1-1-1998

An investigation of family literacy practices of eight families with preprimary children and a family literacy program conducted in a low socio-economic area

Jennifer A. Jayatilaka
Edith Cowan University

Edith Cowan University

Copyright Warning

USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

Edith Cowan University

Library/Archives

Use of Theses

AN INVESTIGATION OF FAMILY LITERACY PRACTICES OF EIGHT

FAMILIES WITH PREPRIMARY CHILDREN AND A FAMILY LITERACY

PROGRAM CONDUCTED IN A LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC AREA

by

Jennifer A. Jayatilaka., (Dip ED. E.C.E., Grad., Dip. Special Ed.)

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the

Award of

Master of Education (Early Childhood Studies)

at the Faculty of Education, Edith Cowan University

Date of Submission:

December 1998

Abstract

Study of the research literature showed that literacy skills are socialised in young children along with their learning of oral language. This socialisation process occurs within a child's home environment long before they enter formal schooling. Family literacy has been shown to have the potential to impact powerfully on children's perceptions about literacy use through role models and support provided by various family and community members. Literacy activity is often deeply embedded in daily family practices. For some children, differences between home and school literacy practices can occur. Where this mismatch occurs for children in low socio economic homes the problems associated can be compounded. In the present study a formative experimental design was used to investigate and describe some of the literacy practices of eight families living in a low socio-economic environment as identified by the parents of children attending a preprimary centre. Some family literacy programs designed to reduce the effect of the literacy mismatch between home and school have been found, in research literature, to be unsuitable for certain communities because of their inability to address the needs of individual families. The present study reports on the results of a family literacy program jointly planned by the teacher/researcher and parents of eight families from a low socio-economic community. It describes the nature of the family literacy program and the perceptions of the program held by the eight participants. Issues arising from this family literacy program design are highlighted and some implications for educational practice and further research are presented.

Declaration

"I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

1. incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

2. contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or

3. contain any defamatory material"

Signature: _____

Date: _2̲0̲t̲h̲_ _F̲e̲b̲r̲u̲a̲r̲y̲ 1̲9̲9̲9̲

Acknowledgments

I would like to dedicate this document to my family, husband Con, sons Brenton and Jacob and Mum and Dad and sincerely thank them their incredible faith, support and encouragement given constantly during the time it took to complete this project.

I would like to applaud and thank Dr. Mary Rohl for her unending support and patience throughout this long, arduous and exciting journey. I am so grateful for her guidance and advice which made it possible for me complete my research.

Finally to those at school who have helped in many ways. Thank you: Sue Soord, Margaret Fox, Billie Mc Carthy and others for always being there and making sure I stuck to it.

I owe a large debt to the parents who participated in the study. It was an honour to hear their stories. I respect their courage and admire their enthusiasm and humour.

Table of Contents

REFERENCES

APPENDICES

List of Tables

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In Australia in 1997, Ministers from the Commonwealth, State and Territories Education Departments agreed upon a national goal in an attempt to "represent community expectations for all schools in literacy and numeracy" (Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs, now know as Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 1998, p.9). The goal, "that every child leaving primary school should be numerate, and be able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level" and the sub goal, "that every child commencing school from 1998 will achieve a minimum acceptable literacy and numeracy standard within four years"(p.9), are the basis for a comprehensive National Literacy and Numeracy Plan. The Plan represents a framework which aims to improve the levels of proficiency in literacy and numeracy skills of students in Australian schools from the early to the post-school years in order to increase their personal, social and cultural development. In the monograph Literacy for All: The Challenge for Australian Schools, in which the plan is explained, DEETYA (1998) acknowledges the diversity of literacy experiences brought by students to the early years of schooling and focuses on a number of critical factors relevant to the acquisition of literacy. Two of these critical factors, relevant to the present study, are:

1.   The importance of home literacy practices which support literacy development in the pre-school and early school years, such as early exposure to print, especially stories, and a supportive family environment;

2.   The significance of parental involvement in the early years of schooling and in family literacy programs.

Similarly, in his study of literacy intervention with parents of preschool children Hannon (1996 p. 76) concludes, "there is a compelling case for trying to develop ways of working with parents to promote children's preschool literacy development, and good reason to think that if we were successful this could have substantial benefits for later school attainment". Further, LoBianco and Freebody (1997 p.76) comment that, "apart from the obvious and broader differences in home background languages and English, there appears to be significant 'mismatch' between the language patterns used in some homes and those used and expected in schools". Accordingly some research has shown that support for early literacy development through a range of strategies including school based family literacy programs has the potential to strengthen the links between the literacy of children's home environments and that of the school and help lessen the effects of any such mismatch (Barton 1995, Cairney 1994, LoBianco & Freebody 1997, Wolfendale & Topping 1996).

In this thesis, I describe a family literacy program designed and conducted with eight families from a low socio economic area which contained preschool children. The aims of the study were to examine the literacy practices within these families and to conduct a series of workshops, jointly constructed by the researcher and the participants which were designed to increase awareness of children's early literacy development. The participants' perceptions of the program are also reported.

The study begins with a literature review in Chapter 2. This chapter examines definitions of literacy and family literacy and the implications of the effects of the mismatch between the literacy practices of the home and those of the school. It also includes a discussion of the ways in which partnerships between home and school

can be strengthened. Family literacy program design is also looked at in this chapter, along with suggestions for evaluating family literacy programs. Four existing family literacy programs are evaluated in terms of their content, process of delivery, financing source and program control.

In Chapter 3 the formative experiment design of this study is outlined and the methodology used to plan and collect data is described. Due to the nature of my role as the researcher in this study a brief statement of my background is included in this chapter. This short history describes some events that brought me to the point of commencing this study.

Chapter 4 introduces the eight participants of the study and their family profiles. It describes them in terms of family background, parental educational experiences and expectations and the family literacy practices as described by the participants themselves during the study.

Chapter 5 is a description of the workshops series and examines information collected while the six workshops were conducted. It contains details of the development of the workshop series and the outcomes of each session. The atmosphere and discussion of each workshop are described through the use of transcripts as the participants engaged in the workshop activities. The particular features of each workshops are described under the headings of 'group atmosphere', 'content and presentation', 'group discussion', 'home tasks' and 'the facilitator'.

Chapter 6 examines the results of a parent questionnaire completed by the participants in the final workshop. An analysis of the responses given by participants is included and this is followed by an evaluation of the workshop series

in terms of specific criteria identified by Cairney (1996), which are listed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 7 examines the issues arising from the study. The implications of this study for educational practice are listed and suggestions for further research are included.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

In this chapter I review some of the research literature on the topic of family literacy both from Australia and overseas. Firstly, I define the term 'literacy' and discuss its meaning in terms of the current social context. I then look at how the term 'family literacy' is defined by researchers in the field. Next, differences between the literacy of the home and the literacy of the school are examined, followed by suggestions for strengthening the partnership between home and school.

The final section of this chapter describes important considerations for designing and evaluating family literacy programs and then examines in detail four such programs in terms of their content, process of delivery, source of finance and program control.

Defining Literacy

In his historical look at the development of literacy in industrialized nations, Venezky (1991) found that the terms 'literate' and 'illiterate' have been used from the last half of the 16th century. However, the term 'literacy' did not appear in English literature until around the end of the 19th century. It was at this time that a more complex understanding was developed about how literacy skills were used by people in their daily lives. Venezky (1991) defines literacy as a "cognitive skill involving reading and writing" and he points out that reading can be classified into two skill levels: that of detecting and recognising letters and word parts; and that of deriving and integrating meanings.

In attempting to answer the question, "What is Literacy?", Anstey and Bull (1996) observe that literacy is defined by different sectors of the community according to their own purposes. For instance there are many popular press reports on 'problematic literacy' issues, such as falling literacy standards and rates of poor literacy levels in school leavers. The popular press definition of literacy is generally narrow, in most cases, referring only to specific skills of reading and writing. Governments, on the other hand, tend to have a more global definition of literacy and measure the ability with which specific sectors of the community display competence in everyday literacy tasks against a 'national attainment level'. The result of these comparisons are used to direct government funding, measure the success of educational systems or develop policies related to literacy learning. Anstey and Bull (1996) observe that Departments of Education have historically defined literacy as a set of measurable, observable skills for reading, writing, speaking and listening but, more recently, have moved towards a definition which, while continuing to include oral language, reading and writing skills also adds the categories of critical analysis, viewing and non-verbal communication. As Lo Bianco and Freebody (1997) point out, definitions of literacy may range from a narrow skills-based view of functional literacy to a much wider definition which includes "social and political empowerment" (p. 28).

Freebody (1992) expands Venezky's definition of literacy when he describes it as a technology which, when used successfully, involves the use of a set of "resource-crafts". In his definition of a literacy learner Freebody (1992), like Venezky (1991) includes the ability to decode and comprehend (participate in) text, but he also adds the skills of text user and text analyst. Therefore in Freebody's (1992) view a

successful literacy user is one who uses all four roles: code-breaker, being able to make connections between the spoken word and the written symbol; text-participant, being able to understand the meaning and structure of text; text-user, being able to engage in social interactions around texts; and text-analyst, being able to analyse the ways in which written text is constructed by and constructs the learner. In this view, for literacy users to read a text fully, it is important they have an understanding of the graphic, semantic, structural, pragmatic and ideological codes used by the writer.

Other researchers (Gee 1996, Lankshear 1996; Luke, Comber, O'Brien 1996; Moll, 1994) have also examined the critical impact of the social and political environment in which the literacy learner is immersed. In his study of Hispanic, working class communities, Moll (1994) concentrated his analysis on understanding the social structures and networks within and between households and found that, in such communities, the children had a strong, clearly defined place within that environment. The place they held involved many complex household relationships which were influenced by factors such as the personal and work history of each family. Findings from the study demonstrate the importance of a family's social environment and the function their social networks serve in providing an exchange of knowledge related to the "household's functioning in society" (p. 184).

Children's social environments have a crucial effect on early literacy learning and they learn their community's value of literacy through an osmosis-like socialisation process. This socialisation occurs at an early age as a child learns about ways of behaving in the community or, described by Bull and Anstey (1996): "as ways intimately connected to the sociocultural identity of their group, as well as to their

power and status in the world" (p. 40). Bull and Anstey (1996) add to the discussion of literacy as a social practice by suggesting that, "Literacy is not just a number of discrete skills but an active, dynamic and interactive practice which can be used to get meaning from, and to build meaning around written texts" (p.40).

Gee (1996) describes acts of writing, reading, speaking and listening as carefully coordinated events not unlike making music or playing sports. He writes that during activities involving both language and literacy the participant's decisions and actions simultaneously coordinate with, and are coordinated by "other people, props, spaces, objects and ways of using language and other sign systems" (p.5). He defines these coordinated 'Discourses' as:

> ways of coordinating and integrating words, signs, acts, values, thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, objects and settings. A Discourse is a sort of 'identity kit' which comes complete with an appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk and, often, write in order to take on a particular social role that others will recognise. (p.6)

Therefore when engaging in Discourses with others in a variety of situations participants adapt and change their identities. Luke, Comber and O'Brien (1996) add another dimension when they consider what occurs when people interact:

> How we conduct our everyday face-to-face social relations is an expression of broader political affiliations, beliefs and investments in action. In everyday events in classrooms, lounge rooms, staffrooms and offices, we are engaged in 'taking sides', in working and interacting in ways that act in the symbolic and material interests of particular groups –

men and women, wealthy and poor, white and black, young and old, culturally 'mainstream' and marginal. (p. 31)

In light of this comment and in combination with the notion that literacy is socialised within the community of the literacy learner it can be assumed that children will assimilate social and political beliefs and biases through their interactions with their community and the community of the classroom. It would appear that for some low socio-economic groups, low competence in literacy may lead to a powerlessness to influence political agendas, which could affect group members' life choices. It is also important to remember that classroom cultures are supported by the political beliefs and power of the education system in which they are contained, thus disempowering certain groups. Bull and Anstey (1996) suggest that as educators our own literacy power has the "potential to infringe on the rights of others, " but that literacy may be used to empower certain groups within a society to "overcome unfair practices perpetrated by powerful elites" (p.41).

The wide range of literacy skills used in the community and the rapidly changing context in which these skills are used, combined with the social and political environment of the literacy learner add to the complexity of the task of defining literacy in the 1990's. Heath (1991) noted that while the socialization of language and literacy is occurring in the home and community, critical thinking skills are also developed. She explains that these and other higher level skills such as making judgments, debating with others, questioning, evaluating text and forming opinions, are then applied by learners to reading and writing tasks. As a result, communication takes place in a variety of ways which include reflection and sharing

of ideas. This may occur not only through the traditional processes of talking and writing, but also through the electronic media. Topping, Shaw and Birch (1997) refer to 'electronic literacy' as:

> literacy activities (eg in reading, writing, spelling) which are delivered, supported, accessed or assessed through computers or other electronic means rather than on paper. (p7)

Electronic literacy includes a wide range of electronic devices including 'high-tech' modes, such as computers with CD-ROMs, interactive facilities and global connections, and 'low-tech' approaches such as video and audio taped books which have the power to enable the literacy user to engage in various forms of literacy activity. Whilst electronic literacy opens up new avenues for developing both traditional and new literacy skills, Topping (1997) makes the point that there are no computers in many homes, particularly those outside Western industrial nations and "in areas of relative socio-economic disadvantage" (p.14). Within some sectors of the community the need for, and opportunity to use, literacy skills are reduced to necessary daily tasks such as filling in forms, reading timetables or instructions and following directions. However, as Topping points out, where opportunity and motivation exist, literacy skills have the power to enable the user to make assumptions, predict outcomes, interpret data and sequence events.

As noted earlier, at the present time social context is seen by various researchers as a most important factor in the development of literacy. Children learn the importance and usefulness of literacy in their family by watching those around them and by participating in literacy activities. In their study of family and school literacy practices Breen, Louden, Barrat-Pugh, Rivalland, Rohl, Rhydwen, Lloyd and Carr

(1994) confirmed that literacy is a "set of practices embedded in the social customs learned within a community" and that "literacy is learned as people absorb the social customs of the family and community of which they are members."

Thus for the purpose of the present study, literacy is defined as a set of social practices embedded in the context of the community. These practices will include reading, writing, talk around literacy events, viewing and computer practices.

Defining Family Literacy

McNaughton (1995) describes the role that families play in the socialisation of young children. Part of this socialisation process is the use of those literacy skills which are appropriate for the family group. Socialisation is achieved through a series of experiences and opportunities for "purposes that have to do with their [each family member's] role within and outside the family." Through these family activities McNaughton claims children "develop ideas and values about literacy practices and activities and their personal and cultural identity" (p. 17).

Some of the literature on family literacy attempts to define the parameters of the field (Barton 1995; Cairney 1994; Morrow 1995). Topping and Wolfendale (1995) admit that defining family literacy is difficult and that the term 'Family Literacy' embraces more than the amalgamation of the concepts of 'family' and 'literacy'. The concept of family literacy has changed over the last decade with an increase in the amount of research and debate conducted on the topic. Barton (1995) comments that the term 'family literacy' can mean different things for different groups of people and as a result he is concerned that the use of specific, narrow images, such as parents reading to young children, presented through media channels, has resulted

in a lack of clarity about what is meant by family literacy. While adults reading regularly to children is an important aspect of family literacy, the concept of family literacy itself has a much broader understanding.

Cairney (1994) defines family and community literacy as "the literacy practices which occur within the context of both the family and community". However, the contexts in which literacy is learnt cannot all be represented in one statement. A literacy user will give and receive assistance during literacy activity both with family members and the wider community. Barton (1995) describes this by saying that everyone in a Western society participates in some form of literacy activity; literacy learning is lifelong and; family members do not cease to learn different ways to use their literacy skills just because they are not the generation which is attending school. He adds that because families are infinitely different, literacy learning within families, community and classroom cultures happens in many different ways.

The term 'family' within the context of family literacy does not necessarily mean that of mother and/or father and siblings. Home environments may be influenced by a number of related and unrelated adults and children, covering two or more generations (Cairney 1994; Barton 1995; Paratore 1995). Intergenerational literacy is a process whereby the literacy habits of different generations have a direct influence on each other. Each will have their own strengths and needs for literacy. For example, great grandmothers may teach young children to understand and play card games, children may show parents how to use the family computer, an elderly baby-sitter may spend time reading to young children and a teenage neighbour may share a basketball magazine with a 12-year-old.

