (Darville, 2004).

Discourses of Time

Throughout the discourses of the low-income participants, it is apparent that these parents live their lives in the present, strictly for today and were for the most part unable to make long term plans, let alone think about what tomorrow might bring. At times it seemed that they engaged in activities that would help them to forget about tomorrow and the meanness and sometimes meaninglessness of their lives.

Many of the women's discourses hinted at lives filled with despair, humiliation, deprivation and exploitation. Some of the women, like Andrea and Jill, continued to live with abusive partners for they lacked the skills or the resources to make it on their own so they endured the hardships of a restrictive lifestyle, always dreaming that things might improve. With limited educational and financial resources, these women did not have access to programs or training that would give them the skills to take charge of their lives and move on.

Discourses of time become part of the habitus for the parents as well as their children. Most of the parents in the study do not have the training or the skills to mentor their children towards setting goals and working towards them. Instead, they look for immediate and tangible rewards and do not understand delayed gratification. Thus, when the children enrol in school, their way of dealing with a concern is to address it immediately.

Discourses of Space and Mobility

Many of the women in this study had little control of space or access to the means to seek out spaces of their own. Andrea's husband kept a tight leash on her, forbidding her to have visitors in the home when he was not present. Her mobility was thus seriously constricted and living a lonely life of confinement, she sometimes kept her youngest daughter out of school to keep her company. Andrea's husband clearly held an authoritative power over her and tried to control not only her mobility and actions, but her thinking.

Many of the families also had to rely on public transportation since they didn't have a reliable vehicle. Taking the bus, as Natalie outlined, was time consuming and difficult to coordinate with her sons' school schedules.

The range of work options for the women was very restricted due to their low level of formal education. Many of the jobs were primarily in the service industry such as dishwasher and chamber maid. These jobs provided little opportunity for the women to interact with the public or to expand their social network beyond their neighbourhood.

Another issue related to the discourse of space is the confinement of having homes in a low-income neighbourhood where property lots were small and homes were built in close proximity to each other, therefore limiting their privacy. Further, the noise level was often very high with so many people living close together and having lots of children in these homes

Discourses of the Female Body

Many of the women in the study had lived with physical or psychological violence in their daily lives, sometimes under the guise of love. Alcoholism or excessive social drinking on a regular basis by their partners, left them often feeling lonely and desperate or resulted in them being abused. Some of these mothers not only had physical scars to show; but also deep psychological wounds from the trauma they experienced in their lives. One woman revealed being confined unwillingly and having bruises from being physically abused.

These women's bodies were in poor overall physical condition. Their diet was often unhealthy and exercise was limited. Consequently, many of the women were overweight. These women suffered from many chronic illnesses and psychological problems. Their bodies were tired from the stress in their lives. The women suffered from a feeling that they did not have time to do what they needed to do. Moreover, the women did most, if not all, of the childcare and meal preparation, shopping and cleaning around the house, particularly if they were single parents.

Discourse of Maternity

Sometimes the women appeared to accept their circumstances and act as if they were content with their maternal role as being able to bear children and be a good mother to them. For some, that may have meant giving up their freedom and hope for a world of possibilities for themselves when they joined the ranks of single parenthood to leave an abusive domestic situation to make a better life for themselves and their children.

Although they want to advance their education and many make attempts to do so, they often cannot continue a program to completion. They know their options turn into an impossible dream when they accept their role as mother and provide the childcare and other needs for their children. Women in the study spoke about feeling that they are in a state of crisis. For example, Michelle talked about feeling like she was bound by chains held together with a padlock and no key available.

The women in the study suffer from both a physical and psychological isolation. They rarely venture outside their neighbourhood because they lack access to reliable transportation. In the process of enculturation of their children to the ways of their world, they are socially reproducing their values, beliefs and attitudes. Their children also have had limited opportunities to explore other worlds.

The women are isolated psychologically with a restricted circle of friends and limited social network that they can call upon. They have also cut ties with many members of their extended families and so can not call upon them for support or assistance as might be needed from time to time.

Summary

These six discourses – hope, invasion, time, space and mobility, the female body, and maternity - serve to offer a frame for the women in the study to give voice to their realities. They also show how notions of social reproduction, habitus and cultural capital may link to these discourses.

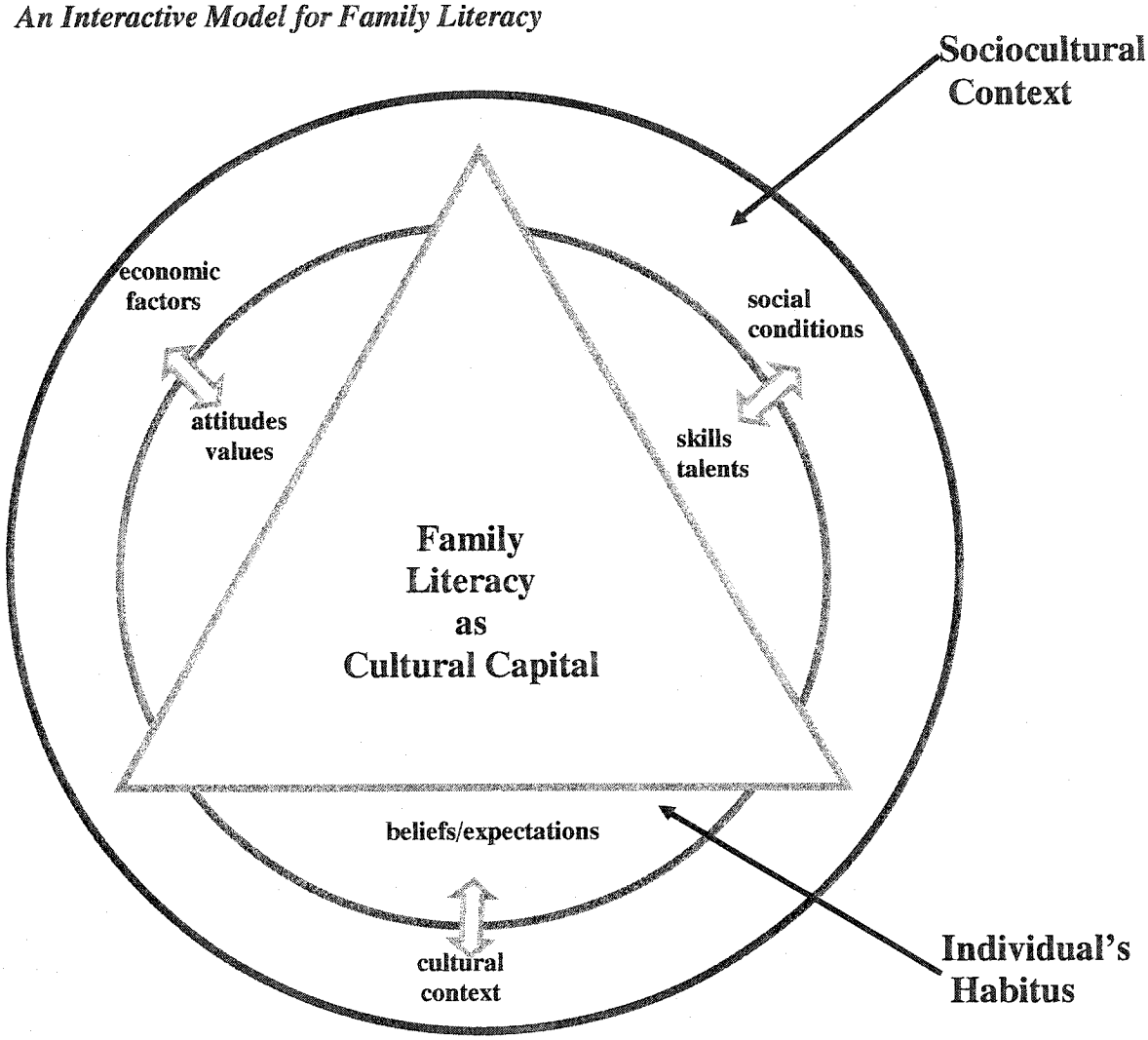
An Interactive Model for Family Literacy

Figure 4, on the next page, offers a graphic representation of a revised organizing framework for family literacy that reflects the dynamic nature of learning and the complexity involved in this process. This interactive model emerged after completing the research illustrating the idea that family literacy is not simply an end product as it appeared in my oversimplified conceptualization in Figure 1. As the findings of this research reveal, family literacy may be understood best when approached from multiple perspectives in a collaborative, yet critical manner.

The surrounding outer circle in the model represents the individual's natural setting or sociocultural context. The social forms through which individuals live are included here; that is, the economic factors, social conditions, and the cultural contexts that are unique to each individual's social and cultural situation. It must be noted that these social forms interact with the attributes of the habitus to create situations and factors that are completely unique to each individual. Further, unequal divisions of resources and power influence how individuals are able to reproduce themselves in the inner circle of their habitus. Thus, while sociocultural factors clearly affect the habitus individuals may occupy, the individual may, in turn, be limited by factors in their habitus.

Figure 4

An Interactive Model for Family Literacy



For example, individuals with greater economic means may be able to purchase items or participate in cultural programs that provide opportunities which orientate their children to school ways. It has been shown that a child who has these experiences as a preschooler has an advantage over a lower-income student who may lack these opportunities since finances in that household may be fully consumed with day to day living expenses.

The triangle positioned on the individual's habitus and intersecting the sociocultural context represents family literacy. As previously discussed, literacy may be viewed as a form of cultural capital. Much of the knowledge that one acquires in life involves interactive learning. The child may gain knowledge from an adult's modeling, through direct instruction in an educational setting, or a combination of these. Thus, the child may be enculturated into family literacy practices through any of these means. The child learns socioculturally determined ways of using the oral mode of his or her native language in routine conversations with whomever he or she spends time, such as family members. This is a form of primary socialization within a given cultural context. Families teach children how to make sense of their experience within their unique cultural context, with variability noted between families depending on their unique situations. Children then use the values, beliefs and skills attained, which comprise their habitus, to give shape and give meaning to their experiences.

Institutions outside the family which have regular contact with the children, such as schools and churches, build upon what children have learned and thereby socialize them to literate ways. However, schools typically exclude or minimize the role of the family. When there is compatibility between what is done at home and the learning

promoted at school, it becomes easier for the child to become socialized in school ways. However, this process may be much more difficult with low income children, since the values and perspectives of home and school may conflict. When the learning that is acquired in the home informs literacy teaching that occurs in school, it may be possible to build on skills that children already have in their repertoire. It is hoped that this model will lead to practical suggestions and directions for future research and intervention. The following section outlines contributions to theory.

Contributions to Theory

The interactive model for family literacy presented in Figure 4 highlights not only the ongoing nature of literacy throughout the lifetime of the individual but indicates that literacy does not simply happen in one particular place or situation. What I mean by this is that individual literacy is a process that occurs on at least three levels: the personal habitus or lived reality of the individual child, the sociocultural context or external environment into which the child is raised, and the family literacy of the child's home situation. The model offers an important and original scholarly contribution to the field of family literacy. It can serve as an effective framework for those who will be designing, doing research on, or implementing family literacy programs. To date the field of family literacy has not been guided by a solid framework and this research will help fill the void.

I have shown how literacy is much more than reading and writing and how it is intertwined not only with education, but also health and social welfare. In the interactive model, this is illustrated by the triangle crossing into the outer circle which includes a place for the social conditions mentioned. All children should have the opportunity to

be exposed to a variety of discourses in order to learn more about themselves and the world. However, children who lack the literacy skills that mainstream children learn as a matter of course in their habitus and social environments are not only at a disadvantage because of their lack of facility with these skills but they seldom get to use the literacy skills that they possess.

In other words, low-income children will have more difficulty when there is a mismatch between the literacy skills learned in formal schooled literacy and the literate ways that they have been shown at home. Furthermore, what this model suggests is that those working in the literacy field should carefully examine the gate-keeping role in how mastery is defined. Hence, researchers should also work on defining what mastery means since mastery will result in the accumulation of cultural capital. If by mastery, we refer only to what is commonly considered print literacy or skills-based literacies, which Kelly (1997) describes as "texts that must be decoded by skillful readers" then we negate the "cultural subject/body of literacy, that body constituted in and of literacy practices" (p. 75).

In Kelly's opinion, what is needed is a shift towards multiple literacies that go beyond a skills-based approach to consider sociocultural contexts, including those of popular culture and multimedia, in order "to move along with print into broadened notions of what it means to read and what it is that can be read" (p. 81). What is needed then is literacy that builds upon the skills already attained not only to improve the functional literacy of the individual within particular technologies but to expand the

boundaries of literacy itself through multiple literacies that encourage "a wider expanse of identities as expressions of human possibility and meaningful difference" (p. 116).