There has been much interest in family literacy, especially intergenerational literacy, in the United States.   In 1995 the International Reading Association published a monograph on the subject.   This was entitled Family Literacy Connections in Schools and Communities.   In this publication Auerbach (1995) cautions against educators and politicians jumping on the "family literacy bandwagon" without having a clear knowledge of the implications of the term 'family literacy.'   She claims that the fact that family literacy is becoming a "buzzword in the '90's" could prevent the change and development she sees as necessary in family literacy programs.

Auerbach (1995) presents two definitions of family literacy. First is the view that family literacy means merely repeating school literacy behaviors within the home environment. Inherent in this model are two assumptions. These are that school-like behaviors are the correct and only way to acquire literacy skills and that any family literacy behaviors which are unlike those of the school are in some way defective.   The second view offered by Auerbach (1995) is a participatory, empowering one which views family literacy as a wide range of literacy practices which may be used by family members daily in a way that is appropriate and socially significant to the user. These home practices have an "in context" personal relevance to literacy learners that school literacy learning may lack. This second view is the one adopted for the present study as it recognises the great value of the literacy practices occurring within the family and home environment.

The results of some research studies suggest that literacy acquisition cannot be separated from the context in which children develop. Spreadbury (1994) studied the skills of 25 parents reading to their 5-year-old children and found that, "across

all education and socio-economic levels parents are highly competent at facilitating their children's literacy learning during parent-child reading aloud sessions at home"(p. 24). Taylor (1983) studied the lives of six families with children whose literacy skills were beginning to emerge. She found that "reading and writing are so much a part of the lives of these parents and children that their experiences are too diffuse for casual commentary" (page 25). Taylor had to develop a diverse way of recording the literacy activities of these families to show more clearly the literacy activity which was occurring. She conducted 'literacy searches' of the homes of the families she investigated, searching out evidence of literacy involvement, samples of work done by children and interviews and photographs of children. A wide range of literacy and literacy related activities were found to occur regularly.

Often in discussions of family literacy and its effect on children's school success, assumptions are made about the quality of the literacy which occurs within particular home environments. Greaney (1986) claims that the conventional social measures such as socio-economic status or non-English speaking background tend to focus too much on what families <u>are</u>, not what they <u>do.</u> This mind set underestimates the effects of the home environment on the child's school development.

Auerbach (1995) and Morrow and Paratore (1993) suggest that many low income, immigrant or minority families do offer an environment that enhances literacy development, but in ways often not recognized as school-like learning. For example, oral story telling occurs in some families and may be similar to the narratives spoken and written in schools. Purcell-Gates, L'Allier and Smith (1995) conducted an ethnographic study of 20 low socio-economic, urban families which contained 24

children between the ages of 4 and 6. During the three month study they made observations of the uses of functional print in the families and its relationship to the young children's emergent literacy development. Following a detailed description of four of the families the authors note that, as each family is unique, it is insufficient to use a "demographic characteristic such as socio-economic status to make assumptions about a child's literacy environment" (p. 577). This could be true of a whole range of other characteristics such as language, ethnic background, employment status or educational levels achieved by parents.

For the purposes of the present study, family literacy is defined as the literacy events in which children are immersed outside the classroom. These events will include a range of reading, writing, speaking, listening, computing and viewing activities, with a range of people of different ages, either related or unrelated to the literacy learner. These events will be shaped by the cultural environment in which the literacy learner lives.

Differences Between Home and School Literacy Practices

Lo Bianco and Freebody (1997) report that current research has highlighted the mismatch between some family language patterns, routines and interactions and those of school environments. They note that this mismatch has resulted in frustration for some parents from low socio-economic families when they are unable to match their interactions and talk with their children to that of the school, thus possibly denying their children the same level of home support experienced by other children. The difference which exists between how literacy is used and taught at school and the ways children observe their families using literacy skills may be

especially significant for children from low socio-economic, non-English speaking or minority culture backgrounds. Lo Bianco and Freebody (1997) claim that if schools make incorrect assumptions about learners from these backgrounds a lasting, detrimental effect on the quality of their literacy learning may occur. Morrow and Paratore (1993) emphasise that because of this lack of understanding, in some cases the types of literacy events that parents share with their children will have little influence on their children's school literacy achievement. They comment that this phenomenon may also be true in the reverse, that is, school literacy activities may have no relevance in the home environments of some families. Barton (1995) points out that school literacy is just one of the many different types of literacy that learners might be exposed to. He says that differences between the two environments exist and cannot be ignored and suggests that connections between home and school practices can be strengthened through the development of programs based on the need to understand and support the literacy practices of the home.

Strengthening the Partnership between Home and School

It would seem that there is a need to strengthen the relationship between the school and home if early literacy learning is to be optimal. Where family literacy programs are being developed it is essential for facilitators to learn as much as possible about the lives of the families involved so that meaningful connections can be made by children between learning in the home and community environment and school learning. Barton (1995) suggests that if schools find out what happens in families rather than make assumptions about what may be happening, educators might begin to view parents as equal partners in the education of their children.

When this occurs the relationship between home and school will become reciprocal. He comments that in such a reciprocal environment parents will be able to contribute information about how their children learn and therefore play a more important role in bridging the gap between the literacy practices of home and school.

Cairney (1994) recommends that schools move past a "token involvement" of parents in school-based programs, that is, those in which parents are used to add on to processes that already occur in schools. Parent initiatives based on meaningful parental involvement and specific parent programs occurring in schools would encourage a more collaborative relationship and fully recognise the part parents play in the overall literacy development of their children. Purcell-Gates, L'Allier and Smith (1995) suggest that teachers set different goals for families who have different literacy levels. These goals should attempt to make school learning more relevant to the experiences of both families and students.

Family Literacy Program Design

The assumptions held by teachers about families and their levels of literacy competence are an important factor to consider when developing appropriate family literacy programs in schools. When teachers are prepared to recognise and build upon the strengths of the literacy knowledge that children bring to school, a positive start for a family literacy program can be made. Auerbach (1995) cautions that having belief in a model which is designed to transmit school-like literacy practices to the home has some basic assumptions which could prove to be false. One false assumption is that children's literacy skills are only developed to the extent that the home environment is able to conduct school-like activities. Others are that parents'

own problems obstruct the positive literacy contexts within the family environment and that children from language minority homes are literacy impoverished. Finally, there is the assumption that school practices are adequate, leading to another assumption that it is home factors which determine school success.

Assumptions held about families involved in a family literacy program by those designing the program affect the ways in which the program is planned and designed. Topping and Wolfendale (1995) describe three general types of family literacy program. The first type is a program based on a strong home/school partnership, the second is an intergenerational literacy program. and the third is research which explores different uses of literacy within families. Programs may be designed to include only one of these design types or they may include more than one. Topping and Wolfendale (1995) list the goals and aspirations they consider family literacy programs should be based on. These include the goals that the family literacy program values the existing home culture and competencies and that the program attempts to build on them. They also include the goals that a family literacy program provides opportunities for gains in the literacy competencies of all family members and that family members be encouraged to help each other, not only during the course of the program, but also after it has concluded, thus providing assistance between generations into the future. The authors add that it is important that a family literacy program offer equal learning opportunities and access to all members of all families of all kinds. However, many factors impact on a the design and effectiveness of a family literacy initiatives. These include available time, financing of a program and support for the program within the school community.

Cairney (1994) sees parent support for a family literacy program as essential for its success. Involving parents in the planning stage is crucial and choosing a family literacy program that will enhance the literacy practices of the home rather than being imposed upon families will be more likely to be well received by parents. Equally important to a program's success is how parents are recruited to participate, what and how information is shared and who delivers the information. Within the school setting all these factors should be examined so that what emerges is a clear picture of how appropriate the design of a particular program is for the school community.

When designing a program, the information presented to participants is particularly important. Barton (1995) has a list of strategies which he considers will strengthen the outcomes of a family literacy program. He advises that asking parents to undertake direct teaching activities in the home may not be the most effective type of support for children's emergent literacy skills. Alternatively, he recommends that parents understand the importance of a positive attitude to, and encouragement of their children's involvement in literacy activities. Barton suggests that parents be guided in methods for enhancing the literacy activities that already occur within their homes. Support from schools for this type of activity also needs to be positive and encouraging.

Purcell-Gates, L'Allier and Smith (1995) suggest that it is important for schools to develop appropriate goals for children from low socio-economic families to enable them to develop emergent literacy skills, thus strengthening the ways in which these children learn and use new skills outside the classroom. In their study of families of low socio-economic status they found that, although some children did not have the

opportunity to experience literacy activities as frequently as others, it was not correct to assume that all children from low-socio economic families held the same perceptions and understandings about the use of literacy. Accordingly they suggest that appropriate goals could include ways of involving the children in literacy activities relevant to their social context and that schools offer the type of support which encourages emergent literacy learning within the home environment to occur.

Morrow and Paratore (1993) recommend that schools include family literacy as a part of their curriculum. They claim that this will help integrate family literacy more thoroughly into the school curriculum and demonstrate that it is a valued part of literacy learning for each child.

Schools in Western Australia are currently given the power to plan and control curriculum issues which are directly related to the needs of their school community This initiative makes it possible for schools to include a family literacy component in their yearly School Development Plan.

Evaluating a Family Literacy Program

Cairney et al. (1995) conducted a research project to examine the relationship between the home and community environment of specific groups of literacy learners and their school language and literacy learning. One objective of the project was to "conduct a detailed mapping exercise of current parent language and literacy initiatives in Australia in the middle years of schooling" (p.1). The project reviewed 261 family and community initiatives. It was found that there was a lack of detailed evaluation within these programs. It appeared that 15.7% of the programs examined had a formal evaluation process, 14.2% had no evaluation and only 20.3% were

evaluated in relation to student outcomes. It would appear that due to the long term nature of the benefits of family literacy programs, results are not usually easily quantifiable and that future research in the field should attempt to include the longitudinal effects of family and community literacy programs.

It also seems important in developing a family literacy program to assess the appropriateness and relevance of the program to the community in which it will be used. Cairney (1996) suggests that a program should be evaluated on the following four variables:

> *Content* - What information is shared? What is the focus of group discussion, demonstrations, home tasks and so on? What is the stated purpose of the content?
>
> *Process*- How is the information shared? Who acts as the facilitator or leader for any program and how does this person structure opportunities for discussion, observation etc.?
>
> *Source* - Who has initiated the involvement? Was it a parent, school, community or government initiative?
>
> *Control* -Who is in control of the program? Where is the program located (home, school, community building)? How do parents become involved in the program (chosen, selected, parent initiative)? (p.133)

Four Family Literacy Programs

I have applied Cairney's (1996) criteria for evaluation to four family literacy programs implemented in Australia and overseas to illustrate some key elements of family literacy program design. The first program is <u>Collaborating for Successful</u>

Learning (C.S.L.) (Spreadbury 1995, Australian Parent Council 1995) a project involving over 500, Year 2 children from non-government, low socio-economic, high non-English speaking community schools in South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland. The second program is Parents as Partners in Reading (P.A.P.) which was designed for children and parents at one rural southern Louisiana elementary school (Edwards, 1995). It aimed to facilitate a fit between the parents' expectation that their children would have a successful school experience and the school's expectation that parents should provide a good literate model and read regularly to their children (Amm and Juan 1994). The third program is Parents as Teachers Program, (P.A.T.) trialled in three schools in New South Wales in 1991 to offer parents who were expecting their first child support in the form of home visits, educational programs and health checks for the first three years of the child's life. The fourth program evaluated is Talk to A Literacy Learner (T.T.A.L.L.), designed in Australia by Cairney and Munsie (1992) for use at Lethbridge Park Primary School. Its purpose was fourfold: to raise parental participation in the literacy activity of their children; to change the nature of parent/child interactions; to raise the community's expectations about literacy; and to train community resource people to increase the range of literacy activities available in the community. These four programs were chosen because they are relevant to the Australian community, having been either designed within Australia or trialled with Australian families.

Content of Family Literacy Programs

Each program focused on teaching parents skills to influence children's early literacy learning. C.S.L. included topics such as 'Parent Motivation and Reading'

and 'Building Self Esteem and Writing' (Australian Parent Council 1995). In the P.A.T. program, parents were educated about children's development in language cognitive, social and motor skills. The P.A.P. consisted of 28 two hour sessions divided into three phases: group discussion, book reading practice and group feedback. The T.T.A.L.L. program addressed seven main topics. These were: the reading process; supporting the reader; using the library; the writing process; supporting the writer and; research writing.

Process of Family Literacy Programs

All the four programs required participants to attend a varying number of workshops. C.S.L. required parents to attend three workshops and conduct home based activities with their children between sessions. P.A.P. consisted of 28 workshops, children were included and presenters discussed and then modeled aspects of book reading with children. During these sessions parents read aloud to their children and received feedback about their efforts from other participants. The P.A.T. offered parents, over three years, group meetings and coffee mornings to share their parenting experiences, the children's health was screened periodically and home visits were conducted by trained parenting consultants. The T.T.A.L.L. program required parents to attend a total of 16 two-hour sessions conducted two days per week for eight weeks.

Source of Funding for Family Literacy Programs

C.S.L., P.A.T. and T.T.A.L.L. were funded by grants from state or federal Government departments. The P.A.P. program was designed and conducted as a project by a university researcher.

Control of Family Literacy Programs

In the C.S.L., P.A.T. and T.T.A.L.L. programs, sessions were conducted by trained presenters; in the P.A.P. program the program designer was initially in control and then allowed trained parent leaders to take charge as the program progressed. Programs that were funded by government bodies were ultimately controlled by the funding body. However, program designers made decisions about the content and processes included in each program.

Other Criteria for Evaluating Family Literacy Programs

The four evaluation criteria used above could be extended to create a more thorough evaluation. One addition could be the philosophy and beliefs held by the program designer and whether these are reflected in the program design. For instance Edwards (1995) commented that she wanted to leave the community with something they could "adopt and adapt to the own needs" after the study was complete. To this end she trained parent tutors, gradually withdrawing from the project to become an observer as the tutors became more confident in their role. Her philosophy for this practice was that parents would then continue the process without the need for the researcher to be present. Thus the underlying philosophy was evident in the program processes.

There is only a very limited amount of information available about the short and long term outcomes of some of these programs, although Cairney (1996) does provide a comprehensive evaluation of the T.T.A.L.L. program to determine its impact on the people involved. His evaluation includes qualitative and quantitative data collected during the course of the program and quotes from various participants. The evaluation of outcomes would seem to be a most important addition to the criteria.

Summary

This chapter has defined literacy and family literacy in terms of the present research project and has also looked at some commonly held beliefs about family literacy. It has examined some differences which may exist between the literacy practices of the home and the school environments of literacy learners and has made comment on ways in which the partnership between the two may be strengthened. This chapter has examined issues relevant to designing and evaluating family literacy programs in a school community and has evaluated four programs which have operated in Australia.

Gaps in Research in the Field of Family Literacy

An examination of the literature shows that much of the research conducted in the area of family literacy has concentrated on families of children who had reached the formal years of schooling and there has been very little conducted with children in the pre-school years. Hannon (1996) suggests that waiting until children enter school before involving parents in programs focusing on the teaching of literacy

skills is too late. He reports that research in the last decade has shown that the community now acknowledges that what children learn about literacy in the years prior to school is extremely important and he points out that parents and other family members have a central role in the literacy learning of young children in the years prior to school. He urges that there is a 'compelling case' to create ways of working with parents to support literacy development in young children before they reach school.

Although their study only looked at children in the middle years of schooling Cairney et al. (1995) made firm recommendations with regard to further research in the field of family literacy. These included the recommendations that research should address the issue of possible mismatches between home and school literacy practices and that research is needed to investigate the impact of family literacy programs on student outcomes.

In addition to this, recommendations in the National Literacy and Numeracy plan (DEETYA 1998) suggest that there is a need for research which will encourage school communities to:

- explore ways of enhancing understandings of the differences and similarities between home and school literacy practices in the school community that may lead to more effective mutual recognition of these practices in both sites;

- identify ways for teachers and parents to examine and study their own literacy practices with children and identify challenges they should pose themselves about how their own views and interactions can be changed in line with their goals and aspirations;

• consider ways of communicating and disseminating educational information among members of the school community, including school staff, students and community members;

• identify processes and strategies that establish more productive methods of establishing and maintaining partnerships between schools and their communities. (p38)

This study attempts to investigate some of these issues. On the basis of the literature reviewed here I designed and carried out a formative experiment at Addington (pseudonym) Primary School which is situated in a low socio- economic area of Perth. With a group of parents who had children attending the preprimary centre, I attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What were some of the family literacy practices in (eight) families in the Addington area?