Looking at Family Literacy through a Kaleidoscope Metaphor

The application of metaphors in qualitative research is well-recognized for communicating messages succinctly and in powerful ways. A child's toy kaleidoscope has been selected as a metaphor for use in the present study. The origin of the word kaleidoscope is from three Greek words: *kalos* meaning beauty, *eidos* meaning form, and *scope* meaning image. According to the Kaleidoscope Photographic Workshop site (2003, ¶ 2), a kaleidoscope is "an optical instrument in which bits of glass, beads, etc. [are], held loosely at the end of a rotating tube [and] are shown in continually changing symmetrical forms by reflection in three mirrors placed at 60 degree angles to each other."

The kaleidoscope metaphor has been previously used in qualitative research as a template for the organization and analysis of data. Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, and Coleman (2000), four doctoral candidates in a research class, provided an overview of the constant comparative method to analyze their data in their paper. They worked through the complex process of categorization, comparison, inductive analysis and refinement of their data bits into categories while making reference to the kaleidoscope metaphor. Dye et al (2000) indicate that the loose bits of coloured glass in the kaleidoscope represent their data, while the mirrors represent their categories, and the flat plates represent the overarching topic that inform their analysis. This metaphor helped them to conceptualize the process of ongoing category refinement.

In the same way, Diment (2001) saw merit in selecting the kaleidoscope metaphor when referring to a process of making sense of qualitative data. She talks about how the methods used for data analysis in grounded theory dissolve and change like a kaleidoscope:

> Familiar as we are with the way that a kaleidoscopic image dissolves and changes in shape and form when the instrument is fractionally revolved, it can nevertheless be a disconcerting experience to discover that both the data and the methods you are using to analyse it are also dissolving and changing. The difficulty is to hold the shape steady enough for a composite picture to emerge and my specific difficulty with applying the tenets of grounded theory to the data analysis meant that I could no longer see the data as fixedly as I believed I needed to in order to arrive at a 'definitive' analysis. (pp. 8-9)

Similar to the others, I found that a kaleidoscope could be used metaphorically to help in my understanding of my subject matter. I have applied the kaleidoscope to family literacy to conceptualize the relationships among family members and how outside factors affect family literacy in low-income homes. The small two-dimensional coloured shapes at the bottom of the kaleidoscope tube may represent the traits of the family members. By traits, I mean the family background and status, skills, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, values, experiences and habits, which are implicated in determining their cultural capital as well. People acquire cultural capital through the social system and only if they have means of appropriating it (Jarvis, 1992).

When viewed alone from a perspective outside of the family, the pieces of glass are perceived merely as unconnected pieces or traits belonging to mothers, fathers, sons, daughters or extended family members. The pieces are not recognized as having much value on their own; they may be seen as nothing more than a variety of flat loose shapes trapped in a jumbled disarray between two pieces of glass. As the viewer changes focus

and peers through the eyepiece, a rich mesmerizing medley of colour may be apparent. There is a magical sense of wonder in how the process of rearranging those pieces achieved harmony and balance in a series of uniform pie slices.

In my cross-case analysis of the family literacy data, I carefully studied the individual families alone with a myopic view as I created the various categories for my data. I then broadened my focus by comparing across categories and rearranging or reducing the complexity by sorting the data into related groupings. This process continued until I worked through the content analysis for the various data collected from each family. Through the inductive analysis, my themes began to emerge. The process of constant comparison lead to the creation of descriptive categories as Dye et al (2000) suggest will occur.

After a simple turn of the tube, representing one of the many twists in life as the family members interact with others around them in their community, there is an interaction among those pieces and a new image is then formed. This is an ongoing process in which minor adjustments may upset the balance and suddenly alter the state for the family while forming a new image or view. There are infinite possibilities for the pieces to interact with the surrounding pieces and compose a new image. Some shifts are larger and therefore create more noticeable patterns of change than others.

This interaction helps the family members acquire and maintain a subjective sense of identity. The familial ties and shared history among these individuals contribute to the socialization process during which their self-concept is shaped and habitus is formed. The process is not comprised of a single linear event, but rather multiple co-occurring events

in which the family members engage. A variety of factors not only from within the family, but from outside, influence socialization. Just as reflections from the mirrors and refractions through the viewing lens inside the kaleidoscope change the shape and colour combinations inside the apparatus, the influence of and interactions with others near to them in their community, affects the situation, self-view and positions of the family.

One's point of view affects how these images are interpreted. Depending on the angle chosen to look at the pattern and the amount of light that illuminates it, there may be quite different views. In the dark, closed-minded view, the flat little pieces trapped inside the tube may seem vague, particularly if they contradict the cultural values of the community. The mirrors cannot reflect the light and the magically interacting, and ever changing rich patterns may not even be recognizable. When examined with bright light and an open mind, the mirrors offer the viewer an opportunity to reflect on the pattern. The little pieces may be seen as parts of beautiful and quite tantalizing patterns, regardless of whether or not they match the dominant community values.

By using the metaphor of a kaleidoscope with its dynamic ever-changing patterns of colour and light, people may be seen from a variety of perspectives and their multiple worlds within which they engage become more evident. The key issue for better understanding of family literacy is to hold the kaleidoscope to the light to note the family strengths. Without sufficient light to illuminate and the help of the mirrors to reflect the beautiful patterns, a deficit view of family literacy may be taken. In contrast, with sufficient light and time to reflect, the view from the kaleidoscope offers a new dimension that acknowledges multiple literacies. While recognizing that family literacy

deals with unique individuals that interact within families, and that all families form their own sense of symmetry and balance, it follows that the viewer gains a full appreciation of the broader definition of "literacy" and a host of literacies would be respected.

Implications for Practice

Findings from this thesis have implications for both literacy practice and reworking of public policy for people living in low-income circumstances. The findings, in addition to being useful to practitioners in the field of family literacy and various educators, will have direct implications for those creating teacher education programs and for others developing broad social policies.

Literacy Practitioners and Teachers

Teacher preparation is in fact a career-long continuum of development and literacy practitioners and teachers need ongoing professional development on the subject of literacy. The review of the related literature revealed a startling lack of agreement over the definition of literacy and the common use of definitions that were limited in scope. As a result, many literacy activities fall outside of the narrow definition of school literacy and may not be valued or interpreted as literacy events by educators.

In the present study all of the families engaged in regular television and movie viewing. This medium, when used purposefully with programs carefully selected, could be included in the spectrum of literacy activities. Educational programming could be especially helpful to improve the literacy of low-income children who might be limited in their ability in their current circumstances to extend the scope of their

worldview. However, the educators in this study looked upon the television as a negative entertainment force in the lives of these families, without seeing the possibility of it having any educational potential. They often voiced concerns about the young children watching movies with mature subject matter or staying up late at night to watch television and not getting sufficient rest.

As has been previously described, a serious shortcoming of our education system involves the promotion of one form of literacy, referred to as school literacy, and the subsequent failure to adequately acknowledge the value of other vernacular literacies. This results in schools unwittingly perpetuating a distancing between those in power and those not in the dominant class, reproducing social relationships that maintain the dominant structure in society. Thus, there is great need for acceptance of a common definition that is broad enough in scope to encompass the multiple literacies.

Classroom practices and school activities that construct a limited way of addressing literacy contribute to hierarchical and dominating practices. Guiding teachers in reflective practice may help them to engage in critical classroom practices and construct alternative ways of addressing literacy. Also, there is a range in modes of literacy expression beyond the written word, such as oral, visual and electronic. By showing students real life purposes or authentic uses of literacy, some students may be better able to connect in productive ways to curricular learning. Thus, the role of the everyday popular culture, television, radio and movies could be extended in the lives of the students.

Burant (1999) points out how school personnel must be more open to issues of cultural diversity and networking with families to better understand their needs. From a critical theory stance, it is not so much a question of fixing the system, but rather completely changing the system to allow a community where everyone is valued and respected. For teachers, it may be hard to admit that there are students in their classrooms, or their family members, whose voices are not allowed to be heard. School staff may be unwittingly silencing them by their practices; they may make them uncomfortable to speak and not feel part of the mainstream view.

Teachers can capitalize on the personal experiences and background knowledge of their students by looking beyond the standard school-related materials to employ a range of effective pedagogic strategies that will actively engage students from a variety of backgrounds. At the same time, they could support positive communication between home and school cultures and involve other family members.

Literacy practitioners, including teachers, have varying needs for information on the subject of family literacy and poverty to guide them to work more effectively and to understand the cultural matches and mismatches to the dominant mode in society. Nagle (1999) points out that most educators were socialized along white middle-class lines and may be less familiar with other cultural realities. Teachers would benefit from having time and support to allow critical reflection in their practice (Jarvis, 1992). Reflective journal writing is one pedagogical technique that would encourage teachers to speak in their own voice. Jarvis (1992) suggests that the

occupational structures in teaching prevent opportunities for reflective practice, so he points to a need for a theory of practice, along with mentors and managers to help.

Opportunities for educators to develop partnerships with private non-government organizations that have a mandate to promote literacy activities would also serve a useful purpose. Educators would become better versed on the roles of the organizations and could draw upon them for support with some school-based initiatives. At Parkview School, various community groups and literacy stakeholders teamed with school staff to put a community program in the school. Outside organizations, all too familiar with writing proposals, helped the school prepare successful applications for staffing and purchasing of required materials.

A well-designed professional development program which aims to highlight the importance of literacy and show how literacy underpins success in all learning areas is critical. Such a program should stress how literacy affects life opportunities and outcomes and, as such, is a social justice issue. By recognizing that literacy is a key component of successful learning, this will help to afford the subject the attention it deserves and encourage literacy practitioners to seek opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge.

Program administrators could also promote opportunities for collaboration among teachers to allow them sufficient time to share information and analyze the language and literacy used in their classrooms. In working together to develop their individual skills and knowledge base on integrating diverse language and literacy from their communities into their classrooms, teachers will be taking a big step to

better meet the needs of all of their students. Opportunities to visit selected classrooms might also be a way to achieve this goal.

Lickteig, Parnell and Ellis (1995) outline ways that principals can support professional development for teachers such as by encouraging staff to attend professional workshops and conferences; sharing professional reading; purchasing professional resources for staff libraries; encouraging membership in local reading councils and planning inservices. Lickteig et al (1995) also outlines a variety of ways that principals could support the teachers with instruction. Their list includes: helping to obtain materials, reading to students, listening to students read, ensuring that students having difficulty get the help they need, encouraging teacher innovation, providing classroom libraries, arranging author visits and encouraging publication of students' works.

Patton, Silva and Myers (1999) point out that when educators work with families outside of school settings, they become much better informed about the family's daily lives and experiences. Without knowledge of this aspect of their lives, it is easy for educators to assume that families are not following through on literacy activities in the home setting. This runs counter to what was discovered in the present study, where both children and their family members engaged in a variety of literacy activities that were not school-based. The list of literacy activities included: bible reading, reading books and magazines for pleasure, following recipes or craft patterns and performing tasks to maintain the household such as paying bills, budgeting and shopping. By having a better understanding of the social organization of literacy in the homes and everyday lives of

the children from low-income circumstances, the teachers will be better able to respond more effectively (A. B. Anderson, Teale & Estrada, 1997).

Preservice Teacher Education

Classrooms today are more diverse than ever and a strong preservice education program is needed to ensure that future teachers are adequately prepared for the many demands of the classrooms. Preservice education that includes discussion of diversity provides an opportunity for future teachers to develop their knowledge and skills in issues associated with various socioeconomic classes to help them understand some of the needs of low-income families that they will eventually serve as teachers.

There are a number of variables that affect perceptions and attitudes, including one's experience. Opportunity to complete a teaching practicum, or minimally to visit in a culturally diverse school and to participate cooperatively in extra-curricular activities with low-income families may help to dispel some common myths and negative stereotypes about low-income families, such as the families not valuing or supporting education. Delpit (1995) also suggests that teacher education students might interview parents and collect data to develop some strategies for working with diverse children.

An implication for teacher education programs is to ensure that teachers are fully prepared to work with students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Burant, 1999) and are sufficiently trained and at ease working with the families of all students. I support Key's (1998) recommendations that teacher education programs "include courses that focus on teacher attitudes and arrogant perceptions" (Key, 1998, p. 91). One principle I have

understood from a critical theory stance, is the necessity to first recognize the social and cultural constraints that one's background provides before they can be addressed.

Sometimes it becomes all too easy for myths to unintentionally continue to be perpetuated by a dominant class and the truths to be overlooked or not even recognized. It is vital that pre-service teachers develop the knowledge necessary to work with families from cultures different from their own. They must abandon a deficit perspective with its false assumptions about the lack of literacy forms in some families and become reflective practitioners in their own right who can independently evaluate situations on their own.

Robertson (1997) studied twelve primary school teacher education students reactions to the film *Stand and Deliver* in which a Hispanic teacher's disadvantaged high school students were succeeding with advanced calculus. Robertson talks about how popular culture and the media promote images of teaching with visions of devotion and self-sacrifice. She says that this teaching as a "dream of love blocks some significant tensions from consciousness" (p. 84) and "reproduces conservative values, beliefs and attitudes" (p. 85). Robertson points out the need for educators to learn how beginning teachers "come to think in different ways about teaching and how particular fantasies of teaching in white primary-school women teachers, namely the erotic notions of mastery and salvation, ignore the issues of 'race', gender, and other kinds of conflict in education" (p. 76).

Teacher education students also have a need for opportunities to explore their own reading and writing stances through biography and reflection to help them better understand their perceptions and approaches related to reading instruction. The mode of

cognition of critical theory recognizes the innate possibilities that people have as they are able to be reflexive and can produce their own knowledge (Peters et al, 2003). Morawski and Brunhuber (1995) point out how pre-service teachers in the process of learning to teach typically rely on their past experience in classrooms to inform their practice. They speak about how "the beliefs and feelings which teachers hold about literacy activities, including the teaching of reading, can be found in their Early Recollections of Learning to Read (ERLRs)" (p. 316).

Morawski and Brunhuber (1995) also promote the practice of active reflection through journals and/or verbal interaction for teachers. They argue that this will help teachers to develop a greater awareness of their perceptions and their origin in order that they may be informed about what affects their own instructional practices. Thus, they recommend the inclusion of such opportunities in methods courses on reading along with activities that will allow the students to become self-directed and reflect on their conclusions.

Implications for Policy

The current literacy policy agenda may be somewhat misguided since it appears to advocate a single best practice model that fosters the myth that prosperity necessarily results from literacy. It is not to deny that investing in resources to help parents improve their literacy could have important payoffs for their children, it is just that there are so many other factors involved and these cannot simply be ignored. In order to move them to action, policy leaders must clearly recognize how education is inextricably intertwined with political, cultural and socioeconomic factors that have led to systemic inequalities.

This is a problem for which both educators and politicians must work together to increase their understanding and attempt to remedy.

The importance of the relationship between income variables and home environment on children's outcomes cannot be denied. Some of these variables composing the home environment include literacy, children's activities and parental participation in their children's lives. Social policies designed to facilitate the development and occurrence of these activities, could promote child well-being. It is not only important to have policies to promote literacy, but also to have policies to provide environments for parent-child interactions, thereby making it easier for families to spend time together or have a safe and accessible place to go for recreational activities.

If government housing development projects, for example, were encouraged and supported to offer well-equipped fully staffed libraries in community centres and provide organized recreational and educational activities at the centres this might help low-income families. Accessible educational programs could go a long way in keeping both children and adults engaged in worthwhile activities and away from the potential lure of trouble that parents like Natalie and Andrea describe as happening in their overcrowded neighbourhoods when children have nothing productive to do with their spare time.

Many jobs today are low paying and designated as casual, so that the employer is not required to cover costs of employee benefits such as sick days and paid vacation leave. Very often these low wage jobs have inflexible hours that do not allow a parent to work around their children's school schedules. Single parents simply cannot afford to survive and raise a family on these low wages and shiftwork may be highly disruptive to

the family, particularly single-parent families. Thus, there is little financial incentive for them to work and they may choose to remain on social assistance.

A system is needed to prevent the abuse of casual workers, ensuring perhaps after a set period of employment that they are able to receive benefits, or even be able to maintain some of the benefits that are available for those under income assistance, if salary falls below a certain level, namely their health card to cover medical expenses. Without such a standard, businesses can continue to take advantage of workers by hiring low-skilled and poorly educated employees and justify paying them less than a living wage with poor working conditions and no benefits.

In my study, most of the low-income women were unemployed, but they were typically able to rattle off a list of previous low skill jobs they held in the service industry. They had found themselves trapped in a spiral of exhausting low paying work which prevented them from attending courses or attaining the skills that they needed for positions that would offer them higher wages. Further, they had to cover their own childcare and transportation costs. Many decided they were better off not working and collecting their benefits so consequently quit their jobs.

It is hard to find a job today that offers a living wage for those with limited education and few job skills. Richmond (1999) highlighted how New Brunswick society has changed with the advent of technology and how some families have felt the impact. In the past, it was possible for many people to work in unskilled or low-skilled seasonable employment related to the farming, fishing, hunting, or mining industry in this province. One's level of literacy attainment was not as critical as it is today. In modern

day society, however, these types of jobs are no longer available. Mechanization has replaced manual labor and some of the natural resources have been depleted so, for example, fewer fishers and hunters are needed.

Key (1998) spoke about the cultural arrogance of social policy makers in unquestionably accepting the "rightness of their philosophical views" (p. 104). She pointed out their need to recognize the "intimidating power of literacy" (p. 104) and understand the underlying conditions between knowledge and power in order to make more informed decisions about public initiatives. Clearly, establishing an open dialogue with those in marginalized positions would be helpful.

In my study, Natalie presents as a powerful example of someone trying desperately to change her life circumstances. In Chapter 4, I highlighted the many barriers she faces with her limited skills for employment and low level of formal education. Existing public policies in Canada serve to discourage low-income individuals from leaving their unemployed position where they receive housing and heating subsidies as well as full health benefits, to go to an employed position where they must cover these expenses plus additional costs of child care and transportation. One obvious problem is that most of these people have less than a high school education, which is often a minimal requirement for employment. They end up in unskilled low paying jobs that do not offer the benefits and so in fact, despite the pay cheque they are in a lower financial position.

Social policy makers need to listen to those working in the field of family literacy if they truly want the public policy agenda to move forward. Practitioners are the ones

who interact with those living in low-income circumstances and understand their needs. They, rather than the politicians, should be the ones to define the pertinent issues facing these people. With literacy practitioners' background and understanding from working in this context, they are in a better position to outline the future direction for social policy. The establishment of government working groups and task forces which would include those on the frontlines who would be able to examine these issues and make recommendations to the government would be helpful in this regard. The role of policy makers would then be to help create the economic, political and social conditions that will support literacy practitioners and educators to develop well-designed programs which would use a broad definition of literacy and enable those families living in poverty to move beyond their present life circumstances.

In a discussion with Cheryl Brown, an experienced family literacy worker in New Brunswick (personal communication, July 28, 2003), she delivered some helpful insights from her experience gained from working with low-literate families in the community. She refers to what she calls the "reducing barriers" approach where she would like to envision community social workers and case managers working closely with families in need to offer individualized support to them in the areas required. However, she was quick to point out that in reality this is not how the system works. In fact, reportedly, more times than not parents are put though what she feels is a needless intimidating appeal process. This includes a requirement for these low-literate individuals to write extensively and be judged on the product. Brown, as a practitioner, discusses the idea of child care and health care benefits extending until the families are able to become self-

sufficient. She also recognizes the need for some safety nets for these families, as oftentimes they may experience unexpected setbacks.

Limitations of the Study

This research study was limited to those families living in low-income circumstances which had at least one child enrolled in the Core French program in a primary grade at one selected neighbourhood school. Children in Core French follow the curriculum in English with French taught as a separate subject for one period of instruction each school day from the first grade onward. Children attending French Immersion classes were not included in this study because I did not have sufficient competency in the French language to fully understand the subtleties of the interactions between the teacher and the students in the classroom setting. The French Immersion Program is an alternate approach for anglophone children to learn French by becoming immersed into the French language as the language of instruction in all curricular areas (Department of Education, 2001).

Immigrant families whose first language was not English and who may have been living in low-income situations were not included. This second exclusion was because of inherent difficulties in communicating effectively with these families in a language that was not their birth language and because of a concern about introducing confounding cultural variables (Klassen & Burnaby, 1993). Given these restrictions, it would be prudent to recognize that those interviewed may or may not be representative of the larger population living in low-income circumstances.

In my qualitative research design, rather than using formalized sampling procedures common in quantitative research, each of the participant families was chosen through purposeful and selective sampling (Merriam, 2001). Since it was necessary to depend on others in this identification process, the question remains whether these cases represent the population studied.

The decision to conduct my research in only one school was made for practical purposes. This may make it difficult to establish widespread replicability or transferability of the findings to other locations. However, I chose qualitative methods to provide a deeper and broader understanding of the phenomena of family literacy, not to make generalizations. The case study method attempts to overcome this limitation by providing thorough descriptions of the cases and research context, in addition to identifying the assumptions and presuppositions that were central to the research. The results and conclusions drawn from within these boundaries must be weighed with this description I have offered in order to determine how reasonable it is to transfer the findings to other settings and draw out meaningful extrapolations.

My sample consisted of eight families. This large number for a qualitative research design was selected as a safeguard in case there was attrition. Since the eight families participated fully in all aspects of the study, the data collection and analysis were time consuming. Due to the iterative data collection design, there is the potential that the necessary delays between data analysis of previous events and the next data collection event may have resulted in information loss by spreading the process over a longer period.

Areas for Future Research

Family Participants

Some exciting opportunities exist to refine and build upon this research and allow further insight into the phenomenon of family literacy in low-income homes. As a single researcher, this project dictated the number of participants that could be included for a manageable study. In the previous section, I made it clear what I saw as some other possible limitations of my study such as the inclusion of only families with children in the Core French program attending one school and who spoke only English at home.

A larger scale study with a varied sample, including new Canadians and those with mixed language or from other cultural minority backgrounds, could be considered for providing confirmation, rejection or clarification of the current findings with a range of the groups represented under the low-income families umbrella. Similar studies in other school settings may yield interesting results and alternatives that could further refine the research questions.

A more systematic review of literacy artefacts would also be helpful. In the present study, only artefacts given specifically to the researcher were collected. Seeking these out would provide information from all families regarding where they are kept and what values the families place on them.

It was not the intent of this research to try various interventions and to assess the outcome, but rather to observe, participate and describe what was viewed. However, giving scrap paper to the children was one intervention that was offered in the course of study. The children used this to create original pictures, to draw or to write short

messages. It would be interesting to undertake an action research project to reveal how these parents in low-income circumstances experience various 'problems' or issues and how they can take action for change and become advocates for their children's education.

Additional research is needed to learn more about the parents that used literacy activities as an escape in their childhood from traumatic life events occurring around them. Horsman (1999) discusses that she found many of the women in her study used reading as an escape from the realities of violence in their lives and she went on to question the connections between these experiences and their literacy learning as adults. This line of research would also be beneficial for studying issues such as their own resiliency and the kinds of attitudes and beliefs these parents hold regarding barriers they have faced.

In this study, the parents were asked to report on any household activities rather than specifically on literacy events. The reason for this was to try to get a more natural response, rather than have parents write what they might think they should if literacy was being examined. It would be helpful to see how parents self-report through either written or oral diaries on the literacy events occurring in their homes if they are aware that literacy is being examined. The question also remains whether the parents would change in either quantity or quality their practices by increasing their awareness of what is occurring at home related to literacy when the subject is brought to a greater awareness level by self report.

I also would change an aspect of the journal activity to enhance the process and to discover if emancipatory elements in journal writing can be discovered for low-income

families. I would consider more open-ended journals and would encourage participants to not only write in sentence format, but to sketch and doodle if they chose this as a means to represent their thoughts and ideas.

Finally, an additional area of inquiry, where there has only been limited discussion, is on the role of the father in child development, or more specifically literacy, at various ages in the child's life. In my study, it was evident that homework and other school-like activities were gendered tasks for the mothers of children in the early years, regardless of the involvement of the father in the family. However, I have no information on whether the father assumes greater responsibility at another age in the life of the child or whether the gender of the student makes a difference in the father's level or type of involvement.

Greer (2001) indicates that although women dominate the literacy field, there is a role for males in literacy development, particularly with boys. She points out that men can serve as important role models for boys and can provide early literacy experiences. Greer than predicts that if young boys have these models of their gender, they will become more interested in reading and there will be a rise in their interest level for books and in their reading ability. She highlighted also how young boys will follow not only the positive, but also the negative response of a father to books and reading and programs that involve men.