2. What was the nature of a family literacy program jointly constructed between parents from the Addington area and the researcher?

3. What were the parents' perceptions of the family literacy program?

CHAPTER 3

Method of Investigation

Design of the Study

It has been argued in the previous chapter that it is important for schools to collect information about literacy activity in the home environments of their young children. This study describes:

1. some of the literacy activities in eight such families;

2. the nature of a family literacy parent program which was jointly constructed by parents and a preprimary teacher/researcher;

3. the parents' perceptions of the family literacy program.

The family literacy program aimed to heighten the parents' awareness of the ways in which literacy might develop in their young children. Families involved in the study had children attending a preprimary class at a Western Australian school in a low socio-economic suburban area. Answers to the research questions were sought through the analysis of: interviews with parents; audiotapes from parent workshop sessions; parent participation in various home tasks in which they gathered information on their family's literacy activities; parent questionnaires; and field notes made by the researcher.

Research Methodology: Formative Experiment

This study was designed to be qualitative in nature and the investigation was based on a "recognition of the importance of the subjective, experiential 'lifeworld' of human beings" (Burns 1994). This qualitative approach has allowed a study which describes some of the daily literacy activities of families with young children

who live in a low socio-economic area and the role of parents in the literacy activities. The family literacy activities involved reading, writing, viewing television and videos and using computers, as well as some spoken language which occurred around the activities.

However, limitations of qualitative research foci involving only observations, interviews and subjective data and the personal and moral obligations I have as a teacher to the children in these families caused me to look beyond just a description of these events. I decided to try and find a way in which parents' understanding of early literacy development could be increased and their efforts to support their children's emerging literacy skills could be enhanced while the study was conducted. Jacob (1992) describes a research design called a 'formative experiment'. It is based on qualitative research design principles, and is a method which allows research to be explicitly concerned with improving learning. "To achieve their goals, researchers combine qualitative methods of investigation with interventions in learning situations" (p. 321). This description accurately describes the research design in this study. I have used the formative experiment design to plan and implement a series of workshops on various aspects of early literacy for the preprimary parents in this study. Thus, I raised the central theme of my study from that of a description of what existed to an exploration of possibilities for positive action with the school community.

Embedded in the implementation of the workshops was the desire for the researcher/teacher to construct the nature and content of the workshop series jointly with the participants. This was an attempt to strengthen home-school connections, develop a partnership with parents in the educational process and build on existing

family literacy practices, rather than imposing a school view of how literacy should be developed.

The formative experiment design has been used by Jimenez (1997), who describes it as a tool for the researcher to become more actively involved with the participants. Parallels can be drawn between the study of Jimenez (1997) and the present study. Jimenez studied the reading behaviours of students from minority groups (low literacy/Latino readers) in the United States and the formative experiment model was used to construct a series of cognitive strategy lessons for the students. In the present study family literacy practices were examined, the participants were parents of the preprimary children who had lived in a low socio economic area in Western Australia and a series of parent workshops was constructed which focused on early literacy development in young children. In both studies, the underlying aim was to improve outcomes for students who might be seen as being at risk of school failure. In both studies there were are concerns that participants not be stigmatised but that their specific needs would be met.

Whilst it aimed to increase parents' knowledge, the workshop program in the present study also allowed for a fuller description of the literacy activities and perceptions held by each family than would have been possible from interviews alone. The intent was to collect ongoing data on:

(1) family literacy practices throughout the duration of the program, including those which existed before the program and any changes which occurred as a result of the program;

(2) the parents' perceived needs in regard to the program;

(3) the collaborative nature of the design of the program.

Locating Participants for the Study

There were two full time preprimary classes on the Addington primary school

site, the researcher being the teacher of one of the classes. The school is situated is a

low socio-economic area south east of the city of Perth. Results of the 1996 census

showed that in this area 63% of persons over the age of 15 had left school by the age

of 16 years, 72% of people living in this area earned an individual weekly income of

between $0 and $499; 11% of the total labour force was unemployed, 39% of those

employed worked in the retail, manufacturing and construction industries and 14%

of family households were single parent families with children under the age of 15.

The Addington primary school had a specialised early intervention program for

children experiencing literacy difficulties in Years 1 to 3 and, in addition to the early

intervention classes held during school hours, The Home/School Advancement of

Reading Education (Englemann, Haddox and Bruner, 1983) program (SHARE) was

run for parents of children in Year 1. The SHARE program was a direct instruction

program of 100 pre-reading and reading lessons for parents to use at home with

their child. Parents were invited to join the SHARE program early in the year in

which children entered Year 1 and generally these were parents of children with less

developed early literacy skills compared to those of their peers. Parents attended

weekly group meetings with the teacher responsible for the program, shared their

experiences with each other and received support as they completed the program at

home with their child. The SHARE program has been described here as several of

the participants in the study had experience of the program with their older

children.

Before the program began I obtained the school principal's permission to conduct the workshops. I explained the aims of the program, some of the processes I was planning to use and gave him three journal articles which highlighted work from other countries in the area of family literacy. He then gave me written permission to proceed with the project (Appendix A). Parents from both preprimary centres were approached, asked to participate in the program and were also given written information regarding the project (Appendix B).

Ten replies were received from the 50 families approached and of these, seven parents, all mothers attended all six workshops (Appendix C). Of the ten mothers who indicated that they would like to attend the workshops, eight took part. One was unable to arrange an interview time and left the school community soon afterwards. One non-English speaking family came for the initial interview and then, despite my numerous attempts to explain the workshop procedure, did not come to any workshops and did not return to be interviewed again. There appeared to be some confusion about the purpose of the initial interview. One participant, a single mother working full time who was unable to attend the workshops, asked to be included and was accepted as a participant. A copy of the audiotape of each workshop was made and sent home for her to participate 'externally'.

There are several possible explanations for the response rate of only 20% from the preprimary parents. Firstly, many of the parents of children in the school community held full or part time employment, thus precluding them from attending workshops during the day. Secondly, as it was the beginning of the school year some parents, particularly those new to the school community, may have lacked confidence within the school environment, making them hesitant to become involved

in a research project. Thirdly, it may be that for some parents their own negative school experiences had created a barrier for them regarding school activities. ·

The Workshops

The workshops were held on Monday mornings, usually in the preprimary centre. As the preprimary children did not attend school on Monday the preprimary centre was available for the workshops. All preprimary teachers in Western Australia have one full non-contact day from classes to allow for planning and preparation time. The preprimary centre was chosen because it contained toys and equipment which would occupy the preschool children of the parents attending the workshops and it offered a familiar, hopefully non-threatening, environment for parents who might have felt anxious about attending workshops initiated by the school.

The Participants

The eight participants involved in the study reflected the diversity and range of families within the school community. Each family was unique in its structure and there were wide variations in the backgrounds of the parents which included culture and educational opportunities and experiences.

Table 1 gives a summary of the details of each family. All participants have been given pseudonyms.

Table 1.

Participants In The Study

Family	Marital Status	Number of Children	Children's Ages	Ethnic Background	Mother's Educational History	Father's Educational History
Dent	Single	2	8, 5.	Australian	Left school at age 15	—
Dunn	Married	3	6, 5, 3.	Australian	Left school at age 16	Left school at age 14
Hart	Married	3	7, 5, 1.	Father from England, mother from Italy.	Left school at age 16.	Left school at age 15.
Nowley	Married	3	7, 6, 5.	Australian	Left school at age 16	Left school at age 15
Settler	Married	2	8, 5.	Australian	Left school at age 17	Left school at age 15
Short	Married	2	5, 2.	Australian	Left school at age 17	Left school at age 15 now a student at Bible College.
West	Married	2	7, 5.	Parents from New Zealand	Qualified Nurse	Qualified Nurse
Zbigniew	Married	3	9, 6, 5.	Parents from Poland	Left school at age 17	Degree in Business and Computing.

Procedure for Data Collection

Parent Interviews

An interview with each participant was conducted prior to the commencement of the first workshop. The purpose of this was to establish the parents' perspectives of their family literacy practices before they attended the workshops. The initial data collection took the form of an audiotaped semi-structured interview conducted at the school. A second interview was conducted after parents had attended three workshop sessions.

Set Home Tasks for Parents

At four of the workshops parents were asked to collect written information on one aspect of literacy in their home environment. Information was collected in a variety of ways:

- lists of family activities which engaged family members in literacy;

- reading logs to show reading practices over a two week period (Appendix M);

- a review of a television program watched by the children in the family (Appendix O);

- a written record of their child's response to questions asked after a story reading.

This data provided information on specific aspects of literacy activity which were occurring in the participants' homes.

Parent Questionnaire

During the final workshop each parent was asked to complete a questionnaire detailing their perceptions of the workshop content and their feelings about their involvement in the group (Appendix Q).

Researcher Journal

As the researcher, facilitator of the workshops and classroom teacher for some of the children whose parents were involved in the workshop group, I kept an observation journal. In this I recorded any comments made to me by the participants; notes about conversations and incidents which occurred between myself and the families involved; my perceptions of the workshop program and; personal observations about family literacy that I gained through interacting with the parents and children on a daily basis.

Audiotaping of Sessions

Further information was collected on each family and on the nature of the sessions themselves through the audiotaping of four of the parent workshops in which family literacy practices were discussed.

Data Collection Summary

Table 2 summarises the data collected by the researcher which addressed each research question.

Table 2

Data Collection Sources for Research Questions

Research Questions	Data Source
1. What were some of the family literacy practices in (eight) families in the Addington area?	• Parent Interviews. • Written data collected by parents in their home. • Transcripts from parent workshops. • Teacher's observation journal.
2. What was the nature of a family literacy program jointly constructed between parents from the Addington area and the researcher?	• Parent Interviews. • Transcripts from parent workshops. • Final parent workshop questionnaire. • Teacher's observation journal
3. What were the parents' perceptions of the family literacy program?	• Parent Interviews. • Final parent workshop questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Family Profiles

The process of analysing the data commenced as each initial parent interview was conducted. Audiotapes of each interview were transcribed and a storage file created for each family. After participants had attended three of the workshops the second interview was completed and information on each family was compiled into a profile to describe each family context. These were categorised under the headings of "family background", "parent educational experiences", "parent expectations". Each compilation is a snapshot of the family as revealed by

the parents themselves. Trends and issues common to profiles were noted and summarised.

Information from Set Home Tasks for Parents

Written information from the set home tasks for parents was collated and stored in a file for each family. Examination of the data revealed further information on the literacy activities of individuals and the effects some of these may have had on the perceptions of young family members.

Audiotapes of Parent Workshops

Audiotapes of each parent workshop were transcribed and analysed. This analysis was ongoing throughout the study. Transcripts were examined for information to add details to the family profiles and to identify trends and issues for both parents and other family members. Transcripts were also examined for evidence of any change in parents' perceptions of the importance of literacy in the home environment and the degree of comfort they exhibited when attending and participating in the group activities and discussions.

Parent Questionnaires

Analysis of parent questionnaires provided data on parents' awareness of the influence of home literacy practices on the emerging literacy skills of their preprimary children at the end of the program and how, if at all, the program

might have impacted on the ways in which they interacted with their children during literacy activity.

Reliability and Validity

The issues of reliability and validity are particularly important when qualitative inquiry is used. Without the statistical tools of the more scientific quantitative studies, qualitative research design must examine the issue of objectivity. Eisner (1985) makes a connection between objectivity and an individual's conception of reality:

> All of us construct our conception of reality by interacting with the environment. What we take to be true is a product not only of the so-called objective conditions of the environment, but also of how we construct that environment. And that construction is influenced by our previous experience, including our expectations, our existing beliefs, and the conceptual tools through which the objective conditions are defined. (p.240)

Eisner (1985) adds that through the process of consensual validation an understanding exists "that we believe in what we believe and that others share our belief as well" (p.240). He claims that through this and the processes of structural corroboration and referential adequacy qualitative objectivity can be achieved.

Structural Corroboration

The process of structural corroboration necessitates a variety of sources from which information is gathered and checked, each against the other, to validate authenticity. By gathering pieces of information from different sources a researcher can then combine them to create a full picture of the phenomena being examined, in much the same way as a patchwork quilt is constructed. Burns (1995) recommends two ways of providing construct validity. Firstly he advocates using "multiple sources of evidence to demonstrate convergence of data from all sources" (p.328), and secondly he recommends "establishing of a chain of evidence that links the parts together"(p. 328). In this way information can be checked for consistency against similar information from different sources before final conclusions are made. In the present study structural corroboration was achieved through analysing interviews, parents' talk to each other, tape recordings of parent workshops, the researcher's journal and information from participant questionnaires.

Referential Adequacy

Referential adequacy is used to validate further observations and descriptions made about a situation by a researcher. If the critical discourse is an accurate description of the situation and identifies what is known of the situation, as well as highlighting new aspects of it, then referential adequacy has been achieved. In Eisner's (1985) words, "If the talk or writing is useful, we should be able to

experience the object or situation in a new, more adequate way...When the critic's work is referentially adequate we will be able to find in the object, event or situation what the cues point to" (p. 243).

Hence, in this study, parent descriptions of their family literacy practices and experiences not only illustrate descriptions of general family literacy practices in the current literature but also introduce new issues and situations. In this way further issues were raised and questions asked.

Generalisation

The debate on the possibility of generalisation of findings from qualitative studies continues, with little evidence being found to transfer assumptions from a small number of participants to the general population. This study does not seek to generalise findings to the wider school community as it recognises that the "circumstantial uniqueness" of each family group determined the outcomes of this study. However, the description of the diversity of literacy activity found in the profiles of the eight families in the study and the description of the family literacy program constructed by parents and the researcher may lead to what Burns (1995) refers to as "reader-made generalisations", that is: "the reader decides the extent to which the researcher's case is similar to and likely to be instructive to theirs" (p.327).

Personal History of the Researcher

In examining issues in educational research it is important to recognise that the researcher's opinions and perspectives influence the ways in which research questions are formed. In the present study my attitudes to family issues and analysis of the data collected have been directly influenced by my personal experiences. The following section presents a brief personal history of the factors which are likely to have contributed to my opinion and perspectives.

Early Schooling and Family Attitudes

I grew up in a family which, by most standards, was large. My mother was a full time, professional homemaker who, after having six children of her own permanently fostered two more. Due to family difficulties she had left school at 16 and although she would have liked to have become a "domestic science teacher", she was unable to complete her secondary education. After working briefly she was married and by the age of 27 had a family of six young children to care for.

My father's story is not dissimilar. He was one of a large family who worked a vegetable farm in the north of Queensland. His early schooling recollections were not pleasant. He recalls being punished almost daily at school for not completing his homework assignments. After leaving school at 15 he was apprenticed as a fitter and turner. He became skilled at machining and fixing mechanical devices and much of his adult life was spent working as a maintenance engineer.

Some of my formative years were spent travelling, gypsy style, in a caravan when my family decided to move from the north of Queensland. During this time my schooling was conducted at a variety of locations around the country where my father found work. After settling in a town in the south west of Western Australia my education was completed at the local government schools.

I was brought up in an atmosphere which valued literature. As young children we were often read to as we sat in the car travelling and there were always many books in our house. I recall spending many hours reading novels and poetry from both the family collection and the school library.

Throughout my school years I was encouraged to "get a good education" and "pass the leaving exams", although the opportunity for tertiary education was always going to be a financial hurdle. My parents' attitude to university education or "book learning" without practical experience was, at times, one of contempt. They demonstrated a strong work ethic and valued practical experience in a wide range of situations very highly.

After passing the Leaving Examinations I left home and joined the work force as a clerk, first in an insurance office and then a bank. Within two years I had enrolled in an education training course at University, working part time to supplement the Government allowance and graduated with a Diploma of Teaching. After teaching for three years I recommenced studying and completed a Graduate Diploma of Special Education.

<u>Teaching and Other Life Experiences</u>

My personal and teaching experiences have greatly shaped my attitudes to the important influence that family literacy behaviour has on young children's literacy development. I have worked in a variety of settings with children from both affluent and low socio economic environments. As a result of working with such a wide range of children and their families I have been able to compare differences, such as family environment and the opportunities available to children in various situations. I have come to realise that it is the impact of (that is, the way in which children's experiences are enriched and expanded by the people around them) life experiences that is an important factor in the development of oral language and literacy in young children. While living in an affluent family may give a child increased exposure to a wide range of opportunities to engage in literacy and other life experiences, it is also true that many children from families with a low income also live in literacy-rich environments which offer many chances for them to become involved in literacy-related activities.