School Aspect

With regards to an elaboration of the school aspect of the present study, spending longer periods of time in each classroom over an extended period throughout the school

year would be helpful for gaining more insight into school practices. Although the interactions in the present study were revealing, there are areas that I feel could have been more fully explored if time had permitted. For example, I would like to know more about the teacher negotiating the literacy the child brings to class and how literacy is integrated into the curriculum. Another area for elaboration is how the teacher incorporates relevant meaningful literacy with the students, while keeping in mind the curriculum objectives.

The inclusion of younger, kindergarten level, and older, middle and high school students would be one way to determine if the same influences operate in these classes as in the primary grades, or if other factors emerge that should be examined. Since the school context plays an important role in this study, a greater variation in data might be obtained by including schools in urban and rural settings and looking at more teachers of both genders at various stages in their careers, from very first years of teaching, to mid-career and veteran teachers nearing retirement.

A gap remains in the knowledge base on the impact of information technology on learning in low-income families who have no access to devices such as computers at home. None of the children from the low-income families in my study had personal computers at their home to help facilitate their learning. In contrast, many of the children from higher socioeconomic classes had access to personal computers and the Internet and often spoke at school about using their computer. Their skill in being able to readily use the classroom computer far exceeded the lower-class students because of their experiences with their system at home.

Conclusions

This study adds to the research base for family literacy. The family literacy practices that I have put forth adopt a broad definition of literacy as a vehicle for communication and learning and for people to gain greater control of their lives. Briefly, the research has added to the book of knowledge about literacy in low-income families in New Brunswick. The points will be summarized here. First, school literacy was limited to helping with homework and listening to oral reading. Incidental learning opportunities were typically not recognized by the families. The purchase of items to foster school literacy appeared to be limited, although the parents perceived by their standards that they were buying educational items for their children. While the schools attempted to extend home-school relations, many of the parents were uncomfortable participating in school activities. For those parents who took part, they often discontinued their involvement due to other commitments. Finally, changes to social policy and access to transportation would not automatically translate to more literacy activities and accumulation of cultural capital.

I pointed out the multifaceted aspect of family literacy and the danger in using a deficit model and generalizing about literacy needs of low-income families. Avoidance of a deficit framework will continue to be a challenge. However, a shift is clearly needed to move thinking away from looking at the learner as the problem with a deficit in skills, and to look at the socially framed nature of the problem. Although income still defines these families, new and different possibilities were shown for constructing their identity and may affect their attitudes, values and orientation to literacy. Critical theory helps to

shift us from looking at economics as the primary cause of social development to institutions and culture itself.

The use of critical theory as a framework is intended to be liberatory. Thus my effort in applying critical theory as a tool in this study may be judged as only partially successful since I neglected to involve my participants in activities that would have encouraged their reflexivity and may have empowered them to act in ways that may have been liberating to them.

In my research, I attempted to move beyond more traditional research approaches to examine the complexities of literacy, specifically family literacy, in our modern society. At the outset, I critically analyzed my position as a middle class researcher entering this low-income community. I thought about how my background, beliefs, values, and experiences might affect interactions with the participants, or impact on my analysis of results. While I respected my participants' realities which encouraged my participants to be open with me, as Olson said, I had "positioned [myself] to intervene effectively in their reality" (Olson, 1992, ¶p.3). Moreover, I neglected to provide opportunities for my participants to reflect on their life circumstances.

Had I employed some of the liberatory pedagogical techniques espoused by Freire in his work with peasants in Brazil, I may have been instrumental in encouraging my participants to engage in praxis or reflection plus action that may well have reaped more positive literacy outcomes. Freire respected the people he worked with and used dialogue to continually challenge them to increase their curiosity and improve their understanding. In Freire's 'conscientization', a coordinator encourages participants to talk about themes

that are relevant to them. Reflecting and then coming to a state of consciousness is the first step in practical liberation through education and/or literacy (Freire, 1980).

Olson (1992) indicated that Freire had an "unshakable faith that we all can come to comprehend and transform [reality]" (Olson, 1992, ¶4). Zigman (2002) adds that, according to Freire, who witnessed exploitation of impoverished powerless people, we must begin to effect change in how the oppressed view their situation. She also states that Freire found that one problem was that the oppressed people often lacked the skills to participate and needed to be educated so they can participate in determining their own political and cultural lifestyles.

As presented, children's literacy development largely depends not on their social class, but rather on their socialization in their early years (L. M. Morrow 1989; Nickse 1989; D. Taylor 1983) and how they are enculturated into the family's literacy practices (Heath, 1983; D. Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). This thesis expands the family literacy knowledge base while looking at the literacy-related practices and perceptions of low-income families. The descriptive case study "illuminate[s] the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study" (Merriam, 1988, p. 13) with the co-construction of home-based and school-based data.

In this descriptive study, I generate new knowledge regarding family literacy in low-income homes. As discussed in the introductory chapter, I chose to overlay quotations from the heart in the narrative as a succinct way of summarizing the description that followed. These quotes also serve as a reminder that my research is about

individuals, while highlighting the complexities in their lives. For me, as the researcher, this study raised issues of reflexivity and involved self-reflexion coming from my heart.

Theoretically, my study contributes to a social practice view of literacy as outlined by Barton and Hamilton (1998). Stake (1995) emphasizes that qualitative researchers must "try to observe the ordinary, and they try to observe it long enough to comprehend, what, for this case, ordinary means" (p. 44). Through my observations and process of reflexion I have answered what the ordinary means in low-income families. In Chapter 1, I wrote about ways that my attitudes, beliefs and cultural background could influence the research process and I have remained cognizant and refective throughout my study to reduce likelihood of bias. The overarching commonality in the participant families is that literacy is seen as a set of social practices that are purposeful and embedded in their cultural practices. These social practices underpin the lives of all of the families regardless of their education level, family income or other variable. Thus, the role of context in learning cannot be overlooked.

The knowledge and experiences that children bring to school is a function of what they have learned at home and is a key element for successful literacy. Purcell-Gates and Dahl (1991) show how children who begin school with higher levels of emergent literacy knowledge, the literacy behaviours that typically develop in the early years of a child's life, have an advantage over those with less developed vocabulary or limited awareness of print and literacy concepts. As would be expected, those with higher emergent literacy have a better understanding of the purposes of reading and experience greater success at learning to read and write in school. Purcell-Gates (1996) later added that not only the

frequency of the literacy events, but their complexity will predict the level of emergent literacy knowledge in children.

This study has shown how literacy as a socially constructed concept may be defined in various ways, depending on the expectations and attitudes of the particular interest group involved. It should also be noted that many people still erroneously tend to focus on what they label as the "literacy problem", seeking to understand this "problem" relationship among literacy, education, employment and culture; and the differences between those with low and high levels of literacy in their community.

It is imperative that educators and policy makers address the notion of literacy in ways that will reflect an understanding of the word literacy in its broadest sense to include multiple literacies, which are socially situated. Future research would be important for building on the findings from this study, to refine the power notions in the bureaucracy of the school and the greater society and to connect parental attitudes and child behaviours. Researchers and teachers should work collaboratively to better understand the complex nature of family literacy in low-income homes.

As previously highlighted, there are voices in the classroom that teachers ignore - not consciously, but as a product of the social environment of the school. Delpit (1995) is quick to add that the schools cannot take the full blame and that society contributes to the maintenance of stereotypes which portray some students, as less able and deny them their right to access dominant discourses to have access to economic power. According to Delpit (1995), teachers need to accept students' various home identities and add other voices and discourses. They must hold on to the belief that all children can learn

regardless of social class status or other cultural difference and teach to the children's strengths rather than focusing on their needs.

Instead of pointing fingers at parents for being the cause of their children's problems in learning to read and write, Paratore (1995) suggests that parents should be regarded and welcomed by teachers as valuable and committed partners in the process of educating their children. From this perspective, the parents may then feel more comfortable in their interactions and involvement with the school. In a similar vein, Delpit (1988) points out that school personnel will be in a better position to understand what parents are saying about how to best educate their children when parents feel more comfortable in offering their perspectives. In dealing with families it will become easier for educators once they learn to:

Get right to the heart of matters.
It's the heart that matters more.

- Adam Duritz

REFERENCES

ABC CANADA (2003). *Literacy and numeracy* (¶ 5). Retrieved September 11, 2003, from http://www.abc-canada.org/literacy_facts/

ABC CANADA (2004). *About ABC CANADA* (¶1). Retrieved May 11, 2004, from http://www.abc-canada.org/about_us/

Adams, M. J., Foorman, B. R., Lundberg, I., & Beeler, T. (1998). *Phonemic awareness in young children: A classroom curriculum*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Adler, S., & Goodman, J. (1986). Critical theory as a foundation for methods courses. *Journal of Teacher Education, 37*(4), 2-8.

Anderson, A. B., Teale, W. H., & Estrada, E. (1997). Low-income children's preschool literacy experiences: Some naturalistic observations. In M. Cole, Y. Engeström, & O. Vasquez (Eds.), *Mind, culture, and activity: Seminal papers from the laboratory of comparative human cognition* (pp. 313-329). Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Anderson, G. (1990). *Fundamentals of educational research*. New York: The Falmer Press.

Appleton, J. V. (1995). Analyzing qualitative interview data: Addressing issues of validity and reliability. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 22*, 993-997.

Auerbach, E. (1989). Towards a social contextual approach to family literacy. *Harvard Educational Review, 59*(2), 165-181.

Auerbach, E. (1995a). Deconstructing the discourse of strengths in family literacy.

Journal of Reading Behavior, 27(4), 643-661.

Auerbach, E. (1995b). Which way for family literacy: Intervention or empowerment. In L. M. Morrow (Ed.), *Family literacy: Connections in schools and communities* (pp. 11-28). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Barclay, K. (2001). Humanizing learning at a distance. (Doctoral dissertation, Saybrook Graduate School, Hawaii, 2001). Dissertation Abstracts International, 62, 1388.

Barer-Stein, T. (1993). Culture in the classroom. In T. Barer-Stein & J. A. Draper (Eds.), *The craft of teaching adults* (pp. 147-164). Toronto: Culture Concepts.

Barker, K. (1999, January 30). *Adult literacy: Lessons learned project: Technical Report.* Ottawa, ON: Human Resource Development Canada.

Barton, D. (1997). Family literacy programmes and home practices. In D. Taylor (Ed.), Many families, many literacies: An international declaration of principles (pp. 101-109). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Barton, D. (1994). Literacy practices and literacy events. In M. Hamilton, D. Barton, & R. Ivanic (Eds.), *Worlds of literacy* (pp. vii-x). Toronto, ON: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Barton, D., & Hamilton, M. (1998). *Local literacies.* London: Routledge.

Beals, D., deTemple, J., & Dickinson, D. (1994). Talking and listening that support early literacy development of children from low-income families. In D. Dickinson (Ed.), *Bridges to literacy: Children, families, and schools* (pp. 19-42). Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Bhola, H. S. (1996). Family literacy development and culture: Interconnections,

reconstructions. *Convergence, 29*(1), 34-45.

Bingman, M. B., Ebert, O., & Bell, B. (2002, March). *Documenting outcomes for learners and their communities: A report on a NSCALL action research project.* Cambridge, MA: NSCALL. Retrieved October 11, 2002 from, http://nscall.gse.harvard.edu/research/report20.pdf

Borg, W. R., & Gall, M. D. (1989). *Educational research: An introduction* (5th ed.). New York: Longman.

Bottomore, J. L. (1977). Foreword. In P. Bourdieu & J.-C. Passeron (Eds.), *Reproduction in education, society, and culture* (pp. v-viii). London: Sage Publications Inc.

Bottorff, J. L. (1994). Using videotaped recordings in qualitative research. In J. M. Morse (Ed.), *Critical issues in qualitative research methods* (pp. 244-261). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241-260). New York: Greenwood Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.-C. (Eds.). (1977). *Reproduction in education, society, and culture.* London: Sage Publications Inc.

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.-C. (1979). *The inheritors.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology.* Cambridge:

Polity Press.

Braunger, J., & Lewis, J. P. (1997). *Building a knowledge base in reading* (2nd ed.). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Breen, M. P., Louden, W., Barratt-Pugh, C., Rivalland, J., Rohl, M., Rhydwen, M., et al. (1994). *Literacy in its place: An investigation of literacy practices in urban and rural communities, overview and interpretations* (Australian Language and Literacy Project 2 1993-94). Canberra, Australia: Department of Employment, Education and Training. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED399425)

Brown, M. (1999, October). Bridging the literacy gap. *Literacy at work newsletter.* ABC CANADA. Retrieved September 11, 2003, from http://www.abc-canada.org/our_publications/28.asp

Burant, T. J. (1999). Finding, using, and losing voice: A preservice teacher's experiences in an urban educative practicum. *Journal of Teacher Education, 50*(3), 209-219.