Another important influence on my attitude to the importance of family literacy practices are my experiences as a mother. Raising two children, watching closely how they construct meanings from their environment and noting the effect of my role as a supportive adult has helped confirm my opinion of the importance of a positive home environment in literacy development.

My work at Addington Primary School has consolidated my beliefs about the importance of family support for learning which occurs at school. I believe

schools have a definite role to play in providing parents with knowledge and models which may help them to support and understand their child's literacy development.

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations in this research exists in the method of accepting families for the case studies. It is acknowledged that people who volunteer to engage in studies may have a predisposition for particular sets of values and ideas that contribute to their willingness to participate. Likewise, those parents not volunteering to participate may have contributed a completely different view of the literacy activity of families in this particular school community and different families would have constructed a different program with the researcher. This limitation exists due to the very nature of the design of this research and the sensitivity of the researcher to privacy issues arising from examining personal details of family life.

Another issue arising from the design of the research is my own personal involvement in the group workshops as a researcher and facilitator as well as teacher of some of the children. As a researcher my need to collect data for research purposes may have affected the ways in which I conducted and directed discussions during the group workshops. This in turn may have had the effect of excluding other information parents' may have disclosed, thus affecting the

outcome of discussions and the influence of the workshops on parents' perceptions of the literacy activity occurring within their family group.

At the time of the study I had been a member of the teaching staff at Addington Primary School for five years. During that time I had both formal and informal opportunities to observe the families of this community. The constant nature of my involvement with some of the families studied may have affected the way I viewed these families and may have been responsible for some preconceived ideas and biases about them. It could be argued that this affected the ways in which the data were collected, viewed and reported on. However, I would point out that data were collected from each parent following the same format. That is, during interviews and questions I was careful to ask the same questions of each parent, accepting responses as given. I have tried to keep my interpretation of all data to a literal viewpoint and endeavoured to refrain from making assumptions about any information given to me. It could be argued that my familiarity with some of the participants actually assisted in making them feel at ease more quickly in the interview context and therefore resulted in my drawing more information from them than could have been obtained from an interviewer unknown to them. The fact they knew me personally could also have been the reason they chose to join the study.

Limitations may exist because of the timing of the workshops. Due to many factors they were held during the day and, as has been previously mentioned, many parents in this particular community were employed full time so that

parents who might otherwise have been willing to participate may have been excluded. Finally, due to a lack of human and time resources data collected on home literacy practices came from reports made by the parents themselves. As no observations were made in the homes of the participants accuracy of details could have been affected by parent exclusion, embellishment or bias.

CHAPTER 4

Results and Discussion: Family Profiles and Literacy Practices

In this Chapter the eight participating families are profiled. Information describing each family was obtained from two taped interviews between the participants and the researcher and transcripts from the parent workshops. The profiles contain a brief summary of the family's general background, the parents' educational experiences, their expectations for their children and details of some of the literacy practices of the home environment. Information regarding the home literacy practices was reported by the parents participating in the workshops, both in group discussions and in the completion of set written home tasks. In the second part of the chapter Research Question One, which specifically addresses the literacy practices of the families is discussed.

The Dent Family

Family Background

Allison Dent was a single parent with two daughters, Jessie, 8 years old and Natalie 5. She had lived in the Addington area for four years at the time of the study. At the beginning of Natalie's preprimary year Allison worked four days a week, then changed later in the year to full time employment. Allison was employed at a dry cleaning company where she drove a delivery truck and worked in the factory. Her children attended the local out of school care facility before and after school every day and during school holidays.

Parent's Educational Experience

Allison attended school in the country and left school at the age of 15. She described her schooling as an unpleasant experience:

I hated it. I just didn't like school because I wasn't good at it. I need to be told things over and over again to sink in and I was always behind. I just thought I wasn't brainy. I wasn't able to learn as quickly as the other kids.

Allison did attempt to complete her TEE (Year 12 examination) when she was older. The experience confirmed her poor opinion of herself as a learner and strengthened her resolve never to study again:

I attempted to go back and do my TEE when I was pregnant with Natalie but that was bad timing. You know, sort of being pregnant, all the womanly things that happen. I did the year. I flunked terribly, oh my god, drastically and I've never bothered going back again. I just haven't got the will to fit two years into the one year. For me it would be like four years, absorbing four years in the one year. I tried it once and that's it. I mean I did attempt it and because I failed, I feel I failed school. Yet now I'm older I'm too chicken to go back and put my whole heart into it only to fail again. That's what I'm worried about, failing again.

Parent Expectations

Allison's negative educational experiences may have affected her expectations for her children's achievements at school. Whilst she would like them to succeed she felt that happiness was more important:

My only expectation for my kids, that I expect from them, is for them to do their best. As long as they put their whole heart into it. I mean, sure I'd love them to be top of the class and go and be a lawyer and a doctor. No, my only expectation is that they do their best, as long as they feel they've tried their best then I'm happy.

Literacy Practices

Some of the literacy practices in the Dent family as identified by Allison during interviews with the researcher are summarised and can be found in Appendix D. As she did not take part in the workshop series in person, there is no information on the family's literacy practices from this source.

The Dunn Family

Family Background

Anne and Rick Dunn had three children, the oldest Julie, was 6 years old, Andrew was 5 and Jodie was 3 years old and stayed at home with her mother. Anne's younger sister and her 2 year old son shared their rented house. The family had moved into the Addington area one year before the study began.

Anne often spent time in her children's classrooms, helping out during special activities and on preprimary roster. Until he was 3 years old Andrew' s hearing was very poor. Anne felt this had affected in the way he related to others, preferring his own company to that of his sisters or friends. When his hearing was

restored he attended speech therapy for help with speech delay. However, Anne had found the process frustrating. After waiting a considerable time for assessment she was given a demanding home program to complete with Andrew by herself.

Parents' Educational Experiences

Anne left school at the age of 16 and described herself as a fast learner who was quickly bored:

I dropped out after Year 11. I think because Year 11 was so boring. If I'm not taught things I don't know I get bored and discouraged and I thought, "I'm not doing it". Because Year 11's all revision and I knew that I got bored and played up. I was in advanced English and I don't think I handed in one essay, one assignment.

Anne's mother became sick when she was in Year 11 so Anne and her sister left school to care for her. Anne then went to work. She described her family's attitude:

My family is very work orientated, in my family it was um, you finished school, you went to work.

Rick's father had worked in the army and he had attended schools on navy bases. At the age of 14 he left school and "went walkabout", travelling up to the north of the state. Anne said, "He disappeared one day then rang up his Mum and said, "Oh I'm in Darwin".

Parent Expectations

Anne encouraged her children to do their best at school. Anne had explained to Julie what "going to University" meant after she had heard Julie comment that she would like to become a teacher. Anne acknowledged that she would be pleased if her children "got that far."

Literacy Practices

Some of the literacy practices in the Dunn family as identified by Anne during interviews with the researcher and at program workshops can be found in Appendix E.

The Hart Family

Family Background

The Hart family consisted of Judy, Brian and three boys. Ryan was 6 years old, Tony was aged 4 and the baby, Gino was 7 months old. Brian worked away from home in the mining industry. He returned to the family for one week out of every six. Although born in Australia, Judy spoke Italian fluently and had noticed that her mother, who lived beside them and spoke English, spoke only Italian to the children. It seemed that although the children understood 'Nonna' when she spoke to them in Italian they only used English to communicate.

When he had attended preprimary Ryan was identified as having learning difficulties and then entered a local school for children with special learning needs. He was given medication for Attention Deficit Disorder.

Parents' Educational Experiences

Brian attended school in England. Judy reported that his early education had not been a pleasant experience and he left school at 15. She described his story:

Brian's dyslexic. He said to me that all the people who couldn't read or write or were unable to 'cos they couldn't comprehend were put into a classroom and left to their own devices.

Judy said Brian now read frequently for pleasure although he had difficulty with complex writing tasks such as reports and essays. Brian had recently completed a crane drivers' training course for which he had studied for two weeks.

When Judy began school she could not speak or understand English. She was shouted at frequently by the teacher and remembered being very scared. She repeated Year 1 and found school very difficult in those early years:

Oh God, the first few years were very difficult with the language barrier. Like from speaking Italian and no concept of English at all. So I sort of was.... I did Year 1 twice and I did it a bit better than the first year 'cos I think the first year I was more or less learning English. You were sent at the back of the classroom. I remember like, the foreigners were always at the back and the people that spoke

English and were learning - they taught. So we were more or less left to our own

devices. I remember that specifically because it seemed they were all Europeans.

Judy left school at 16. She attempted fashion design and a computer course but did not complete either.

Parent Expectations

Judy's expectations for her children were to linked to her own educational experiences. She did not want her educational experiences repeated for her children and valued her children's education highly:

Well because I had such a hard time at school, I put education above everything

else. I just want them to, sort of get the best out of it - learn to read and write

and get somewhere. What they want to be I don't care as long as it gets them

somewhere. It's their life isn't it? Not ours. No, as long as they know how to

read and write.

Literacy Practices

Some of the literacy practices in the Hart family as identified by Judy during interviews with the researcher and her participation in the workshop series are summarised and presented in Appendix F.

The Nowley Family

Family Background

Mark and Sue Nowley had three children, Matthew was 7, David 6 and Sarah 4 years old. Sue did not work outside the home, although she helped in the family lawn mowing business doing book keeping and taking telephone messages. The two boys played sport for local teams and Sue spent time after school taking the children to various sporting activities.

Parents' Educational Experiences

As a child, Sue's family moved house regularly. She remembered only some of the twelve different schools she attended during her school life. These included schools in Queensland, New Zealand and Western Australia. She left school at 16 and had done no further study. Mark attended school in Western Australia and left at the age of 15. Like Sue, he had done no further schooling. As well as his lawn mowing round, Mark also sheared sheep when the opportunity arose.

Parent Expectations

Sue's expectations for her children showed the value she placed on their education. She hoped they:

Just do well. They are doing all right at the moment so hopefully they'll be all right. Well, I don't want them to be shearers, there's no work around any more.

<u>Literacy Practices</u>

Some of the literacy practices in the Nowley family as identified by Sue during interviews with the researcher and her participation in the workshop series can be found in Appendix G.

<u>The Settler Family</u>

<u>Family Background</u>

Peter and Nola Settler had two girls, Samantha aged 8 and Rachel 5. Nola worked part time at the harness and greyhound racing track and Peter, who was often called back to work after working hours, worked five and a half days a week at a local stockfeed company. When he worked late and Nola needed to go to work he took the children to work with him.

<u>Parents' Educational Experiences</u>

Nola completed most of her schooling in a North West country town in Western Australia. She completed Year 11 and in her final year at school she did a one year commercial course "but I've never done anything secretarial in my life." When she finished school she worked part time in many jobs including baby sitting, waitressing in a coffee shop and working in a supermarket. When Nola was 18 her family moved to Perth.

Peter left school at the age of 15 and Nola commented, "Where he is working now is only his second job ever and he's been working there 22 years."

Parent Expectations

Nola's expectations for her children showed that although she would like them to attain tertiary education level she was prepared to wait and see how the children performed at school :

Well I would like them to go to University but I'm not going to push them, it's up to them and obviously it depends on the grades they get. But I mean really it's up to them, you can't force them to do anything so.. I'd like them to at least do their TEE and not drop out at year 10. But we'll just wait and see.

Literacy Practices

Some of the literacy practices in the Settler family as identified by Nola during interviews with the researcher and her participation in the workshop series can be found in Appendix H.

The Short Family

Family Background

Cathy and Roger Short have two girls. Jennifer was 5 years old and her sister Katie was 2 years old. Roger had, for two years, been a full time student at a Bible College. He was in his third and final year as a student.

Parents' Educational Experience

Cathy attended the local secondary school. She described herself as a reasonable student and she also attended one semester at University:

I was fairly good at school. I went onto Addington High. I did a semester of nursing at Curtin University and then I left.

Roger spent his school years in New South Wales where his mother was a teacher. Cathy said Roger now enjoyed studying and described his school experiences:

My husband hated school. His mother's a teacher and all his family, his brother and sisters loved school and are really good, one's a lawyer and one's this and the other, but he hated it. And left as soon as he could and now he's back at it.

Parent Expectations

When asked about her expectations for Jennifer, Cathy said:

I want her to go to Uni - to what course is irrelevant, but I don't want her to hit Year 12 and then just leave. I want her to carry on but I don't care what she does.

Literacy Practices

Some of the literacy practices in the Short family as identified by Cathy during interviews with the researcher and her participation in the workshop series are summarised in Appendix I.

<u>The West Family</u>

<u>Family Background</u>

Margaret and Bruce West came from New Zealand to Perth in 1989. They were both nurses, Margaret had given up work to have the children and Bruce did shift work at a local hospital. They had two children Luke, 6 and Paul, 4 years of age. When the Wests first arrived in Perth they rented a house south of the river. They chose to live in the Addington area because the real estate was priced within their budget and it was close to the hospital where Bruce worked. The Wests did not have any extended family in Western Australia.

<u>Parents' Educational Experiences</u>

Margaret attended school in New Zealand. During her secondary years she attended two high schools, "*I went to a co-ed school for half of my high school years and then an all girls school which I hated*". After completing university entrance level she went on to train as a nurse. Bruce studied political science and law at University, then completed a Bachelor of Arts degree with a double major in history and science and also trained as a nurse.

<u>Parent Expectations</u>

Margaret indicated that she had not really thought about what her expectations for her children were. Her initial thoughts indicated that their happiness and level of contentment were important to her:

I expect my children to enjoy school. I expect them to be happy. I don't expect them to do wonderful well academically. I mean I hope they do but I don't expect that of them. I expect them to make friends and enjoy themselves. I expect them to become involved in sport or music or something other than reading and writing. I don't know, I'm a little pessimistic in this day and age. I'm hoping that they'll go on to University or find work. I hope they're not unemployed. I haven't got any expectations about what they do and as long as they're happy with what they do, I've never really thought about it. Just to be confident and pleased with themselves rather than do well academically.

Literacy Practices

Some of the literacy practices in the West family as identified by Margaret during interviews with the researcher and her participation in the workshop series are summarised in Appendix J.

The Zbigniew Family

Family Background

There were three children in the Zbigniew family: Nathan 9, Kristy 6 and Daniel, who was 5 years of age. Their mother Danuta did not work outside the home but had commenced studying a teacher's assistant course, part time, at the local TAFE college. Danuta helped out at the school covering books, attending excursions and assisting when needed in the children's classroom activities. She

also helped in the preprimary centre as a teacher's assistant when the regular assistant was ill and was employed to replace the special needs assistant at the primary school when needed. Her husband Kirsz worked in the city as a computer analyst and programmer.

The Zbigniew's immigrated to Australia after they had married and lived in the north west of Western Australia where the children were born. They moved into the Addington area three years before the study commenced and built a new house three blocks from the school. They chose the area for its proximity to the school and the railway line so that Kirsz had direct transport to work. The Zbigniews had no extended family in Perth.

The children spoke English only. Although Danuta and Kirsz sometimes spoke Polish to each other, they did not teach the children their native language. However, when Danuta's father visited the family from Poland she noticed he spoke Polish extensively and taught the children many Polish words and phrases.

Danuta spent time with each of the children teaching them letters and letter sounds. She considered this helped children become successful readers and writers:

> *I started with Nathan and it seemed to be working. I help them to recognise the alphabet at home and a little bit of basic maths. I try to explain to them as much as I can. I think it has helped a great deal with knowing what letters are and what the sounds of them are.*

Parents' Educational Experiences

Danuta and Kirsz were both born in Poland. Danuta moved to England with her mother when she was 9 years old and attended school there until she was 17. Kirsz completed his schooling in Poland, moved to India where he learnt English and, after completing his A and O levels, entered University in the United Kingdom where he completed a business and computing degree.

Parent Expectations

When asked of her expectations for her children and how she helped them to achieve at school Danuta replied:

I hope they do well. I think all of them have the ability to do well. The only thing I think of doing is backing them up. Just helping them to learn or helping them in those basic skills, that we can do at home. Like, currently we are waiting for a result from the PEAC [Primary Extension and Academic Challenge a program for academically talented students] for Nathan. Whether he gets through or not we've decided to say to him, " If you get through you get through, if you don't the main thing is you try your hardest." We'll just support them, and back them up in whatever they have to do in whatever level of school they are. I hope they go to university actually. Because even with myself I wasn't academically minded like my husband. Each child develops differently and takes it all differently.