Bussière, P., Cartwright, F., Crocker, R., Ma, X., Oderkirk, J., & Zhang, Y. (2001, December). *Measuring up: The performance of Canada's youth in reading, mathematics and science: OECD PISA Study - First results for Canadians aged 15.* Human Resources Development Canada, Statistics Canada, & Council of Ministries of Education, Canada. Retrieved December 4, 2002 from, http://www. pisa.gc.ca/pisa/81-590-xpe.pdf

Cairney, T. H. & Ruge, J. (1998). *Community literacy practices and schooling: Towards effective support for students.* Canberra: DEET.

Calamai, P. (1987). *Broken words: Why five million Canadians are illiterate: A special*

Southam survey (The Southam Literacy Report). Toronto, ON: Southam Newspaper Group. Retrieved November 11, 2002 from, http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/Brokword/cover.htm

Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (2004). *Project history*. Ottawa, ON. Retrieved May 11, 2004 from, http://www.camacam.ca/en/programs/literacy/project_history.html

Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy (1988, February). *Measuring the costs of illiteracy in Canada*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED297152)

Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network (2004). *Research themes*. London, ON. Retrieved August 18, 2004 from, http://www.cllrnet.ca/index.php?fa=ResearchHome.showThemeProjects&theme=5

Capper, C. A. (1994). We're not housed in an institution, we're housed in the community: Possibilities and consequences of neighborhood-based interagency collaboration. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 30*(3), 257-277.

Capper, C. A. (1998). Critically oriented and postmodern perspectives: Sorting out the differences and applications for practice. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 34*(3), 354-379.

Casmier-Paz, L. A. (2000, Summer). 'Betcha can't read my mind': The orientations of literacy discourse. *Quarterly Journal of Ideology.* Shreveport, LA: Louisiana State University Press. Retrieved November 13, 2002 from, http://www.lsus.edu/la/journals/ideology/contents/casmierarticle.htm

Chaney, C. (1994). Language development, metalinguistic awareness and emergent literacy skills of 3-year-old children in relation to social class. *Applied Psycholinguistics, 15*, 371-394.

Cherryholmes, C. (1993). Reading research. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 25*(1), 1-32.

Cohen, L., & Manion, L. (1989). *Research methods in education* (3rd ed.). London: Routledge.

Cohen, L., & Manion, L. (1994). *Research methods in education* (4th ed.). New York: Routledge.

Cook-Gumperz, J. (Ed.). (1986). *The social construction of literacy*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Corbett, E. (1982). A literal view of literacy. In J. Raymond (Ed.), *Literacy as a human problem* (pp. 137-153). University, Alabama: The University of Alabama.

Cornes, S. (1994). Gender-engendered literacy needs. In M. Hamilton, D. Barton, & R. Ivanic (Eds.), *Worlds of literacy* (pp. 105-120). Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Creswell, J. W. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

D'Angelo, F. J. (1982). Luria on literacy: The cognitive consequences of reading and writing. In J. Raymond (Ed.), *Literacy as a human problem* (pp. 154-169).

University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press.

Darville, R. (2004). *Discussions in regards to thesis work.* Ottawa, ON.

Davies, P., Fitzpatrick, S., Grenko, V., & Ivanic, R. (1994). Literacy, strength and identity. In M. Hamilton, D. Barton, and R. Ivanic, R. (Eds.), *Worlds of literacy* (pp. 157-166). Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Delgado-Gaitan, C. (1994). Sociocultural change through literacy: Toward the empowerment of families. In B. M. Ferdman, R. M. Weber, & A. G. Ramirez (Eds.), *Literacy across languages and cultures* (pp. 143-170.) Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Delpit, L. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. *Harvard Educational Review, 58*(3): 280-298.

Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom.* New York: The New Press.

Department of Education (2001, October 25). *French Second Language Programs* (Policy Statement 309). Fredericton, NB: Department of Education.

Department of Education (2003a). *French as a second language.* Fredericton, New Brunswick. Retrieved June 4, 2004 from, http://www.gnb.ca/0000/publications/curric/frenchsec.asp

Department of Education (2003b). *Read across New Brunswick.* Fredericton, New Brunswick. Retrieved May 13, 2004 from, http://www.gnb.ca/0000/progs/litalpha/ranb/ranb-e.asp

Diment, K. (2001, December). Pupil responses to Shakespeare in the National

Curriculum. In H. Colley & K. Diment (Eds.), *Holistic research for holistic practice: Making sense of qualitative research data* (pp. 8-9). Paper presented at the Learning and Skills Development Agency Conference: Making an Impact on Policy and Practice, Cambridge.

Dunsmuir, A. (2003, January). Family literacy day turns five! *Literacy at Work Newsletter #38*. ABC CANADA Literacy Foundation. Don Mills, ON. Retrieved May 11, 2004 from, http://www.abc-canada.org/ our_ publications/38.asp

Dye, J. F., Schatz, I. M., Rosenberg, B. A., & Coleman, S. T. (2000, January). Constant comparison method: A kaleidoscope of data [24 paragraphs]. *The Qualitative Report* [On-line serial], *4*(1/2). Retrieved September 13, 2002 from, http://www.nova.edu/ssss/ QR/QR4-1/dye.html

Edwards, P. A. (1994). Responses of teachers and African-American mothers to a book-reading intervention program. In D. K. Dickinson (Ed.), *Bridges to literacy: Children, families, and schools* (pp. 175-208). Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell Ltd.

Eitle, T. M., & Eitle, D. J. (2002). Race, cultural capital, and the educational effects of participation in sports. *Sociology of Education, 75*(2), 123-146.

Ellsworth, E. (1989). Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working toward the repressive myths of critical pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review, 59*(3), 297-324.

Ewert, D. M. (1993). Rural literacy and community development: Building the link. *Literacy Practitioner, 1*(2). Retrieved November 6, 2003 from, http://www.litcommunity.org/ article6.html

Fagan, W. T. (1998). *Literacy for living: A study of literacy and cultural context in rural Canadian communities.* St. John's, NF: Iser Books

Fédération d'alphabétisation du Nouveau-Brunswick (2004). *La FANB*. Retrieved May 16, 2004 from, http://www.nald.ca/Province/Nb/Fed/Lafanb.htm

Ferdman, B. M. (1990). Literacy and cultural identity. *Harvard Educational Review, 60*(2), 181-204.

Fingeret, A. (1983). Social network: A new perspective on independence and illiterate adults. *Adult Education Quarterly, 33*, 133-146.

Fingeret, A. (1984). *Adult literacy education: Current and future directions*. Columbus, OH: National Center for Research in Vocational Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED246308)

Fingeret, A. (1991). Meaning, experience, literacy. *Adult Basic Education* 1, 1-11.

Fisher, B. (2001). Teaching literacy for lifelong learning. *Journal of Correctional Education, 52*(2), 58-61. Retrieved September 14, 2003 from, http://www. easternlincs.org/correctional_education/ articles/literacy-lifelong-fisher.pdf

Freire, P (1980). *Literacy and conscientization*: Participation, solidarity and development. (Trans, Conscientizaçäo: teoria e prática da libertaçäo. Sao Paulo: Moraes, pp. 26-27. Retrieved July 12, 2004 from, http://www.eicos.psycho.ufrj.br/ ingles/ inglalfabeteconscient/inglalfabetizeconscient.htm

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* New York: Herder and Herder.

Freire, P. (1987). The importance of the act of reading. In P. Freire and D. Macedo (Eds.), *Literacy: Reading the word and the world* (pp. 29-36). Westport, CN:

Bergin & Garvey.

Gadsden, V. L. (1994). Understanding family literacy: Conceptual issues facing the field. *Teachers College Record, 96*(1), 58-86.

Galbraith, M. (2001). Hear my cry: A manifesto for an emancipatory childhood studies approach to children's literature. *The Lion and the Unicorn, 25*, 187-2005.

Gee, J. P. (1989). What is literacy? *Journal of Education, 171*(1), 75-96.

Gee, J. P. (1995). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses*. London: Taylor Francis.

Geuss, R. (1981). *The idea of a critical theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gilbert, N. (1993). *Researching social life.* London: Sage Publications Inc.

Gillham, M., & Buckner, K. (1997). User evaluation of hypermedia encyclopaedias. *Journal of Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia*, *6*(1), 77-90.

Giroux, H. (1988). *Teachers as intellectuals*. Granby, MA: Bergin & Garvey.

Giroux, H. (1989). Critical theory and the politics of culture and voice: Rethinking the discourse of educational research. In R. R. Sherman, & R. B. Webb (Eds.), *Qualitative research in education: Focus and methods* (pp. 190-210). London: The Falmer Press.

Goodman, Y. (1986). Children coming to know literacy. In W. Teale & E. Sulzby (Eds.), *Emergent literacy: Writing and reading* (pp. 1-140). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Gorlick, C. (2001). *A national study of welfare to work programs: Phase 2- Provincial and Territorial updates - New Brunswick.* Social Development Partnerships,

Human Resources Development Canada. Ottawa, Ontario. Retrieved June 1, 2004 from, http://publish.uwo.ca/~pomfret/wtw/html/provsum/nb2.html

Graff, H. (1979). *The Literacy Myth: Literacy and social structure in the 19th century city*. New York: Academic Press.

Graff, H. (1987). *The labyrinth of literacy*. London: The Falmer Press.

Greer, J. (2001). The influence of significant males on boys' literacy levels. In M. Taylor (Ed.), *Adult Literacy Now* (pp. 237-249). Toronto, ON: Irwin Publishing Ltd.

Grolnick, W. S., Benjet, C., Kurowski, C. O., & Apostoleris, N. H. (1997). Predictors of parent involvement in children's schooling. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 89*(3), 538-548.

Halle, T. G., Kurtz-Costes, B., & Mahoney, J. L. (1997). Family influences on school achievement in low-income, African American children. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 89*(3), 527-537.

Harker, R. (1990). Bourdieu - education and reproduction. In R. Harker, C. Mahar, & C. Wilkes (Eds.), *An introduction to the work of Pierre Bourdieu: The practice of theory* (pp. 106-108). London: The MacMillan Press Ltd.

Harman, D. (1987). *Illiteracy: A national dilemma*. Toronto: Cambridge Book Co.

Hart, B., & Risley, T. R. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children.* Baltimore: Paul H. Brooks.

Hart, M. (1990). Critical theory and beyond: Further perspectives on emancipatory education. *Adult Education Quarterly, 40*(3), 125-138.

Health Canada (2001). *What determines health?* Population Health Branch, Health Canada: Ottawa.

Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Heydon, R. (2004). *Directory of Canadian literacy initiatives for struggling readers: New Brunswick.* University of Prince Edward Island: Charlottetown, PE. Retrieved May 31, 2004 from, http://www.upei.ca/readers/html/newbrunswick.html

Hicks, D. (2002). *Reading lives: Working class children and literacy learning.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Holyfield, L. (2002). *Moving up and out: Poverty, education and the single parent family*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Horsman, J. (1990). *Something in my mind besides the everyday: Women and literacy*. Canada: Women's Press.

Horsman, J. (1999). Too scared to learn: Women, violence and education. Toronto: McGilligan Books.

Hourigan, M. M. (1994). *Literacy as social exchange: Intersections of class, gender and culture.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Hudson River Center for Program Development (2001). *Bringing family literacy to incarcerated settings: An instructional guide.* Glenmont, NY: New York State Education Department Office of Workforce Preparedness and Continuing

Education. Retrieved December 6, 2002 from, http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/ hudson/bringing/ cover.htm

International Reading Association (2004). *About the association.* Retrieved May 22, 2004 from, http://www.reading.org/about/

International Reading Association (1994). *Family literacy: New perspectives, new opportunities. A statement prepared by the International Reading Association Family Literacy Commission*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

IRA, UNESCO join forces (2003, October/November). *Reading Today*, *21*(2), 1, 16.

Jarvis, P. (1992). *Paradoxes of learning: On becoming an individual in society*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass Publishers.

Kaleidoscope Photographic Workshop (2003). *Kaleidoscope*. Retrieved July 26, 2003 from, http://www.rex.b92.net/kaleidoscope/fdefinition.htm

Kelly, U.A. (1997). Schooling Desire: Literacy, cultural politics, and pedagogy. New York: Routledge.

Key, D. (1998). *Literacy shutdown: Stories of six American women*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Kirby, S., & McKenna, K. (1989). *Experience, research, social change: Methods from the margins.* Toronto: Garamond Press.

Klassen, C., & Burnaby, B. (1993). Those who know: Views on literacy among immigrants in Canada. *TESOL Quarterly, 27*(3), 377-397.

Knuth, R. A., & Jones, B. F. (1991). What does the research say about reading? Oak Brook: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. Retrieved September 2,

2003 from, http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/stw_esys/str_read.htm

Kook, H., & Vedder, P. (1995). The importance of parental book-reading; tensions between theory and practice. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 3(*3), 3-15.

Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Lamont, M., & Lareau, A. (1988). Cultural capital: allusions, gaps, and glissandos in recent theoretical developments. S*ociological Theory, 6,* 153-168.

Langer, J. A. (1991). Literacy and schooling: A sociocognitive perspective. In E. H. Hiebert (Ed.), *Literacy for a diverse society: Perspectives, practices, and policies* (pp. 9-27). New York: Teachers College Press.

Lankshear, C. (1992). Issues in adult literacy. *Critical Forum*, 1(1), 1.

Lankshear, C. (1997). *Changing literacies.* Buckingham, England: Open University Press.

Lareau, A. (1989). *Home advantage: Social class and parental intervention in elementary education.* New York: The Falmer Press.

Laubach Literacy New Brunswick (2004). *Laubach Literacy New Brunswick.* Retrieved June 11, 2004 from, http://www.nald.ca/llnb.htm

Leichter, H. (1984). Families as environments for literacy. In H. Goelman, A. Oberg, & F. Smith (Eds.), *Awakening to literacy* (pp. 38-50). Exeter, NH: Heinemann Educational Books.

Lewis, M. G. (1993). *Without a word: Teaching beyond women's silence.* New York:

Routledge.

Lickteig, M. J., Parnell, M. K., & Ellis, S. D. (1995). Ways elementary administrators support literacy education. *Reading Horizons, 35*(4), 299-309.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Lipman, E. L., Offord, D. R., & Boyle, M. H. (1997). Single mothers in Ontario: Sociodemographic, physical and mental health characteristics. *Canadian Medical Association Journal, 156*(5), 639-645.

Lips, H. M. (1993). *Sex and gender: An introduction.* Toronto: Mayfield Publishing Co.

Literacy New Brunswick (2001a). The early childhood and family literacy summer student project. *FIRST WORDS: A journal of family literacy in New Brunswick, 1997-2001*, p. 10. Retrieved June 3, 2004 from, http://www.anbi-lnbi.nb.ca/ English/ newslet/10.htm

Literacy New Brunswick (2001b). The New Brunswick Coalition for Literacy. *FIRST WORDS: A journal of family literacy in New Brunswick, 1997-2001*, p. 13. Retrieved June 3, 2004 from, http://www.anbi-lnbi.nb.ca/English/newslet/13.htm

Literacy New Brunswick, Inc. (2004). *Literacy New Brunswick, Inc.* Retrieved May 6, 2004 from, www.anbi-lnbi.nb.ca

Luke, A. (1988). *Literacy, textbooks and ideology.* London: The Falmer Press.

Luke, A. (1995a). When basic skills and information processing just aren't enough: Rethinking reading in new times. *Teachers College Record, 97*(1), 95-115.

Luke, A. (1995b). *When literacy might (not) make a difference: Textual practice and capital.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational

Research Association, San Francisco. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 384001)

MacNutt, B. (2001, autumn). At the forefront of family literacy. Toward greater collaboration: Family literacy forum report. *literacy.ca*, *4*(1), 4. Retrieved November 6, 2003 from, http://www.literacy.ca/public/litca/fall01/fall01.pdf

Malayalam, J. (2003). *A new and sweet definition of 'Heart'!* Retrieved July 6, 2003 from, http://merawatan.com/egoptics/heart.htm.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. (1995). *Designing qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mason, J., & Allen, J. B. (1986). A review of emergent literacy with implications for research and practice in reading. *Review of Research in Education, 13*, 3-47.

McKee, P. A., & Rhett, N. (1995). The Even Start family literacy program. In L. Morrow (Ed.), *Family literacy: Connections in schools and communities* (pp.155-166). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

McLanahan, S., & Kelly, E. L. (1998). *The feminization of poverty: Past and future.* Network on the Family and the Economy. Retrieved October 17, 2002 from, http://www.olin.wustl.edu/macartur/working%20papers/wp-mclanahan3.htm

McLaughlin, D., & Tierney, W. G. (1993). *Naming silenced lives: Personal narratives and processes of educational change*. New York: Routledge.

Mehan, H. (1993). Why I like to look: On the use of videotape as an instrument in educational research. In M. Schratz (Ed.), *Qualitative voices in educational research* (pp. 93-105). London: The Falmer Press.

Merriam, S. B. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Merriam, S. B. (2001). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education: Revised and expanded from case study research.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Miles, M., & Huberman, A. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Ministry of State for Literacy (1994). *Community-based literacy in New Brunswick.* Fredericton, NB: Ministry of State for Literacy.

Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into Practice, 31*(2), 132-141.

Morawski, C. M., & Brunhuber, B. S. (1993). Early recollections of learning to read: Implications for prevention and intervention of reading difficulties. *Reading Research and Instruction, 32*(3), 35-48.

Morawski, C. M. & Brunhuber, B. S. (1995). Teachers' early recollections of learning to read: Applications in reading teacher education in the content areas. *Reading Research and Instruction, 35*(4), 315-331.

Morrow, L. M. (1989). *Literacy development in the early years.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Morrow, L. M., & Paratore, J. (1993). Family literacy: Perspective and practices. *The Reading Teacher, 47*(3), 194-200.

Morrow, L. M., Tracey, D. H., & Maxwell, C. M. (1995). *A survey of family literacy in the United States.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Morrow, R. (1994). *Critical theory and methodology* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Nagle, J. (1999). Histories of success and failure: Working class students' literacy experiences. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 43*(2), 172-185.

National Adult Literacy Database (1997). *Position paper on family literacy in Alberta* [On-line]. Available: http://www.nald.ca/province/alt/flag/position.htm

National Adult Literacy Database (2003). *The Annual Honourable Joyce Fairbairn, P.C. Literacy Public Awareness Award.* [On-line]. Retrieved June 9, 2004 from, http:www.nald.ca/AWARDS/National/natawrds/Joycelit.htm

National Council of Welfare (1999). *Poverty profile.* Ottawa, ON. Retrieved September 23, 2003 from, http://www.ncwcnbes.net/htmdocument/reportpovertypro99/Introduction.html

National Institute for Literacy (2004). *International Adult Literacy Survey*. Retrieved June 14, 2004 from, http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/facts/IALS.html

National Literacy Secretariat (2004). *About us*. Human Resources Development Canada, National Adult Literacy Database. Retrieved May 22, 2004 from, http://www.nald.ca/nls/aboutnls/aboutus.htm

New London Group (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review, 66*(1), 60-92.

Nicholson, L. J. (1994). Women and schooling. In L. Stone (Ed.), *The education*

feminism reader (pp. 73-83). New York: Routledge.

Nickse, R. S. (1989). *The noises of literacy: An overview of intergenerational and family literacy programs* (Report No. CE-053-282). Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED308415)

Nickse, R. S., & Quezada, S. (1994). Collaborations: A key to success in family literacy programs. In D. K. Dickinson (Ed.), *Bridges to literacy: Children, families and schools* (pp. 211-235). Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Nutter, P. (1993). *Literacy initiatives in Canadian municipalities.* National Literacy Secretariat. Retrieved September 21, 2003 from, http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/ REPORT1/rep03-01.htm

Olson, G.A. (1992). History, praxis, and change: Paulo Freire and the politics of literacy. Introduction to Freire and his work in the light of his contemporary critics, followed by an interview with Freire. JAC 12.1 [*Journal of advanced composition*]. Retrieved June 25, 2004 from, http://jac.gsu.edu/jac/12.1/ Articles/1.htm

Orr, L. (1995). Stories from a working class childhood. *Women's Studies Quarterly, 1 & 2*, 16-18.

Osborne, R. (2002). *Megawords: 200 terms you really need to know*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Paratore, J. R. (1995). Implementing and intergenerational literacy project: Lessons learned. In. L. M. Morrow (Ed.), *Family literacy: Connections in schools and*

communities (pp. 37-53). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Parker, J. M. (1989). Building bridges in midtown Manhattan: An intergenerational literacy program. *Urban Education, 24*(1), 109-115.

Parks, R. D. (1995). The influence of a family literacy program on low socio-economic families and their children. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Miami, 1995). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 56, 2531.

Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Patton, M., Silva, C., & Myers, S. (1999). Teachers and family literacy: Bridging theory to practice. *Journal of Teacher Education, 50*(2), 140-146.

Pellegrini, A. (1991). A critique of the concept of at risk as applied to emergent literacy. *Language Arts, 68*(5), 380–385.

Pellegrini, A., Galda, L., Flor, D., Bartini, M., & Charak, D. (1997). Close relationships, individual differences, and early literacy learning. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology,67*(3), 409-422.

Pellegrini, A. D., Galda, L., Shockley, B., & Stahl, S. (1995). The nexus of social and literacy experiences at home and school: Implications for primary school oral language and literacy. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 65*, 273-285.

Performers for Literacy (2004). Website of Performers for Literacy/Les Magiciens de Mots. Retrieved May 22, 2004 from, http://www.nald.ca/pfl.htm

Peters, M., Lankshear, C., & Olssen, M. (2003). Introduction: Critical theory and the human condition. In M. Peters, C. Lankshear, & M. Olssen (Eds.), *Critical theory*

and the human condition (pp. 1-14). New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Philliber, W. W., Spillman, R. E., & King, R. E. (1996). Consequences of family literacy for adults and children: Some preliminary findings. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 39*(7), 558-565.

Polakow, V. (1993). *Lives on the edge: Single mothers and their children in the other America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Potts, M. (2003, March 20). Re: HELP!!!—Motivating young. [Msg 1465]. Message posted to NIFL-FAMILY list, archived at http://www.nifl.gov/nifl-family/2003/1465.html

Province of New Brunswick (2003). *A quality learning agenda, a cornerstone of greater opportunity: New Brunswick's prosperity plan 2002-2112, Policy statement on K–12: quality schools, high results*. Fredericton, NB: Province of New Brunswick. Retrieved June 9, 2004 from, http://www.gnb.ca/0000/publications/comm/1894-Publications-E.pdf

Purcell-Gates, V. (1993a). I ain't never read my <u>own</u> words before. *Journal of Reading, 37*(3), 210-220.

Purcell-Gates, V. (1993b). Issues for family literacy research: Voices from the trenches. *Language Arts, 70*, 670-677.

Purcell-Gates, V. (1995). *Other people's words: The cycle of low literacy*. Cambridge; Harvard University Press.

Purcell-Gates, V. (1996). Stories, coupons, and the TV Guide: Relationships between home literacy experiences and emergent literacy knowledge. *Reading Research*

Quarterly, 31, 210-219.

Purcell-Gates, V., & Dahl, K. (1991). Low-SES children's success and failure at early literacy learning in skills-based classrooms. *Journal of Reading Behavior: A Journal of Literacy, 23*, 1-34.

Purcell-Gates, V., L'Allier, S., & Smith, D. (1995). Literacy at the Harts and the Larsons: Diversity among poor, innercity families. *The Reading Teacher, 48*(7), 572-578.

Raymond, J. (Ed.). (1982). *Literacy as a human problem*. University, Alabama: The University of Alabama.

Richardson, P. (1994). Doing school literacy at home. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy, 17*(4), 333-336.

Richmond, H. (1999). *Family and community literacy partnerships in New Brunswick.* Unpublished doctoral thesis. University of Nottingham, UK.

Rideout, V. (2001, August). *Bridging the digital divide in Atlantic Canada communities*. Ottawa, ON: Human Resources Development Canada Office of Learning Technologies. Retrieved October 14, 2003 from, http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/bridging/bridging.pdf

Rist, R. C. (1970). Student social clas and teacher expectations: The self-fulfilling prophecy in ghetto education. *Harvard Educational Review, 40*(3), 266-301.

Robertson, J. P. (2003). *Discussions in regards to thesis work.* Ottawa, ON.

Robertson, J. P. (2004). *Discussions in regards to thesis work.* Ottawa, ON.

Robertson, J. P. (1997). Fantasy's confines: Popular culture and the education of the female primary school teacher. In S. Todd (Ed.) *Learning Desire: Perspectives on*

Pedagogy,Culture, and the Unsaid (pp. 75-96). NY: Routledge.

Roscigno, V. J., & Ainsworth-Darnell, J. W. (1999). Race, cultural capital, and educational resources: Persistent inequalities and achievement returns. *Sociology of Education*, *72*, 158-178.