Literacy Practices

Some of the literacy practices in the Zbigniew family as identified by Danuta during interviews with the researcher and her participation in the workshop series are summarised in Appendix K.

Summary

The eight families described represent a wide range of situations and experiences. The families had lived in the area for varying lengths of time. Some were in rented accommodation and others had purchased houses in the area. One family had built their house behind the home in which the mother had lived as a child and in which her parents still lived.

The parents' educational experiences also varied. Three had tertiary qualifications and one was studying at Bible College. However, the majority of the parents had left school before gaining tertiary education entrance and many had not completed any further studies. Many of the parents had negative experiences at school which had affected their expectations of their children's educational experiences in various ways.

All parents held expectations for their children's future and valued the education they were getting, seeing it as important. A few specifically hoped their children would continue to a tertiary qualification, but most wanted their children to achieve well in school, do their best and to be happy.

Family Literacy Practices

The eight families who took part in this project appeared to engage in many and varied literacy practices every day. Literacy practices in the home also appeared to be very similar. Children were read to at night and, in some homes, during the day when the children were weary or requested a story. Most families made regular visits to the local library and children were encouraged to complete their set homework tasks from school. In every home children had access to writing and drawing materials which were usually stored in a central place. The school aged children used these in their play to write signs and notes and the younger children drew pictures, wrote their names and the letters they were learning. In some of the homes children were encouraged to help adults complete writing tasks, such as writing shopping lists or writing letters to relatives.

The tables below describe some of the practices identified in the families, from both the workshop sessions and the interviews with the parents of each of the families. The degree to which literacy activity was embedded in daily family activities varied from family to family. It is acknowledged that some of these behaviours may have changed during the course of the project due to the nature of the program. Specific discussion of changes in the behaviour of the participants will be presented in the discussion of the results of data collected of Research Question Three in Chapter 6.

Reading Practices

Table 3 shows the reading practices of the parents as identified by the parents themselves.

Table 3

Parents' Reading Practices as Identified by the Parents

Practice	Family
Parents read books to children at bedtime	Dunn, Hart, Nowley, Short, Settler, West, Zbigniew.
Father read informational texts.	Nowley, West.
Father read books in the toilet-children modeled Father's behaviour.	Hart, West.
Mother read recipes.	Hart, West, Zbigniew;
Father used the newspaper classified section to list of secondhand items to purchase.	Dunn.
Mother studied for further education.	Short, West, Zbigniew.
Mother conducted the SHARE Program with her children through the school.	Nowley, Settler
Parents read as a leisure activity.	Dunn, Hart, Nowley, Short, Settler, West.
Mother shared a letter from New Zealand with the family.	Hart; West
Mother read the telephone book in the children's presence.	West; Nowley; Short.
Mother read a road map book	Nowley; West; Zbigniew;

It can be seen from this table that parents engaged in a range of reading activities, which were related to leisure, family and household activities. Table 4 gives details

of the children's reading practices in the home environment as identified by their

parents.

Table 4.

<u>Children's Reading Practices as Identified by the Parents</u>

Practice	Family
Reading was modeled by older siblings to the younger children.	Settler, Short, Hart, West.
Children read, and looked at books of their own choosing, at home without an adult.	Settler, Short, West.
Children entered newspaper competition.	West.
Children listened to taped stories.	Hart, Settler, West, Zbigniew.
Children did homework reading tasks.	Dent, Hart, Nowley, West, Zbigniew.
Children read the television guide.	Dent.
Child 'read' a memorized book to parent or sibling.	Hart, West, Zbigniew.
Children read from a chart of letters on the refrigerator.	Nowley.
Children asked adults to read information from the television screen.	Hart, Zbigniew.
Children recognised the letters from their name in environmental print.	Dunn, Hart, Settler.
Child described a story she had read to her mother and recommended the book to her.	Settler.
Children played with magnetic letters kept on the family's refrigerator.	Hart, West.

Table 4 above demonstrates that the children from the families in this study were

involved in reading activities in the home environment which included both deliberate engagement with formal reading activities, such as story reading and homework tasks, and incidental involvement with reading as part of their play or daily activities, such as playing with magnetic letters or recognising letters they knew in environmental print. These identified practices appear to have occurred when the children were playing alone or with other children and adults from their family.

Table 5 shows the reading practices each family participated in together as identified by the parents.

Table 5

Family Reading Practices as Identified by the Parents

Practice	Family
Family read the school newsletter	Settler.
Family visited and borrowed from the local library	Hart, Settler, West, Zbigniew.
Family had jigsaw puzzles and games with numbers and letters.	Hart, West.
Family had magazines.	Hart.
Family had a collection of books in the home.	Dent, Dunn, Hart, Nowley, Settler, Short, West, Zbigniew.
Family read road signs while travelling in the car	West.
Family read junk mail.	Hart, Settler, Nowley, Zbigniew.
Family read street signs and writing in the community.	Nowley.
Family had non-English story books for children.	Zbigniew.

Family purchased the newspaper regularly.	Dunn, Hart, Settler, Short, West, Zbigniew.
Family looked at the child's work progress folder from school.	West.

This table shows that within the home environment all family members engaged in some reading activity which included planned reading practices such as reading during leisure time, and casual reading activity such as reading road signs, jigsaw puzzles and playing games. These activities sometimes involved the whole family, such as when the newspaper was read, or only some of the family members at any one time, such as reading the school newsletter.

Discussion of Reading Practices

In all the families in this study reading was an integral part of daily living. The children in these homes had opportunities to regularly participate in reading in a number of ways. Modeling from older siblings and parents occurred frequently. As in findings from previous studies (Breen et al, 1994; Heath, 1991; Mc Naughton, 1995) children from the families in this study had the opportunity to develop their attitudes about literacy through a set of practices engaged in by their family during regular day to day activity. The literacy activity modeled by parents provided a context-based model for young children in the home environment. Hannon (1996) notes the powerful model parents provide for children when young children see parents "demonstrating how written language is linked to a

wide range of adult purposes in the home, community and workplace" (page 65).

Recognition of children's early literacy achievement in the home ~nvironment

helps to further encourage children's efforts and participation in literacy events.

Hannon (1996) also notes that families can offer unique encouragement to young

children by recognising and valuing early literacy achievements and engaging

children in real literacy tasks as seen in these families, such as sending letters to

relatives or helping to write a shopping list.

Writing Practices

Table 6 focuses on the writing practices of the parents in the eight families.

These practices were identified by the parents themselves during the course of the

workshops and parent interviews.

Table 6

Parents' Writing Practices as Identified by the Parents

Practice	Family
Mother did crossword puzzles.	Dent.
Mother wrote banking slips in the children's presence.	Nowley.
Mother wrote letters to friends and relatives regularly.	Hart, Nowley, Short, West, Zbigniew.
Mother used a dictionary during writing activity.	Hart.
Mother wrote shopping lists with children's help.	Nowley, Settler, West.
Mother recorded daily events in a diary and calendar.	Hart, Nowley, Settler, Short, West.

Mother wrote a list of tasks to be done during the day.	West.
Parents wrote assignments for study.	Short, Zbigniew.
Mother wrote letters in the sand for child at the beach.	Zbigniew.
Parents kept the accounting books for the family business.	Nowley.

These writing practices of the parents included a range of casual daily activities such as, compiling shopping lists and completing banking slips. Formal writing tasks were also evident and included correspondence to family members and keeping accounting books for the family business. Information about the writing practices of children in the families was reported by the parents and is shown below in Table 7.

Table 7

Children's Writing Practices as Identified by the Parents

Practice	Family
Children dramatised being at school in their home play activity and copied writing activities modeled in their classrooms.	Settler.
Children wrote postcards to their friends while on holiday.	Short.
Children played and created a shop in their playroom at home, writing signs and price cards on items.	West.
Children wrote on a blackboard with chalk.	Hart, Short, West, Zbigniew.
Children cut and glued words from	West.

a magazines to make a sentence.

Children wrote their names and other words and letters they knew.	Hart; Settler, West.
Older children engaged in writing activity for homework tasks.	Hart; Nowley
Children wrote in a writing activity book purchased through a book club.	West.
Children had access to writing and drawing equipment.	Dent, Dunn, Hart, Nowley, Settler, Short, West, Zbigniew.
Children used a <u>Magnadoodle</u> toy to write and draw on.	Short.
Child wrote own her name on the bedroom wall with a crayon.	Settler.

As can be seen the writing activity of the children included various activities, in diverse contexts within their home environment. This activity occurred when the children played alone or when siblings or adults acted as scribes and models.

Discussion of Writing Practices

Wolfendale (1996) comments that family literacy equips children with the appropriate tools and techniques for formal schooling from the "natural" resources of their home and community. Therefore the wide range of literacy practices embedded in the every day activity of family life will affect children's perceptions of the use of literacy in the family setting.

In all the homes in this study the children appeared to have access to writing and drawing equipment. Parents and other family members modeled various

purposes for writing in their daily life. Younger children were encouraged and
taught to write and draw in the home environment. Spreadbury (1995) notes that
the influence of parents' interest in literacy is crucial to a child's concept of literacy
and has an important effect on children's literacy learning. Active encouragement
of literacy activities such as shared reading and writing activities in the home have
also been shown to play a significant part in developing young children's
perception of themselves as literacy learners and was evident in the literacy
practices of the eight families involved in this study.

Computer Practices

Two families in the study had a home computer. All of the mothers had very
limited experience of computers; some had never touched one. All the school
aged children had limited access to computers at school. Table 8 identifies the
purpose that the computers were used for by the parents of these families.

Table 8

Parents' Computer Practices as Identified by the Parents

Practice	Family
Father used work laptop computer for working at home	Zbigniew.
Parent used the family computer for study purposes.	Short, Zbigniew.

Table 8 indicates that only two families had access to a home computer. Within
these families the computer was used for work and study activities; no information

was given about use of the computers for leisure.

Table 9 shows the computer practices of the children as identified by their parents.

Table 9

Children's Computer Practices as Identified by the Parents

Practice	Family
Children used school computer in the library to access books and resources.	Settler
Children had limited access to a computer in their classroom for educational purposes.	Dent, Dunn, Nowley, Settler, Short, West, Zbigniew.
Children used the family computer to play games.	Short, Zbigniew.
Children used the computer to search for information for homework assignments and personal interest.	Zbigniew.

From the information in Table 9 it would appear that the children in these families had some opportunities to use computers through their school experiences. In the two homes where a computer was available children were encouraged to play games and use the computer to research information for study purposes.

Discussion of Computer Use

Wolfendale (1996) refers to information technology as the "new literacy" through which school based, educational initiatives require children to become

computer literate and combine these new skills with the more traditional ones of reading and writing. She claims this form of technology will have a bearing on the directions of family literacy as children become possibly more informed and skilled than their parents. Likewise Topping, Shaw and Bircham (1997) discuss the notion of "Family Electronic Literacy" programs being a combination of family and electronic literacy from which, they suggest, "in addition to literacy gains, participants are likely to develop some transferable skills in the use of information technology" (p.8). A program of this nature would provide participants with a supportive environment in which to improve literacy skills, learn computing skills and have the added benefit of reducing "adult anxiety and technophobia" (Topping 1997, p.15).

In some of the families in this study, children were developing computer skills at school which their parents did not have. Whilst Nola Settler and Margaret West acknowledged that computers would benefit their children's education, generally they were considered by the parents as too expensive an item for their family to purchase. Danuta Zbigniew and Cathy Short were the only parents who had used a computer. While Wolfendale (1996) acknowledges that there is the potential to use information technology to "bring together home and school in ways that will be mutually beneficial" (p. 173) she cautions that poorer families may be increasingly disadvantaged. This would certainly appear to be the case for most of the families in this study.

<u>Viewing Practices</u>

Television viewing practices varied from home to home and these appeared to link with the mothers' views on the value of television viewing. Some mothers preferred their children to be playing games either inside or outside while others felt that after a hard day at school children needed time to relax and thought that television offered this opportunity. Most of the preschool children watched the children's afternoon television programs.

Each family had a television and video recorder and engaged in regular viewing practices. Table 10 shows the viewing practices of the parents when they were alone.

Table 10

<u>Parents' Viewing Practices as Identified by the Parents</u>

Practice	Family
Parents watched soap opera programs.	Dent, Dunn, Settler

It would appear that only a small amount of information was collected on the viewing practices that the parents engaged in by themselves. There could be a number of explanations for this result. In some instances the parents may have been reluctant to give this particular information to the researcher or the nature of their lifestyle may not have allowed sufficient time to engage in viewing alone. It could also have been possible that at the same time the television was on and they were alone, these parents may have been occupied with other tasks, such as housework or cooking so that the parents may not have considered themselves engaged in viewing.

Table 11 gives the examples of the children's viewing practices as reported by their parents.

Table 11

Children's Viewing Practices as Identified by the Parents

Practice	Family
Young children watched programs rated for preschool children.	Dunn, Hart, Settler, Short, West, Zbigniew;.
Children watched videos alone or with siblings. Videos came from the family's collection or the library.	Dent, Dunn, Hart, Nowley, Settler.
Children watched adult rated movie such as Jurassic Park.	Dunn, Settler, West.

In some instances the viewing practices of the young children in this study were affected by their parents' attitudes to the amount of time they considered was appropriate for children to spend watching television. In other families parents rated alternative activities more valuable for children than sitting inside watching television. These included playing outdoors during fine weather, reading or playing with siblings and friends. The amount of time some of the children spent viewing was influenced by the sporting and social activities they attended outside school hours.

The viewing practices engaged in by each family together, were reported by the parents and are included in Table 12.

Table 12

Family Viewing Practices as Identified by the Parents

Practice	Family
Family collected information from the television such as daily weather, Lotto numbers.	Zbigniew.
Family watched movies together.	Dent, Dunn, Hart, Settler, Short.
Family watched evening soap operas such as Home and Away and Neighbours together, regularly.	Dent.
Family watched family entertainment programs together, such as Hey, Hey It's Saturday.	Nowley.
Family watched news programs together.	Dunn, Hart, Nowley, Settler, Short, Zbigniew.
Family watched documentary programs together, such as Bush Tucker Man.	Dunn; Hart; Short; Zbigniew.
Family watched videos from their family collection and the local library together.	Dent, Dunn, Hart, Nowley, Settler, Short Zbigniew.
Family watched sports programs together, such as A.F.L. football games.	Settler.

It seems that, in these families, the act of viewing occurred regularly when family members were together either as a whole or in part. The type of television programs and videotapes they watched together varied from sport, news and weather programs to soap operas, movies and documentary videos.

Discussion of Viewing Practices in the Home

Whilst only two families had access to computers in the home there was at least one television set present in each household involved in this study. Use of this electronic medium varied from household to household. Cathy Short, Margaret West and Judy Hart were aware that watching particular television programs influenced children's behaviour. Ninja Turtles and Power Rangers were cited by parents as two programs they had observed that influenced their children's behaviour. Opinions on what was suitable for children to watch varied from family to family, as did the amount of control parents exerted over length of time and types of programs children viewed. In some instances discrepancies existed between what parents said they considered was an inappropriate program for young children to view and the programs they said their children watched. Margaret West allowed her children to watch regular evening news programs even though she acknowledged that the reports regularly caused anxiety in her eldest son. She was concerned when he appeared to display an understanding of news items she considered violent or unsuitable.

Allison Dent revealed that as she was not a confident reader, television provided her with information and entertainment she did not seek from the newspaper or books. Data gathered on viewing practices in this family showed a regular amount of time was spent daily watching television together and Allison described how she spent some of that time discussing social and other issues which arose from the programs they viewed.

<u>Other Literacy Related Practices of the Children</u>

During the data collection and workshop series it became evident that some activities the children engaged in regularly at home led them to use some elements of literacy. The parents were not specifically asked to relate these activities. However, the activities were presented as incidental anecdotes which occurred during discussions in the workshops and parent interviews. They are listed below in Table 13.

Table 13

<u>Other Literacy Related Practices of the Children as Identified by the Parents</u>

Practice	Family
Children played with play dough.	Hart.
Children played regularly with construction toys such as <u>Duplo</u>.	Hart, West.
Children sang counting rhymes and songs.	Hart, West.
Child used favourite story characters during imaginative play at home.	Dunn, Hart.

Whilst involved in play at home the children sometimes engaged in activities which led them to use various literacy skills. During these activities siblings and parents were sometimes involved in supporting and modeling play behaviours and using their own literacy skills to extend the play activities young children were engaging in.

Table 14 describes other activities which involved the whole or part of the

family as a group and had the potential to demonstrate how literacy skills were embedded in the activities of everyday living.

Table 14

Other Family Activities as Identified by the Parents

Practice	Family
Mother attended speech therapy with children.	Dunn, Nowley.
Mother told the children a story without a book.	Hart, Zbigniew.
Family played board games together.	Dent, Nowley, Settler, West, Zbigniew.
Family visited the Art Gallery and Museum.	West.
Family attended children's sporting commitments.	Nowley.

These other activities listed in Table 14 were described during general discussion in the group sessions and interviews, and although they did not specifically involve literacy practices they had the potential to support various literacy acts within families. For example singing rhymes and songs with young children included references to letters and numbers and had the potential to develop phonological awareness which has been shown to be strongly related to early literacy acquisition (Rohl and Pratt 1995). Playing board games involved reading and recording activities; visiting the art gallery and museum involved talking about and reading descriptions of various displays. Parents were not specifically asked to give examples of incidents in the home environment which

engaged family members in talk around literacy activities, a practice that Heath (1991) has suggested is a most important literacy practice. Nevertheless, Anne Dunn described how she spent time with her son Andrew at speech therapy sessions. She then read his speech therapy program and played games at home with him to improve his speech. Some of this time was spent making the sounds of various letters Andrew was learning at school. Judy Hart explained that while playing with dough at home her children sometimes made letter shapes to represent the letters of the alphabet they knew. As noted by Hannon (1996) such family activities provide children with an adult role model, opportunities to use and demonstrate their increasing awareness of the literacy activity around them and to discuss literacy activities.

Factors Affecting Engagement in Literacy Activity

The ways in which the families in this study engaged in literacy activity appeared to be influenced by a range of factors. These factors included the amount of time parents spent or had available to them to participate in literacy activities with their children. This appeared to be affected by the number of children in the family, existence of full or part time employment of one or both parents and the parents' desire to engage in literacy acts with their children.

The degree of necessity for literacy within a family was another factor affecting engagement in literacy activity. Therefore, where a family business existed, relations lived overseas or a parent was involved in further education, literacy

activity, such as studying, letter writing or keeping account books for a business was conducted out of necessity. It appeared also that the existence of very young children or babies in the family who created a demand on adult time affected both the time and frequency of literacy activity in some families, draining both the time and energy of adults and compounding other difficulties, such as those described by Judy Hart. She said that during the frequent times when her husband was away working in the country she had less time to engage in reading for herself and, with the addition of a baby to the family she was often left exhausted at the end of the day, unable or simply not "in the mood" to read bedtime stories to her two older sons. On the other hand, in some families the presence of a sibling to model and engage younger children in literacy through play activities increased the opportunities for young children to engage in literacy activity which they might not engage in with adults. In the Dent, Settler, Short and West families older siblings were observed by the parents to engage younger children in games such as creating shops, drawing maps, playing schools and reading books for long periods of time during their general play activity without the inclusion of adult.

Diversity of Literacy Activity

It was shown in Chapter 2 that various researchers (Breen et al 1994; Spreadbury 1994; Taylor 1983) found that literacy activity was embedded in the daily lives of families. In each of the families in the present study, members engaged in a range of literacy activities which were often interwoven with family

events such as preparing a shopping list or reading a television program guide. In other words, literacy activities did not take place in a vacuum. In each family parents and siblings provided a range of literacy models in many situations, such as keeping the books for the family business or inventing games involving reading and writing skills. It was also evident that the families in this study used various resources in their literacy activity. These included computers, newspapers, libraries, television, pencils, paper, blackboard and chalk, diaries and calendars, books, television and oral story telling. In varying degrees the children in these families were involved in literacy events either through direct involvement, such as contributing to a letter to be sent to relatives overseas, or as observers and mimics of modeled behaviours, such as copying their parents by taking reading material with them when visiting the toilet. The West and Zbigniew families were isolated from their extended family and so relied on friends, the school and a network of other families in the school community to provide literacy role models for their children.

Each home environment provided children with a range of both fiction and non fiction reading materials and access to writing and drawing materials. Many of the families made regular visits to local municipal libraries to supplement resources for their literacy activity. In the Zbiginiew household the children were able to read the school's new reading books when Danuta brought them home for covering.

Some research has found (Breen et al. 1994) although some families appeared similar on the surface in terms of race, class and language a closer examination revealed that similar literacy practices had significantly different meanings in each family. The results of this study suggest that for this particular group of preprimary parents the literacy practices in their homes are similar.

Low Income and Family Activity

Some parents indicated that a lack of financial resources restricted experiences which might have increased their children's understanding and perception of literacy and the world around them. Whilst some activities may not have a direct link to literacy skills they presented opportunities for children to increase their world view and offered chances to engage in discussion and other indirectly linked activities which supported the development of literacy. Such activities included those which would incur some entrance cost, such as visits to live theatre, Underwater World or Scitech. In some of the families children were offered outings of a less expensive nature such as visits to the beach or picnics at a park. These activities might have provided children with experiences indirectly linked to literacy activity at home or school. The role that the school plays in providing children with some of these experiences through excursions and incursions is reinforced by LoBianco and Freebody (1997) when they comment on the crucial nature of the role of schooling to impact on the circumstances of the materially deprived, particularly in regard to oracy and literacy.

Attitudes to Literacy and School Success

All of the parents involved in the study had positive expectations for their children's success at school, regardless of their own personal school experiences which in many cases could not be seen as ideal. Judy Hart emphasised that in spite of her negative early schooling experiences and those of her husband she held a strong conviction that her children's education was extremely important. LoBianco and Freebody (1997) suggest that there are strong similarities between the expectations for children's success at school held by parents in disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged groups.

Hannon (1996) presents his ORIM (Opportunity, Recognition, Interaction, Model) model as one in which parents should provide children with literacy opportunities, recognise their early literacy efforts, and interact with them during literacy activity and provide literacy models. In each family in the present study, young children's early writing and drawing attempts appeared to be supported through the recognition of their early efforts, guided modeling and general encouragement. This was evident when Margaret West and Judy Hart encouraged their young children to contribute writing for letters to distant relatives; when Allison Dent taught Natalie to recognise the alphabet; and when Danuta Zbigniew taught her son to write his name in the sand at the beach while they were on holidays.

Many of the participants thought that the availability of books and writing equipment in the home was an important factor in helping children achieve

success in reading and writing and they seemed to provide this. In addition, the parents had firm ideas about why they read to their children which included: the provision of emotional comfort when a child was overactive, tired or upset; as part of a daily routine such as prior to sleeping; for pleasure and entertainment; for fun or play between parent and child; for educational purposes; and to stimulate the child's imagination.

Conclusion

The summary of literacy practices of the eight families described above are based on self reporting from parents both in the workshop sessions and the interviews conducted with the researcher. It can be seen that these literacy practices include more than just reading and writing, which is consistent with the findings in the literature review reported in Chapter 2. Literacy practices also included viewing, computer use, talk around literacy activities, in particular television viewing and other activity of day-to-day family living, such as playing board games discussing homework tasks or choosing a storybook to read. LoBianco and Freebody (1997) summarise this phenomenon as follows, " Literacy practices are the result of the explicit and implicit experiences and presentations which parents, teachers and others undertake with students" (page 85).

More details of some of the home literacy practices identified in this chapter are given in the following chapter which describes the nature of the family literacy

program.   It contains transcripts of the sessions, some of which include

descriptions of individual family literacy practices.

CHAPTER 5

Results and Discussion: The Nature of the Program

In the first part of this chapter descriptions of each of the six workshops are given. Some workshops, especially Workshop One are described in detail so that the 'flavour' of the sessions is clearly portrayed. The quotations and transcripts included in this chapter are taken directly from the audiotapes of each session. The second part of the chapter contains a discussion of specific features of the workshops.

Preparation for Workshop One

One week before the program began I prepared and sent a note to each participant, outlining the workshop format, time and dates for all the workshops so that the participants were clearly informed of their commitment before the workshop series started. The note also contained information on child minding during the workshops and promised refreshments (Appendix L).

The format of the first workshop was carefully planned in advance. I thought it very important to have the participants feel relaxed and comfortable as quickly as possible during this first workshop as it would set the atmosphere for all following sessions. I was aware from the initial interview that some of the parents might well have been anxious about what was expected of them so that I realised the initial activity for this first workshop was crucial to achieve a relaxed comfortable and trusting atmosphere. Therefore, I planned a warm up exercise to

introduce the participants to each other. I collected information for the parents from some resources on literacy development in young children which I had been using as reference books at University. I made notes on the importance of the home environment for literacy development in the early years. I wanted to introduce this information, with which the participants might not be familiar, as a basis for discussion of their own family literacy practices and how they could help facilitate their children's literacy learning. I also planned for them to keep a detailed diary of their family's literacy practices for discussion at the following workshop. In the final part of the workshop I planned for the participants to jointly construct the rest of the program with me. I had already tentatively contacted a guest speaker who was an authority on children's literature for one possible workshop as it was necessary to make a booking for her in advance. All workshops, including this were to be negotiated by the group.

Morning tea details and furniture arrangement were also considered. As I had planned to keep the group informal and intimate I organised access to unlimited tea and coffee throughout this and following workshops and arranged the chairs in a small circle around a set of tables. This allowed for written work on a large piece of paper to be viewed easily by all group members within a relatively informal setting. I prepared the equipment I would need throughout the workshop which included a tape recorder to record the workshop discussion.

Overview of Workshop One

At the beginning of the workshop the aims of the program were explained to the participants, they were introduced to one another and they described a wide variety of their own early learning experiences.

Next, information was introduced about current theory on emergent literacy and was discussed in relation to the participants' home environments. The group also discussed the impact of their home environments on the literacy perceptions of their young children and listed some reading and writing activities which had occurred in their homes.

Some time was spent discussing workshop formats for the following five workshops and the participants indicated that they were unsure of appropriate information to ask to be included in the remaining workshops. Several topics were settled on after some discussion.

Workshop One

As arranged, the eight parents, all mothers, who had indicated an interest in participating arrived just before 9 am. Some had organised to have their children cared for during the workshop and some brought their children to play. After providing initial cups of tea and coffee I invited the participants to sit at the table. I asked the participants permission to audiotape each session to use in this document explaining that strict confidentiality would be kept and pseudonyms used in all references. The participants all agreed to allow the audiotaping to

occur. As they did not all know each other I asked each of them to introduce herself to the group. Two of the parents stated that they had never spoken to each other even though their children were in the same preprimary group and they had seen each other frequently at the school when delivering and picking up their children.

To begin the first workshop I introduced the warm up exercise up asking the group members to spend a few minutes telling the person next to them their earliest recollections of their own experiences of learning to read or write. This suggestion was met with some laughter and declarations from a few that they were unable to remember anything of their formative years. I asked the group to think quietly for one minute before commencing. I also told them that they would be reporting their partner's story back to the group, rather than their own. I did this, not only to take the pressure off participants who might have felt threatened at telling their own literacy histories to the whole group but also to encourage each person to carefully listen to what was being told. I stressed that <u>listening</u> was equally as important as <u>telling</u> when preparing feedback to the rest of the group. In pairs, the parents spent several minutes talking to each other and exchanging recalled experiences and early memories. This seemed to immediately create an environment where 'right or wrong' answers became irrelevant in the light of each person's personal experience. Everyone was given the opportunity to tell another person her story knowing that it would be listened to and reported back to the rest of group. The earlier objection of some that they only remembered the vaguest

details of their earlier lives was overcome as more and more stories were revealed and each person was able to contribute other details about herself. During the retelling, the story owner tended to interrupt the teller and frequent consultation on story details led to the stories generally being told by both people.

As this part of the workshop proceeded a wide range of life stories and experiences within the group was revealed, each interesting and valuable in its own right and each contributing a special flavour to the group. While listening to each other's recollections the group members appeared to empathise with each other and make connections between their own experiences and that of the other group members. Each person shared her story with the rest of the group and participants asked questions to clarify information given.

The eight participants presented different family situations and a diversity of experiences which reflected the variety of situations which existed within the school community. Judy Hart revealed that she grew up in an Italian family in which no English was spoken. During the telling of her story she was able to add details of the difficulties she had encountered during her initial school experiences. As she spoke I was able to encourage her to share more of her experiences with us:

Jenny: Did you only speak Italian at that time?

Judy: Yes I did and I found that difficult too 'cos I couldn't understand what she [the teacher] was saying which was probably why she was yelling at me.

Jenny: What about reading then, did anyone read to you at home, do

            you remember?

Judy: I only remember my brother reading. That's all 'cos Mum and

            Dad had the Italian. So Mum didn't have any education at all

            and dad had up to Year 5 I think or 6.

Jenny: So your Mum doesn't read and write even now?

Judy: My Mum's blind.

Danuta Zbigniew commenced her school life in Poland and then was taken to

England by her mother. Like Judy she attended school not knowing the accepted,

common language of the school environment she was about to attend. This was

complicated by the range of non English speaking children around her:

I was taken out (of Poland) to go to England. So there again I went into this group

of Indians, all different cultures, thrown into me and all these different languages,

you know, talking to me. And then eventually I discovered that's not the language

I'm going to learn - it's English. So, which was still hard, I learnt it I picked it up, so

I remember all this.

Sue Nowley also had her schooling interrupted as she spent many of her school

years traveling from state to state, barely staying in one place long enough to make

friends. Cathy Short helped to tell Sue's story to the group:

Cathy: She does remember her parents got divorced when she was 5,

            she moved every year and she kept changing schools.

Nola: That must have been hard.

Jenny: That must have influenced you learning to read.

Sue: I used to love reading, my early reports were I could read well

            but I don't remember learning.

Nola Settler attended school in the north west of the state. She remembered

being a bookworm as a child and stated that she still read at every opportunity:

I must admit I read a lot. My husband reckons I sit on my bum all day and do

nothing but read. Like I read when I have my morning coffee, sometimes when I

have my lunch, sometimes when I have my tea, so I do read a fair bit.

She noticed that her children's awareness of literacy was developing in a similar

way to her own:

Oh I was just thinking that Samantha and Rachel play schools now. Like

Samantha will take Rachel into her room. She keeps the newsletters from the

school and uses them and things like that. I think it must be, you know

generation to generation.

Anne Dunn dropped out of school at 16 years of age. She evaluated her own

learning style and recalled some of the circumstances which contributed to her to

leaving school:

I think because Year 11 was so boring. If I'm not taught things I don't know I get

bored and discouraged and I felt I'm not doing it, because Year 11's all revision

and I knew that but I got bored and played up.

Anne explained that she joined the program because she wanted contact with

other mothers. She hoped to hear their ideas on how they coped with their

children and talked about the child rearing methods they used. From her observations of her children she commented on their emergent literacy skills:

I think the youngest always comes out the best prepared for school though because they've got the others there. Jodie [her youngest] already knows how to do a 'J'. Andrew [her second child] didn't know how to do an 'A' for Andrew until he went to preprimary. Julie [her oldest child] just had no idea or she had an idea what words were but she didn't know until she went to preprimary and got taught properly. She had no idea what school was really about but Jodie knows. I think the youngest always comes out the best.

Cathy Short had two children, her oldest daughter was attending preprimary and her youngest stayed at home with her parents. Cathy did not work outside the home and her husband Roger was a full time student at Bible College. She enjoyed reading and literacy events formed an integral part of their family life. Cathy clearly remembered an incident from her childhood which Sue related to the group:

Sue: She doesn't remember much but she does remember her
            brother, who was about six years older than her, writing a story
            for her and her sister and teaching them to read.

Jenny: So he was a big influence?

Cathy: Yeah, I could read before I went to primary school.

Margaret West, a trained nurse who had spent her school life in New Zealand had lived in Australia for seven years. She did not work outside the home and

assisted at the school on excursions, committees and was the manager of the school uniform shop. During the initial workshop she expressed doubt about the value for her of attending the workshops. She felt that her children were progressing well at school and becoming competent, capable literacy users. This was shown when I asked the group members to contribute ideas or personal needs for further workshop topics and she commented:

Margaret: How do you know if you need something - if your child is doing O.K. and he's happy and well adjusted and no problems about going to school - you know? I mean I don't know what to ask for if I don't know what they should be doing.