Rosenthal, R. J. (1993). Some causes of pathological gambling. In W. R. Eadington & J. A. Cornelius (Eds.), *Gambling behaviour and problem gambling* (pp. 143-148). Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press.

Ross, M. M., Rideout, E. M., & Carson, M. M. (1994). The use of diary as a data collection technique. *Western Journal of Nursing Research, 16*(4), 414-425.

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rubin, R. (1997). *Low-income mother's recollections of early reading experiences and family literacy practices.* Unpublished paper for EDU 7200, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario.

Rutsch, H. (2003). Literacy as freedom - United Nations launches literacy decade (2003-2012). *United Nations Online Chronicle. XL*(2), 29. Retrieved November 14, 2003 from, http://www.un.org/Pubs/chronicle/2003/issue2/0203p.29.html

Scarborough, H. S., Dobrich, W., & Hager, M. (1991). Preschool literacy experience and later reading achievement. *Journal of Learning Disabilities,* 24(8), 508–511.

Schwartz, R. H. (2001). *Judaism and global survival.* New York: Lantern Books.

Seidman, I. (1998). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and* social sciences (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Shalla, V., & Schellenberg, G. (1998, May). *The value of words: Literacy and economic security in Canada* . Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

Sheehan-Holt, J., & Smith, M. (2000). Does basic skills education affect adults' literacy proficiencies and reading practices? *Reading Research Quarterly, 35*(2), 226-243.

Shively, J. (2001, autumn). What is family literacy? *literacy.ca*, *4*(1), 1-3. Retrieved November 6, 2003 from, http://www.literacy.ca/public/litca/fall01/fall01.pdf

Sinner, A. (2003). Women learners in the classroom: Exploring the experience of voice, listening and silence. *Journal of International Women's Studies, 5*(1), 114-121.

Skage, S. (1995). *A practical guide to family literacy: A project of the Family Literacy Action Group of Alberta.* Brooks, AB: Family Literacy Action Group.

Sleeter, C. E. (1996). *Multicultural education as social activism.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Smith, S. S., & Dixon, R. (1995). Literacy concepts of low- and middle-class 4 year olds entering preschool. *Journal of Educational Research, 88*, 243-253.

Snow, C. (1991). The theoretical basis for relationships between language and literacy in development. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 6*(1), 5-10.

Snow, C., Barnes, W., Chandler, J., Goodman, I., & Hemphill, L. (1991). *Unfulfilled expectations: Home and school influences on literacy.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Snow, C., & Tabors, P. (1996, January). Intergenerational transfer of literacy. Commissioned paper. In L. A. Benjamin & J. Lord (Eds.), *Family literacy:*

Directions in research and implications for practice (Summary and papers of a national symposium) (pp. 73-79). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

SoberDykes (2003). 12 step programs, Women in recovery for substance abuse. Retrieved June 11, 2004 from, http://www.soberdykes.org/12stepmain.html)

Spindler, G. D. (1974). *Education and cultural process: Towards an anthropology of education.* Montreal: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Statistics Canada (1990). *The survey of literacy skills used in daily life.* Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

Statistics Canada (1996a). *Backgrounder on the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS)* (p. 2). Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

Statistics Canada (1996b). *Reading the future: A portrait of literacy in Canada.* Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada.

Statistics Canada (1998). *A New Brunswick snapshot: IALS (International Adult Literacy Survey)* (p. 3). Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

Street, B. (1984). *Literacy in theory and practice.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Street, B. (1995). *Social literacies: Critical approaches to literacy in development, ethnography and education.* New York: Longman.

Street, B. (1996). Literacy, economy and society. *Literacy across the curriculum, 12,* 8 -15. Montreal: Center for Literacy.

Street, B. (2003). What's "new" in New Literacy studies: Critical approaches to literacy in theory and practice. *Current Issues in Comparative Education, 5*(2). Retrieved October 13, 2002 from, http://www.tc.columbia.edu/CICE/articles/bs152.pdf

Stuckey, E. (1991). *The violence of literacy*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann-Boyton/Cook Publishers, Inc.

Svensson, A.-K. (1994). Helping parents help their children: Early language stimulation in the child's home. In D. Lancy (Ed.), *Children's emergent literacy: From research to practice* (pp. 79-92). Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

Swadener, B., & Lubeck, S. (Eds.). (1995). *Children and families "at promise": Deconstructing the discourse of risk.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Symons, S., Szuszkiewicz, T., & Bonnell, C. (1996). Parental print exposure and young children's language and literacy skills. *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research, XLII*(1), 49-58.

Tabachnick, B. R., & Bloch, M. N. (1995). Learning in and out of school: Critical perspectives on the theory of cultural compatability. In B. B. Swadner & S. Lubeck (Eds.), *Children and families "at promise": Deconstructing the discourse of risk* (pp. 187-209). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Taylor, D. (1983). *Family literacy: Young children learning to read and write*. Exeter, NH: Heineman Educational Books.

Taylor, D. (1993, Fall). Family literacy: Resisting deficit models. *TESOL Quarterly, 27*(3), 550-553.

Taylor, D. (1997). *Many families, many literacies: An international declaration of principles.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Taylor, D., & Dorsey-Gaines, C. (1988). *Growing up literate: Learning from inner- city families*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc.

Taylor, R. (1995). Functional uses of reading and shared literacy activities in Icelandic homes: A monograph in family literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly, 30*(2), 194-219.

Teale, W. H., & Sulzby, E. (1987). Literacy acquisition in early childhood: The roles of access and mediation in storybook reading. In D. A. Wagner (Ed.), *The future of literacy in a changing world* (pp. 111-130). New York: Pergamon Press.

Tett, L., & Crowther, J. (1998). Families at a disadvantage: Class, culture and literacies. *British Educational Research Journal, 24*(4), 449-460.

Thomas, A. (Ed.). (1998). *Family literacy in Canada: Profiles of effective practices.* Welland, ON: Éditions Soleil Publishing Inc.

Thomas, A. (2001). Family literacy: Issues and directions for research and practice. In M. Taylor (Ed.), *Adult Literacy Now* (pp. 171-192). Toronto, ON: Irwin Publishing Ltd.

Thomas, A., Skage, S., & Jackson, R. (1998). Family connections: 1998 directory of family literacy projects a cross Canada. Welland, ON: Éditions Soleil Publishing Inc.

Toohey, K. (1996). Learning English as a second language in kindergarten: A community of practice perspective. *The Canadian Modern Language Review, 52*(4), 549–576.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2003). UNESCO: What it is, What it does. Retrieved May19, 2004 from, http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/ 0013/001315/131585e.pdf

United States Congress (1991) *Public Law 102-73, the National Literacy Act of 1991.* Retrieved October 23, 2002 from, http://www.nifl.gov/public-law.html

Unwin, C. G. (1993). The applicability of a developmental model of literacy learning to intervention within the family setting. (Doctoral dissertation, Auburn University, 1993). *Dissertation Abstracts International, 54*, 4049.

Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Wade, B., & Moore, M. (1996). Children's early book behavior. *Educational Review, 48*(3), 283-288.

Willinsky, J. (1990). *The new literacy: Redefining reading and writing in the schools.* New York: Routledge.

Willis, P. (1976). The class significance of school counter-culture. In M. Hammersley & P. Woods (Eds.), *The process of schooling* (pp. 188-200). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Willms, J. D. (1997a). Literacy skills and social class gradients. *Policy Options 18*(6), 22. Retrieved November 18, 2002 from, http://www.unb.ca/crisp/9705.pdf

Willms, J. D. (1997b). *Literacy skills of Canadian youth*. Ottawa, ON: Minister of Industry, Statistics Canada. Retrieved November 18, 2002 from, http://www.unb.ca/crisp/9615-MIE1.pdf

Wishard, A. (2002, February). *Vygotsky in practice: Moving from adult centered, to child centered, to an interdependent perspective*. Retrieved December 3, 2002 from, http://ematusov.soe.udel.edu/final.paper. pub/_pwfsfp/000000d8.htm

Wolfe, P. (1998, fall). Best supporting actress: Gender and language across four secondary ESL/bilingual classrooms. *Current Issues in Education,1*(1), 1. Retrieved September 22, 2003 from, http://cie.ed.asu.edu/fall98/Wolfe/ Wolfe.html

Woods, T. (2000, November 9). *What is literacy?* [Msg 3238]. Message posted to NIFL-LD list, archived at http://www.nifl.gov/nifl-ld/2000/0775.html

Wright, J., & Sinai, D. (2003, January). Network researches children's literacy, language development. *Literacy at Work Newsletter #38*. ABC CANADA Literacy Foundation. Don Mills, ON. Retrieved May 11, 2004 from, http://www.abc-canada.org/ our_ publications/38.asp

Yaden, D. B., Rowe, D. W., & MacGillivray (1999, June). Emergent literacy: A polyphony of perspectives. *CIERA Report #1-005*. Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement. Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan. Retrieved November 8, 2003 from, http://www.ciera.org/library/reports/inquiry-1/1-005/1-005.html

Yin, R. K. (1993). *Applications of case study research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton

University Press.

Zigman, J. (2002). *Studying Freire in a Canadian Cultural Studies course: A female graduate student looks for connections*. Unpublished paper. Kingston, ON: Queens University.

Appendix A

Letter to Director of Education

March 11, 1999

Director of Education
School District X

Re: Proposed Research Study:
Voices from the Heart: A Case Study of Family Literacy Practices in One Low-Income Community in New Brunswick

Dear Mrs. XX:

As we discussed recently, I am interested in conducting my doctoral research in XX . My research proposal has been accepted by the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa and has gone through clearance by the Ethics Committee. I am writing at this time to request your endorsement of my study.

As you are aware, I conducted my pilot study with parents from XX and XX Schools and I would like to conduct my research now with selected parents and staff from the XX School. My data collection with the parents would be conducted in their homes. A part of my study would involve classroom observations and informal interviews with selected teachers in the primary grades at school. Further details are outlined in the attached a copy of my research proposal.

I look forward to hearing back from you at your earliest convenience. I may be reached at (506) XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely,

Rhonda Rubin

Encl.

Appendix B

Informed Consent for School and Day Care Staff

(One copy of this form will be left with the interviewee and one copy will be signed by the participant and kept by the researcher.)

To potential study participant:

Since you have been involved with literacy activities, I invite you to participate in a doctoral thesis research study of family literacy practices of children in the neighbourhood where you work. This topic is being studied to find out more about what children do outside of school hours. Although there has been research conducted with families of preschool children, there is little research with school age children. This study aims to fill that gap.

Your voluntary participation in this study is limited to one interview conducted by me and arranged at your convenience. The interview should last no longer than 45 minutes and, with your permission, will be tape recorded. This will involve a discussion of community resources and a review of potential participants for the study.

I would like you to nominate ten parents who are representative of the population in your neighbourhood. I am seeking those who have at least one child enrolled in a primary grade and who speak English in the home.

I would like you to make initial contact with these individuals who might be willing to participate in my study and discuss their family literacy practices with me. I would then approach these people and invite their voluntary participation under the terms of the attached letter.

No participant names or affiliated organizations will be used in the report arising from this study; confidentiality will be ensured. Only my supervisor at the University of Ottawa and me will see this information. In exchange for your participation, I will provide you with a summary report from this research after the data collection and analysis is complete.

This research has been approved by the Faculty of Education Human Research Ethics Committee. Inquiries or any questions dealing with ethical conduct of this research can be addressed to the Chair of the Ethics Committee (Dr. Aline Giroux) at (613) 562-5800, ext. 4344. Further, this research is being supervised by Dr. Diana Masny who may be reached at (613) 562-5800, ext. 4142.

The University of Ottawa requires its researchers to obtain formal consent from those participating in research. Your signature below will serve this purpose. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time. Questions about this study may be addressed now or later by calling me, Rhonda Rubin, at 855-7980.

I have read the foregoing and I agree to participate in this study.

_____	_____
Participant's Signature	Date
_____	_____
Rhonda Rubin	Date

Appendix B

Informed Consent for Parent Participant

(To be read by the researcher at the beginning of the interview. One copy of this form will be left with the interviewee, and one copy will be signed by the participant and kept by the researcher.)

I understand that:

I am being invited to take part in a study to find out more about what children do outside of school hours:

1. I will be asked to talk about my child's activities in an interview at my home for about one hour. With my permission, I will be tape recorded.

2. I will also be asked to keep a diary of activities at my home for a week.

3 A second interview of about one hour will be scheduled to check that the researcher understood what I said in the first interview and to discuss my diary. I will also be asked to do an activity with my child, like read a story. With my permission, I will be videotaped.

4. A final session of about 20 minutes will be held to discuss questions about the study.

I may choose not to participate at any time. My choice will not affect my child at school.