Jenny: So if you don't know are you looking for ways to extend them?

Margaret: Well their home environment is stimulating. They are not allowed to sit there and watch TV. I mean that's what they want to do but they are not allowed. I mean they do get TV time. There must be a lot of families where the kids just watch TV but I won't do that so I think that they have got a stimulating environment. And my husband and I do put in time with the kids and they seem to be O.K. and whatever level they should be at or... You see that's it I don't know if there is a level that they should be at or...how do you know what you need if you don't know if there is something missing or you don't know?

She was reassured by other members of the group she could contribute ideas to help the others. Nola Settler summed it up by saying to Margaret:

You should still come. You could be doin' something that could help someone that you are not aware of as well.

During the next section of the workshop I presented, for discussion, some information on emerging reading and writing based on the work of Strickland and Morrow (1989). This information was intended to reinforce the parents' own experiences of early literacy and present to them some findings on early learning which may have been new to them and which they could relate to their own children's early literacy learning. It included the following:

- Educationalists used to believe children developed to a stage of literacy 'readiness', that is when they were 'ready' learning to read and write would occur;

- Strickland and Morrow (1989) and other researchers consider a child's literacy development as a continuous process starting at a very early age, even within the first few months of life;

- The reading and writing skills young children develop emerge as they are immersed in the literacy activities of their everyday living;

- Young children's emergent literacy skills can be supported and encouraged in a number of ways by their family and their environment.

This information was discussed by the participants who then related it to literacy incidents they had observed their own children participating in:

Judy: I noticed that with my kids. They've always had stories since Ryan was about six months old and onwards and they'll recognise words and they'll read the pictures. They tell you the word and you think, "Oh this is good".

Danuta: They recite don't they? They remember. You read it a few times.

Judy: Or if you don't get it right or you miss a few pages you're in trouble.

Danuta: Oh yeah. I love it when Daniel....you can read him "101 Dalmatians" and I can read and stop and he will fill in the word because we've read it so many times that he knows it. I mean he's there half asleep and his eyelids are like this and I'll stop and he'll say (inaudible)_____or whatever it is. It's amazing how much they absorb.

I then guided a group discussion on the influence that the home environment may have when children's attitudes to literacy are forming and I discussed how educational researchers have considered the influence of the social environment on young children's reading and writing. I highlighted the importance of the social environment as outlined by Strickland and Morrow (1989):

• The social environment includes home and community and in these settings children see people around them engaged in a wide range of reading and

writing activities for purposes such as writing letters and greeting cards, cheques and shopping catalogues;

- Children learn the purposes and functions of reading and writing by observing those around them;

- Activities involving parents or other people significant to the child interacting around print are very powerful;

- Involving children in a wide range of reading and writing activities within an environment which is positive to literacy activity is an important way to support children's emergent literacy skills.

The group then linked this information to their own literacy practices and how they were already helping their children develop an awareness of literacy by participating in everyday reading, writing and speaking activities. They discussed various ways in which the models for using reading and writing were set in the home:

Jenny: Even the process of spelling itself - when you think about it, it's an isolated skill isn't it? When you are wanting to write a letter to someone you just want to write it don't you?

Judy: I get out the dictionary.

Margaret: I'm a phone person I don't write - I'm lazy that way.

Nola: I don't write either - I haven't got that many people that live away from Perth.

Judy: I write all the time. I love doing it I've got about 20 letters to write to England.

Nola: Well if you've got rellies that live outside Australia or Perth, you know...then but I haven't got any rellies that live outside of Perth.

Cathy: I ring and if we do ever write it's my husband will write a letter on the computer and he cheats, it's got spell check.

Judy: I've got the get the dictionary out 'cos Brian's dyslexic so we've got a dictionary about this thick.

Sue: I use a dictionary if I have to. I do write letters a bit but I have to sound them out.

Nola: I must admit I've always been pretty good at spelling. I can spell most words.

Judy: These new words they come up with.

Nola: I know, well some words I may know how to spell but I might not know the meaning.

Judy: See that's another time you got go and look it up.

To follow up this discussion I asked the group to participate in a brainstorm of the reading and writing activities they had observed occurring in their home environment during the previous week. The resulting list included many examples of ways in which literacy was used in the home, both as a model for

children and as a means of involving children in literacy activity. The items on the jointly constructed list included:

- parents and children made up the weekly shopping list together;

- a child practised writing their name;

- a parent tested a child's spelling homework;

- children listened to and participated in chanting ABC rhymes with an older sibling - *"Ants on the apple a-a-a-"*;

- family members read alone and to each other - magazines, night time stories, library books from school;

- children listened to taped stories and songs;

- a parent helped a child to complete the SHARE program lessons in the text book;

- children did jigsaw puzzles;

- family members played board games such as <u>Scrabble</u> and <u>Up Words</u>;

- parents and children read recipes, road and instruction signs;

- children looked at junk mail catalogues;

- a parent wrote in a diary;

- a parent wrote notes on a calendar;

- adults and older children studied;

- children re read birthday card messages.

All group participants contributed to this extensive list. They demonstrated that they were making connections between the literacy activities of the home and their children's literacy learning in the following way:

Margaret: Shopping list, Luke and Paul are involved in that.

Jenny: In what way Margaret?

Margaret: "What do you want at the shop Mum?" You know, or, "Help me write the list", and they'll ask me how it's spelt or they'll write how they think..

Jenny: So they'll write the list for you?

Margaret: Yep, oh, Paul won't, he'll pretend that he's writing the words. But he knows that that word there means we'll get that item at the shop.

Jenny: Oh, O.K. so he's following your model?

Judy: Oh that's a good idea I never thought of that.

Margaret: Even though it's nothing at all like the word but he'll do a squiggle and that's what it means.

Once this activity was finished I asked the participants to make a similar collection of literacy activities, day by day over the next fortnight as the set home task. I explained that this would show everyday literacy activities within the children's home environment. I stressed that in no way did I want them to structure *extra* literacy activities in their day to day lives but rather to observe and record those which naturally occurred.

To conclude the workshop I asked the participants for a list of possible themes and topics that they would like included in the remaining workshops. I mentioned the possibility of having the children's literacy speaker come and talk to the group and present a book display, if they wanted to include this. I felt it most important that they should have power over the direction of the workshop series and that it be jointly constructed. However, the participants pointed out that they did not know what to choose and were not comfortable about the idea of directing the way the group should go. Their general attitude was summed up in Margaret West's comment when she said:

How do you know if you need something - if your child is doing O.K. and he's

happy and well adjusted and no problems about going to school - you know. I

mean I don't know what to ask for if I don't know what they should be doing.

After further discussion in which I returned to some points made previously by the group, it was agreed that possible topics could include ways to extend children's literacy, children's literature, children's television habits, computer use, phonics and the SHARE program.

Some parents stayed on after the group had concluded to have coffee together. The general discussion at this time revolved around things their children were saying or doing at home in relation to the activities they were experiencing at school.

At the conclusion of the workshop I copied the tape of the workshop and prepared written notes for Allison Dent, who was not able to attend. These notes explained

the set home task. This procedure was followed each week for Allison and for any other members who were not able to attend individual workshops.

I also contacted the guest speaker, confirming a date for her workshop. I also organised the ideas and topics suggested during the discussion into the five planned workshops and booked the computer room. The last two suggested topics, phonics and the SHARE program, were held over for follow up sessions. As the topic of extension of children's literacy was discussed by all participants and a lot of interest in this topic was shown by them, this was given high priority.

Overview of Workshop Two

During the workshop the group members shared lists of the literacy practices they had observed occurring in their homes during the preceding fortnight and contributed to discussion of the items on each list. This list also included items from members of the group who were unable to attend.

The participants examined why they read to their children and described daily events which illustrated how reading was embedded in their family routines and habits. Skills children developed through book reading were discussed and a book was selected for parents to read to their children at home. Questions to assist the parents to focus the child's attention on particular aspects of the story as it was being read were constructed by the participants and included in the book to take home. A personal reading log task to be completed by the participants at home during the next fortnight was explained.

<u>Workshop Two</u>

A week before this workshop I sent a short note to each of the group members reminding them of the date and time of the workshop and asking them to bring along their information from the set home task. In preparation I listed reasons why I read to the children in my class and the different ways I used books to enhance my classroom program. I gathered a collection of books from my personal library of children's literature and specifically chose literature written for young children, which I had purchased in the previous 12 months. I was also careful to choose books with illustrations that would appeal to both parents and children and would be new material, possibly not previously seen by the children. I prepared a format sheet to distribute to parents for the set home task of keeping a personal reading log. A copy of this sheet is included in Appendix M.

When the parents arrived for the session they had observed literacy activities in their home environment for a fortnight and had brought a written list with them to this workshop. I asked Margaret West to repeat to the group a comment she had made to me as she had arrived. Her comments highlighted the effect of the take-home task of listing literacy acts in the home environment. She said:

It made me aware of literacy in the home. Everywhere I go it's made me aware of how much we see without being conscious of it.

Cathy Short agreed with Margaret, even though she said she hadn't listed literacy practices every day. The group participants shared their lists and then as a group they compiled a list of literacy activities which they had observed in their

homes. Those participating in these activities included various family members, including the preprimary aged child. This list appears in Appendix N. In each case participants read the items on their individual list, but also described details of some of the events, therefore giving a fuller account of each event. For instance Judy Hart added details to the item on her list which was 'writes letters':

I write a lot, I have to with all the relatives in England but they always sit down, well Tony sits down and scribbles, but he draws, and Ryan tries. Ryan's always like, we've got the breakfast bar and they've got all their pens and Texlas and stamps and stuff on the breakfast bar.

This fuller verbal description gave details of where the writing happened, what Judy Hart's children used to do the activity and what each child produced during the act of 'writing'. These details were not recorded on participants' written lists. Likewise Margaret West also gave a more detailed verbal description when sharing her list with the group:

We've got these connector blocks that you put together and Paul was making letters out of them, they're for making railway tracks. Uhm Stickers off the.. you know when you have a new a video tape they've got ABC stickers, he put them together, he was playing with those. Luke wrote his own <u>Batman</u> comic, he put speech bubbles and things - it was brilliant.

However at times giving a fuller description also had the effect of irrelevant details being added to the discussion which did not actually relate to the literacy

event. The following excerpt demonstrated this when Nola Settler mentioned her children had cups with their names written on them:

And Rachel's got her own cup too. Well Rachel for last Christmas, the Christmas just gone, she got a cup that you can actually design yourself and you put it in the oven for like 15 minutes or whatever and the actual picture stays on the cup. Even though I was quite annoyed because Samantha actually did Rachel's cup for her and wrote her name on it and drawn it and I thought that wasn't very nice and now it's got Rachel's name on it Samantha can't really use it. So I wasn't very happy about that. But it's her cup and its got her name on it and everything even though Samantha actually did it.

At these times I used questions to refocus the speaker on the list she was reading with questions such as: "Nola what about other things you noticed they (the children) are exposed to in terms of print?"

As the participants continued to read their lists aloud there were many interruptions as others made comments on what had been said such as:

"Oh we do that too",

"My kids love their blackboard",

"Oh no the bookshelf is just pulled out",

"Yeah 'cos Ryan's got the sound cards and Tony will do them with Ryan".

These short interruptions did not seem to deter the speakers as they continued with their lists and they seemed to view the interruptions as simple interjections. However, there were longer interruptions to the flow of the list reading which did

deter the original speaker and at times resulted in some anecdotes not being fully completed as the topic changed. These longer interruptions were generally descriptions of an event similar to one just described by the original speaker.

Next I asked the group members to discuss with a partner the reasons why they read to their children. The participants discussed the question and after a short time the responses were fed back to the group. I classified the reasons the group gave for reading to children as follows:

- Reading for emotional comfort:

  When they are sick as well it is a comfort isn't it? If they are really grizzly when they are sick that's a nice comfort too.

- Reading as part of a daily routine:

  My kids will not go to sleep unless they get a story.

- Reading for entertainment, for fun and play between parent and child:

Roger was reading Jennifer a story the other night. It was a Bananas in Pyjamas story and he was putting every other word under the sun in. I mean instead of saying bananas he'd say orange. She was just cracking up. "No that's not it - it's this word, it's this word". A few he managed to slip past her without her knowing. But for the majority of them it was - "No you're silly Dad, it's this word". So they were having fun.

- Reading for relaxation, to quieten overactive children, or give children some quiet time:

Sometimes if Jennifer is really tired when she comes home from school or anything she'll just get a book and, "Can you read me a story?" and she'll just have a cuddle and I don't know, just a quiet time.

- Reading for educational purposes:

I think it's also that you know they've got to learn to read but that's not the main reason, I mean you know it's good for them.

- Reading to stimulate imagination:

I tend to try and, for the imagination, if I run out of books to read, I'll ask them, "Close your eyes and imagine this or that happening". I will pick a story that I will know like Cinderella or The Three Little Bears. And I will say to them, "You can't open your eyes, you've got to keep them shut."

- Reading as a family practice:

And also Roger and I like reading so it's just something we do.

After this discussion the participants talked about different types of books their children had in the family collection. I redirected the group's discussion to some of the skills children may gain from book reading which I as a teacher considered valuable. These included retelling a familiar story by having to remember the correct sequence and exposure to the different rhymes and rhythms of book language. The group discussion once again moved off topic and the participants began talking about stories their children enjoyed.

At this point the participants were asked to choose a book from a small collection I had brought. I specifically asked them to choose a book which would

be unfamiliar to their child. I asked them to read the book to their partner and jointly construct a short set of questions they could ask their children as they were reading the story.

I asked them to write a question about the cover of the book which would ask the child to predict what the story might be about, then one or two questions to use throughout the story and one to ask when the story was complete. The participants read the stories together, discussed and wrote questions to ask their child during the reading. The questions they wrote ranged in difficulty and purpose. Nola Settler chose a book about a large teddy bear. The questions she wrote required different types of answers from her children, ranging from literal descriptions to predictive conclusions. Her questions included the following:

What sort of food are they having at their picnic?

What do you think is going to happen now?

What was the bear feeling as he opened the basket?

I asked the participants to take time to read the stories to their children, using the questions they had prepared and to report the results back to the group. I handed out sheets for the reading log for the participants to fill in during the following fortnight explaining that it was to be a record of their personal reading. I explained that this would give an indication of the types and amount of reading they did in their daily lives. I emphasised that I didn't want them to try to read more than usual but just record what normally happened. The workshop concluded with coffee and tea being offered to the participants.

Overview of Workshop Three

During this workshop the participants discussed issues which arose from the personal reading log they had collated. They reported on their experiences with their children during book reading, using the questions they had formulated in the previous workshop and discussed some factors which might influence story reading in the home environment.

The participants then examined and discussed rating criteria used by the Australian Broadcasting Authority to rate preschool and children's television programs. Issues highlighted in the discussion included parents' attitudes to the television programs their children watched; the value, standard and quality of some programs viewed; different attitudes to television viewing from family to family; and effects of television on children's behaviour and perceptions of the world.

Workshop Three

This workshop was scheduled to be held on the first day of Term Two. To remind all participants to attend I posted them a short, hand written note during the holiday week prior to the workshop. In the note I reminded them of the date of the workshop, the topic for discussion and asked them to bring the personal reading log they had been keeping.

I obtained information on rating procedures for television programs shown for young children from the Australian Broadcasting Authority. I photocopied

relevant parts for use in the workshop. I also copied a poem, found and given to me by Danuta Zbigniew, to be distributed to all participants. The poem, written by Roald Dahl was titled <u>Advice on Television.</u> I prepared a sheet for the participants to complete at home for the set home task which required them to rate a television program their children regularly watched (Appendix O) and made one copy for each group member.

The workshop commenced with a discussion of the set home task. Each of the group members had brought their written reading log and also a hand written list of the children's book questions they had written in the previous workshop and some of the answers they had elicited from their children. The initial discussion was centred around these documents and there were mixed reactions by the participants to the results. Nola Settler concluded that her reading log was "pretty boring" and explained why, referring to the reading log she had kept for specific details:

I don't read the newspaper or any magazines or anything. All I do is I read novels, which I read probably an average of about an hour a day. But I work Thursday, Friday and Saturday night so I don't read much at all that day. The weekends I watch about three hours of TV and that's only football and the rest of the time it's probably around an hour, an hour and a half. But Thursday and Friday again I work so I only watch about, half an hour of the five o'clock news. Occasionally I watch videos, the TV guide five minutes maybe, you know, not

long. And the first week I just spent about twenty minutes paying bills and the second week I didn't pay any bills. So it was pretty much the same.