At any time during the study, if the researcher witnesses events which may have ethical implications, it will be discussed with me. Then, if the matter requires further resolution, the researcher will inform me of the action she intends to take.

Code names will be used to keep my name and my child's name private in the report.

This study has been approved by the Faculty of Education Human Research Ethics Committee. Questions about this study may be addressed now or later by calling me, Rhonda Rubin, at XXX-XXXX or my advisor at the University of Ottawa, Dr. Diana Masny at (613) 562-5800, ext. 4142.

The University of Ottawa requires its researchers to obtain formal consent from those participating in research. My signature below will serve this purpose.

I agree to participate in this study.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

_____ _____

Rhonda Rubin Date

Appendix B

Assent for Children
Assent to Participation in a Research Study

(To be read by the researcher at the beginning of the interview. One copy of this form will be left with the interviewee, and one copy will be signed by the participant and kept by the researcher.)

1. My name is Rhonda Rubin. You have probably seen me in your class at school.

2. I am doing a project about school and families. This is also called a research study.

3. I am asking you to be part of my project. You can help me learn more about what kids do with their parents at home and in class at school. I will also be talking to your Mom (Dad) and teachers.

4. I would like to make a video of you with your Mom (Dad) doing something like playing, reading a story together, or talking at dinner time.

5. If you don't want to be in my project, you don't have to participate. Remember, it is your choice and nobody will be upset with you if you do not want to be in the video. Even if you change your mind later and want to stop, you won't be in trouble.

6. You can ask me any questions now that you have about the study. If you have any questions later that you didn't think of now, you can ask me the next time you see me.

7. Your Mom (Dad) has said that it is okay for you to take part in my project. You can still decide not to do this. You should talk this over with your Mom (Dad) before you tell me if you want to participate.

8. Signing your name at the bottom means that you agree to be in this project. After you sign this, I will give a copy of this form to you and another to your Mom (Dad) to keep.

I _____ am taking part in this study because I want to.

_____ _____
Child's Signature Date

_____ _____
Rhonda Rubin Date

Appendix C

Interview Schedule for School and Daycare Staff

1. Community Resources for Literacy Development

   Programs?
   Libraries?
   Other?

2. Parental Involvement

   Committees?
   Academic activities?
   Non-academic activities?
   Parent-teacher interviews?
   Homework?
   Other?

Appendix D

Resource Teacher's Overview of the Study

WHO: my friend
she has been helping me and some of the teachers out at school this year

WHAT: doing a project
interviewing some parents from our school
has nothing to do with the school
thought you might be able to help her out

WHERE: interviews will be at home

WHEN: whenever is good for you

HOW: she will call you to give you more information about the project

WHY: she wants to learn more about what parents do with their kids when they are not in school

Any questions?

IMPORTANT: You do NOT have to take part in this project.
If you decide not to take part, it won't affect your child(ren) at school
If you decide to take part and then change your mind for whatever reason, you are allowed to do that too.

Appendix E

Interview Guide: Family Literacy Practices[37]

1. Adult Exemplars of Literacy Behavior
   - Who reads?
   - When?
   - Where? (Child(ren) present?)
   - What is read? (preferences)
   - How much? How long?
   - What language(s)?

2. Child Participation in Literacy Associated Activities
   - Does the child read alone? How often?
   - To whom does s/he read? How often?
   - Is the child read to? By whom? How often?
   - Who initiates reading to child?
   - What is read? (preferences)
   - What games are played by the child?
   - Does the child use a computer?

3. Access to Reading and Writing Materials
   - What types of writing materials are available?
   - Where are reading and writing materials kept?
   - Who uses these?
   - What types of reading materials are owned?
   - Any subscriptions?
   - Is the library used? By whom?

4. Purposes of Reading and Writing
   - Daily living tasks (e.g., shopping; cooking; bills; forms; etc.)
   - School or work-related?
   - Interpersonal purposes (e.g., letters; notes; cards)?
   - Pleasure (e.g., hobbies; games)?
   - Adult learning?
   - Volunteer activities (e.g., service clubs, church, community groups, etc.)

5. Parental Involvement in School Activities
   - School programs?
   - Homework assistance?

Demographic Information

Who lives in the household (gender, age, last grade completed, language(s) spoken)

---

[37] adapted from: Chaney, C. (1994). Language, development, metalinguistic awareness, and emergent literacy skills of 3-year children in relation to social class. *Applied Psycholinguistics, 15*(3), pp. 391-392.

Appendix F

Parent Questionnaire

1. About how many children's books do you have in your home?

    a. NONE
    b. 1-10
    c. 11-20
    d. 21-30
    e. OVER 30

2. I read bedtime or other stories to my child each day.

    a. ABSOLUTELY TRUE
    b. PROBABLY OR PARTLY TRUE
    c. UNSURE/IN DOUBT
    d. PROBABLY OR PARTLY FALSE
    e. ABSOLUTELY FALSE

3. I feel limited by the time I have available to work with my child.

    a. ABSOLUTELY TRUE
    b. PROBABLY OR PARTLY TRUE
    c. UNSURE/IN DOUBT
    d. PROBABLY OR PARTLY FALSE
    e. ABSOLUTELY FALSE

4. If my child is having difficulty at school, it is my responsibility to try to help.

    a. ABSOLUTELY TRUE
    b. PROBABLY OR PARTLY TRUE
    c. UNSURE/IN DOUBT
    d. PROBABLY OR PARTLY FALSE
    e. ABSOLUTELY FALSE

5. I am able to help my child with schoolwork.

    a. ABSOLUTELY TRUE
    b. PROBABLY OR PARTLY TRUE
    c. UNSURE/IN DOUBT
    d. PROBABLY OR PARTLY FALSE
    e. ABSOLUTELY FALSE

Appendix F (continued)

6. If I had read more when I was a child, my life would have been different in the following way(s) (*Circle all that apply*):

   a. I WOULD HAVE A HIGH PAYING JOB.
   b. I WOULD BE MORE ACTIVE IN MY CHILD'S SCHOOL.
   c. I WOULD HAVE GONE FARTHER IN MY EDUCATION.
   d. I WOULD BE BETTER ABLE TO HELP WITH HOMEWORK.
   e. OTHER (*please specify:* _____)

7. If I want to buy my child a toy or book that cost less than $10, I would have to save.

   a. ABSOLUTELY TRUE
   b. PROBABLY OR PARTLY TRUE
   c. UNSURE/IN DOUBT
   d. PROBABLY OR PARTLY FALSE
   e. ABSOLUTELY FALSE

8. If I want to buy my child a toy or books that cost $20-$50, I would have to save.

   a. ABSOLUTELY TRUE
   b. PROBABLY OR PARTLY TRUE
   c. UNSURE/IN DOUBT
   d. PROBABLY OR PARTLY FALSE
   e. ABSOLUTELY FALSE

9. When my child is reading, it is important to make sure that s/he understands the book:

   a. ABSOLUTELY TRUE
   b. PROBABLY OR PARTLY TRUE
   c. UNSURE/IN DOUBT
   d. PROBABLY OR PARTLY FALSE
   e. ABSOLUTELY FALSE

10. I talk to my child about what happened at school that day.

   a. ABSOLUTELY TRUE
   b. PROBABLY OR PARTLY TRUE
   c. UNSURE/IN DOUBT
   d. PROBABLY OR PARTLY FALSE
   e. ABSOLUTELY FALSE

11. The best way to help my child learn to read and write is (*please describe*):

   _____
   _____

Appendix G

Guidelines for Journal Entries[38]

Please answer each question for each journal entry.

1. Briefly describe the literacy activity that any member of the family does. Note the time it started and the time it was finished, as well as who was involved in the activity.

   Activity:

   _____

   _____

   _____

   People present: _____

   Time started: _____ Time finished: _____

2. What was the purpose of this activity?

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

3. Describe any thoughts or feelings that you have about this activity.

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

4. Describe any other activities happening at the same time.

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

5. Indicate whether this activity was (*choose just one*):

   ☐ Stressful and pleasurable
   ☐ Stressful
   ☐ Pleasurable
   ☐ Neither stressful nor pleasurable

[38] adapted from Ross, M. M., Rideout, E. M., & Carson, M. M. (1994). The use of diary as a data collection technique. *Western Journal of Nursing Research, 16*(4), 414-425.

Appendix H

Analysis of Shared Book Reading[39]

		Indicate number
Adult Book Reading Style		
1. Reading	a. Duration (in minutes)	_____
2. Interruptions during reading	a. Questions	_____
	b. Statements	_____
3. Reactions to child interruptions	a. No reaction	_____
	b. One word	_____
	c. Phrase or sentence(s)	_____
Child Behaviors		
1. Responses to questions (RQ)	a. Correct (RQ+)	_____
	b. Incorrect (RQ-)	_____
2. Responses to statements (RS)	a. Correct (RS+)	_____
	b. Incorrect (RS-)	_____
3. Interruptions during reading	a. Questions	_____
	b. Statements	_____
4. Nonverbal gestures (e.g., point)	a. To text	_____
	b. To illustrations	_____
Purpose of Parent-Initiated Dialogue		
1. Tell the story	a. Paraphrase text	_____
	b. Link text to illustrations	_____
2. Construct meaning	a. Discuss picture not in text	_____
	b. Offer mathematics training	_____
	c. Offer literacy training	_____
	d. Expand vocabulary	_____
	e. Reasoning/Linking experience and social behaviors	_____
Purpose of Child-Initiated Dialogue		
1. Use language	a. Predict events in the story	_____
	b. Add information, comment	_____
	c. Question	_____
2. Literacy	a. Join in/attempt to read	_____

[39] adapted from:Kook, H., & Vedder, P. (1995). The importance of parental book-reading; tensions between theory and practice. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 3*(3), 3-15 and Wade, B., & Moore, M. (1990). Children's early book behavior. *Educational Review, 48*(3), 283-288.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Occasionally in life there are those moments of unutterable fulfillment which cannot be completely explained by those symbols called words. Their meanings can only be articulated by the inaudible language of the heart.

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

It is a pleasure to thank the many people who contributed to the realization of this thesis:

First, I cannot overstate my gratitude to my study participants. The families who welcomed me into their homes and their lives were wonderful. My heartfelt thanks goes to the immensely talented educators who openly invited me into their school and classrooms. The understanding gained through these encounters and my additional participation as a volunteer at the school was vital to my study and enriched my thesis.

Next, I would like to acknowledge the valuable contributions of my committee members in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa who generously shared their time and expertise. I thank Professor Maurice Taylor for his enormous amount of faith in me, his kindness for assuming the role of my thesis supervisor in the final stages, his timely feedback, and for all of the challenges he has helped me to meet. I am also sincerely grateful to Professor Diana Masny, who provided me with advice, direction and helpful leadership in the early stages as my initial thesis supervisor, Professor Cheryll Duquette for her congenial nature, decisive and energetic support of my work, and many illuminating discussions, Professor Cynthia Morawski for her commitment, professionalism and capacity to stimulate my interest not only in research on literacy but the practical application, and Professor Judith Robertson for her precise sense of language, exuberant and enthusiastic guidance, and many constructive comments on my work. I also thank Professor Richard Darville of Carleton University for serving as my external examiner and for his comprehensive feedback on my thesis and his thought-provoking questions at my oral defense.

I extend special thanks to Professors Robin J. Enns and Douglas Knight, formerly at l'Université de Moncton and Professors Kathleen Berry and Pam Whitty at the University of New Brunswick. These professors, who had taught me, recognized my philosophy of education, my love of learning and my creativity and urged me to continue my studies in education. Each one inspired me pedagogically and has remained a great source of inspiration throughout my doctoral program.

I would be remiss not to thank the graduate students who I met during the course of my studies for their camaraderie and moral support and my work colleagues for their friendship, confidence in me and sometimes much needed diversion. Special recognition goes to those who provided invaluable assistance in conducting reliability checks,

reviewing the categories in my content analysis, and serving as auditor and my peer debriefer. I owe Jane, Jocelyn, Nancy, Stephanie and Susan a debt of gratitude for listening so patiently and helping me to improve my thesis and clarify my arguments.

My family is also deserving of mention. I am appreciative of their help in enabling me to stand my ground and to persevere at those times when the gale force winds seemed to blow so hard that my life seemed to be a hurricane followed by a blizzard.

Finally, I thank my father, Norman Rubin, whose values and sacrifices paved the way for me for the challenge of higher education. Unfortunately, his untimely death was in the final month of my thesis writing and he was not able to celebrate the completion. My accomplishment is a tribute to him. His spirit shall live on in my heart forever. Hasta luego - 'til we meet again.