Nola Settler saw the lack of variety in what she read as a deficit, although on several occasions she noted that she was a bookworm who read at every opportunity. Judy Hart expressed surprise at the amount of reading she had done in the time she had kept the reading log:

It is surprising actually, when you go and count it. I mean we have stories right through the day and we have to have rhymes and singing. I do a lot of that anyway because of the baby 'cos he loves it, yeah it's just when you go to sit down and write it you think "Oh my God we did this and we did that".

Her reading log and her surprise at the results demonstrated that literacy activities were indeed well embedded in the daily life of her family, even though she had not previously been aware of this.

In some instances it appeared that television, rather than reading, was the medium used, especially when gaining information on daily events.

Jenny: Does anyone get the paper regularly?

Danuta: Kirsz does.

Anne: No.

Nola: No, I watch the news.

Judy: I get to watch the 7 o'clock news.

This could be because television demands less attention than reading, which means the viewer is also free to do other things while listening to news broadcasts.

Some of the participants noticed that it was often their children who prevented them from sitting down to read. They commented that their partners were unlikely to have this same problem:

Danuta: I think what happens with Mums, because we are with them 24 hours a day, they sort of, well for me they don't expect me to read or if I do sit down to read something I have to tell them, "Just move away". But with Dad it's different.

Cathy: I've noticed that as well.

Danuta: Probably the role would change if it was the other way around. They would probably pester him to, "Go and get me this, go and get me that".

These reading logs helped to identify some of the literacy events in the daily lives of the participants, which illustrated and affirmed the role model they played for their children. It also provided a focus for discussion around some of the literacy activity in which families engaged, it gave participants a chance to describe the events fully and gave each participant authority when participating in the discussion because they were reporting events they had witnessed.

After this discussion of literacy events in their homes the group shared their experiences of reading to their children, using the book they had chosen and the questions they had formulated in the previous workshop. These experiences seemed to be positive in most cases and, for some families, had some transfer to other behaviours in both parents and children:

Cathy: I forgot to get the questions out so I didn't use all the questions.

Nola: I couldn't shut mine up. Well, I got the questions and I wrote the answers.

Cathy: Yeah I did too. I said, "What is it about?" And she said, "A little boy and his vegie garden". Well it wasn't quite, it was close but it wasn't. But she enjoyed it. But I found that I started asking questions with another book as well.

Judy: My kids are starting to do it now with all the books.

Anne: But do your kids turn around and ask you the questions? Like I read my book two or three times to Andrew. By the third time Andrew was asking me questions I had asked him. And he's asking me, "And what's he going to do now Mum?"

Judy: Oh, Tony was doing that and then they'd get all excited and say, "Look what they're doing there, look what they are doing there." And I'm going, "Yeah, yeah."

Anne: By the end of the day they had turned it into a game and Andrew was a tiger and he was going around talking to his friends and saying, "Why aren't you in bed?" and Andrew would say, "Because I don't want to go to bed. Roar." And they were chasing each other around and around the lounge room. It was wonderful. I think it's because Andrew loves tigers so much that he really liked it.

Cathy Short did not appear to think the questions she had formulated were challenging enough. However she did try the same technique with another book she had at home and seemed to have had more success:

I thought the questions didn't really do much because - "What did you think he found?" "Potatoes". But with some of her other books I decided to ask some questions, only a couple, and she was fine with them.

Danuta Zbigniew also had some problems with the process, finding that the written questions served as a distraction to the general story telling:

I think where I made the mistake with this one is normally when we read a book we just read it and then put questions without writing them down. And I think that's what I must have done because I was reading along and then I'd write down the answers so I think they lost the plot to it all by watching me write out the questions and their answers on the paper. I think I've killed the story by doing that.

The group discussed the implications of their experiences and the following conclusions emerged from that discussion:

• the mood of the adult reading to the children can affect the way stories are read and received;

• the appropriateness of the text and the illustrations can impact on the story reading;

• a variety of texts can increase the pleasure of story reading in the home and it would appear most participants used both the school and at least one local

library to provide variety in their homes by encouraging their children to use these facilities;

- too much direction can destroy the experience of story reading.

Margaret West was absent during this workshop and had returned her reading log to me beforehand, commenting that she didn't think she read much until she had written it all down. She had observed that compared to her husband who was "always reading" she thought she read very little. Her reading log showed, however, that she read between 60 and 155 minutes a day and watched, on average, 90 minutes of television.

Allison Dent also returned her reading log to me during the week. It showed that she read from 10 to 95 minutes a day, compared to her television and video viewing of between 3 ½ to 10 ½ hours a day.

During the remainder of the workshop the group examined the standards and criteria used by the Australian Broadcasting Authority to regulate program content on television. From the documentation and telephone interview I had with the Authority I was able to present the following information:

- The ABA only rate children's television programs *sent* to them, not all children's programs which are shown on television.

- The ratings used by the ABA to rate children's television programs with a 'C' (children) or 'P' (preschool) rating are given to programs made specifically for children within the preschool or primary school age range.

- Standards for children's television programs and the amount of Australian content in them came into effect in 1990 and a Broadcasting Services Act was introduced in 1992.

- A television licensee must broadcast 390 hours per year which must include at least 130 hours of 'P' programs and 260 hours of 'C' programs.

When I presented this information the group members expressed surprise at the fact that not all children's programs are rated. It appeared that most of the group had assumed that ALL programs on television were rated by a censoring body. A long discussion revolved around the quality of particular cartoon programs currently screened on television and whether participants considered them suitable for their children to watch and whether they allowed their children to view these shows. Judy Hart expressed her surprise when I mentioned the time allocation for children's programs placed on television licensees:

Jenny: Some of the other things I found out from the ABA is that the television licensees have got to show 390 hours of C or P programs a year, that's all a year.

Judy: I thought you were going to say a month - A YEAR!.

Jenny: A year.

Judy: That's atrocious! - it's nothing.

This conversation led to an involved discussion about which particular children's programs the children in these families watched and didn't watch. It would appear that in most families, parents chose what was suitable and not

suitable for children to watch. This family censorship varied from family to family. So, for instance, when discussing the television program The Simpsons Danuta Zbigniew seemed to think it was an appropriate program for her children to watch. Judy Hart wouldn't let her children watch it and Cathy Short said that her children watched it, but when a section of the show came on that they did not consider suitable, either she or Roger would stand in front of the television so the children would be unable to see the screen.

The group divided into pairs and each was given a brief explanation of one of the five rating criteria from the Australian Broadcasting Authority to read and discuss together. Having completed this, each pair was then asked to report back to the group on that particular criterion. During this reporting the whole group engaged in a discussion of what they understood the criteria to mean, and related them to programs they had watched or were familiar with.

The Criteria For Rating Children's Television Programs

Criterion One

In order to receive a 'P' or 'C' rating a television program had to be made specifically for children or groups of children within the preschool or the preprimary school age range. This information led to a discussion about animated or cartoon style programs. It appeared to the group that a mismatch sometimes existed in some programs when the animation style appealed to young children but the concepts and language may be more suitable for older children and adults.

This stimulated some discussion in the group about the effect some programs might have on children's behaviour in the school playground.

Jenny: Just because it is animated doesn't mean that it's a program for children.

Cathy: But a lot of parents assume that if it's a cartoon it's O.K. for their children to watch it.

Anne: I thought cartoons are for kids.

Cathy: I've never seen Power Rangers like I've seen two seconds of it and it's violent. Isn't it?

Nola: Power Rangers is not animated, Ninja Turtles is yeah. Because when the Ninja Turtles were around the kids would, like not my kids personally, but I know even here at the school, even with the Power Rangers, people were told off for like playing Power Rangers.

Jenny: We ban violent games at school.

Judy: All schools have banned them. It's quite violent, it gets out of hand.

Criterion Two

In order to receive a 'P' or 'C' rating a television program had to be entertaining. This criterion highlighted for the group the differences of people's likes and dislikes as they debated what was deemed 'entertaining'. A short

discussion also arose about the confusing censorship regulations between different programs when the group tried to determine why <u>Fat Cat</u>, a preschool program, had been banned when other programs allowed on television to be viewed by young children appeared to have less merit:

Jenny: What about <u>Fat Cat</u> you know they actually banned <u>Fat Cat</u>.

Nola: Oh that was ridiculous.

Judy: I laughed when they did that, I mean for goodness sake, all he used to do was dance.

Nola: I thought his rating wasn't high is that why they took him off?

Judy: They said the violence.

Danuta: It wasn't intelligent.

Judy: They let <u>Agro</u> on and they ban <u>Fat Cat</u>?

Nola: What's the difference between <u>Fat Cat</u> and <u>Humphrey</u> anyway neither of them can talk.

Judy: All they used to do was dance and play hide and seek.

Criterion Three

<u>In order to receive a 'P' or 'C' rating a television program had to be well produced using sufficient resources to ensure a high standard of script, cast, direction, editing, shooting, sound and other production elements.</u> This criterion did not elicit much discussion. Nola Settler commented that program scripts

should not be too "boring", and, "even though they spend the money the script and the production and everything may not be up to scratch".

Criterion Four

In order to receive a 'P' or 'C' rating a television program must enhance a child's understanding and experience. This criterion highlighted program content. The group began discussing the quality of content in some of the programs their children watched. Cathy Short in reporting on the criterion made the comment:

They can be controversial as long as it's done tastefully. Like it might be a

controversial issue like drugs or family violence, but they have got to aim it at the

age. Not to make issues say, like the environment, it is a trendy issue and not

totally demote it and make it superficial. If they have got to attack an issue like

that they have got to do it well.

The conversation then turned to a discussion of the role models seen in television programs and how parents may deal with inappropriate role models for their children.

Cathy: It also says that in role modeling it's got to be accurate. Like you can't have like Dad being the boss and Mum being this quiet little mouse.

Anne: It's got to be realistic. There was this movie on last week, <u>Life With Father</u> and he was THE boss and if he said jump they would jump.

Judy: How old was it?

Anne: New York in the 1920's, it was really old. It had Liz Taylor as

            the wife. That's old. If it was based in a certain time then that's

            what it was like. Like in the '50's that's what it was, whereas

            something that's based today is going to be different.

Nola: Yeah it's like when you see a movie with a horse and cart.

Anne: At certain times that was the attitude. Men used to say,

            "Jump", and we said, "How high?" But today it's different,

            back then that could have been a serious movie.

Jenny: So if you have got a 6-year-old watching a program like that,

            doesn't that raise a question about role models?

Anne: I just said to my kids that he was a very nasty man and you

            can't speak to mums like that now.

Criterion Five

In order to receive a 'P' or 'C' rating a television program must be appropriate

for Australian children. Sue Nowley reported this criterion to the group. She

explained to the group the notes she had read:

The program is so far removed from the experience of the Australian child so that

they find it hard to understand and that's in areas like concepts, language, culture

and history. They are saying that generally the experience of children viewers is

so wide and as a result only a small number of programs are rejected.

The group began to discuss the diversity of Australian culture and their attitudes to children being exposed to a variety of ideas and cultures. Generally the group seemed to agree that this was a good thing and reflected the Australian way of life and their own experiences with multiculturalism. At this point an issue was raised about how parents dealt with explaining the difference between fiction and non-fiction programs to their children. Anne Dunn and Nola Settler both allowed their children to watch <u>Australia's Most Wanted.</u> This issue once again highlighted the different uses of television in the home. Anne considered this program a lesson in real life for her 6-year-old...

In my case I let my kids watch that because they are going to have to learn about

it sometime.

Nola Settler also thought the program held some value for her 8-year-old:

I know Samantha's older and she is getting right into the news lately, she likes to

know what's happening.

Cathy Short added to the discussion by saying she felt children could get a false view of life from programs of this nature:

But they also need to know that although these things have happened you have got

to put some realism into it - it doesn't happen all the time. Not everybody is

going to end up like that 'cos otherwise, if that's what they see, 'cos if you get a

kid to watch the news, nothing good happens on it.

Some comments were then made on news reporting and the stories currently featuring on television. This section produced a great deal of discussion. The

ABA criteria helped focus the group discussion around the topic of television. The participants all had personal experience of the effects it could have on their young children and differing opinions about what was suitable. The conversation easily slipped off track at times and unrelated information was discussed. The atmosphere within the group was very relaxed and open during this workshop, perhaps because the group was beginning to feel comfortable with the workshop formats and more confident with each other. It was also the first day back at school after a two week break and the group was enjoying the discussion and adult company.

I explained that the set home task for the next fortnight was to rate a television program their children watched regularly according to the ABA criteria and try to determine if the program met the standards. The workshop concluded with morning tea.

Overview of Workshop Four

During this workshop the group was joined by several other family members of the school community to listen to a guest speaker. They were invited to ask questions and view a range of books on display.

Workshop Four

As explained in Workshop One I had invited a guest speaker to talk to the group. She was the manager of a local bookstore, a well known speaker in the

area of children's literature and a University lecturer. In consultation with the school librarian I arranged to invite all families attending the school to this workshop. I prepared a short article for the school newsletter which was distributed one week before the date of the talk and book display.

A total of 12 parents attended this workshop. These included the parent workshop participants, four parents from the general parent body, including one father, and a friend of one of the group participants who did not have children at the school.

The speaker prepared a display of books to illustrate her talk and for parents to view when the workshop concluded. Books on display included a wide range of recent children's literature for all ages, reprinted stories and many non-fiction works including topics on science, nature, art and instruction books.

The talk which was 45 minutes in length is summarised below.

- Children benefit from being read to regularly - at least once a day is an excellent start.

- Children need to experience a wide range of literature from as early an age as possible.

- When possible children should be encouraged to spend more time reading and to watch less television.

- As there is a large variety of books available it is possible to find books that reluctant readers may enjoy.

- Reluctant readers need to be encouraged to read regularly regardless of the literature they choose. The speaker used as an example a book very popular with young readers on the different types of fecal matter produced by a variety of animals. She made the point that although she considered the book in extremely poor taste many children delighted in the humorous content of the story.

- It is difficult to curl up in bed with a computer at the end of a day.

- Literature read to young children can leave lasting impressions on them which reach into adulthood.

The speaker illustrated each point with personal anecdotes and examples of different genres from the book display she had provided. Throughout the workshop the parents were encouraged to discuss their own experiences and to ask questions. At the conclusion of her talk she read aloud to the group to illustrate her point that most people enjoy being read to. Participants were asked to browse through the book display and share some morning tea before leaving.

Overview Of Workshop Five

The group participants used the school's computer laboratory, some with their children. During the one hour workshop they were shown how to find and start up various programs the school had for young children.

Workshop Five

At the participants' request I arranged for the group to use the school's computer laboratory which contains eight computers using IBM or Apple platforms. I arranged (with their teacher) for two competent computer users from the adjacent Year 5 class to be available to set up appropriate programs for the parents to use and to give instructions on computer use to the parents. The students were asked to participate because of their ability and familiarization with the school computers and the available programs and as no adult was allocated as a computer specialist at the school. These students were also regularly used as peer tutors in computer skills with other students.

The group members were invited to bring their preprimary children to the workshop so they could work together on the programs available. Five preprimary children attended the workshop with their mothers.

There were sufficient computers in the laboratory for each parent participant to use one. The Year 5 students explained how to open programs, how to use the mouse for control, how to open and continue games and how to return to the main menu and choose other activities. Activities available included a paint box colouring activity, shape matching, counting and puzzle activities.

In all cases parents who had brought their children shared a computer with them. Parents and their children worked cooperatively. The adults made suggestions on the next step in the game and each took turns to complete puzzles. Parents asked children to choose new activities when they had completed tasks. I

noticed parents generally asked their child about which colour or response to make during the playing of the programs. This occurred even if parents could see the response may have been incorrect. When this happened the parent generally expressed some disappointment and helped the child to choose another response.

Parents who did not bring their preprimary child to the workshop engaged in more complex tasks such as playing cards, completing car racing games or completing complicated jigsaw puzzle programs. Once begun these adults did not require help with completing the activity they had chosen. However, when they wished to change their activity I noted they asked the Year 5 students to show them how to exit from the program and choose another. This was in contrast to the parents who brought their children. They experimented with the computer commands asking their children if they thought they should proceed with various actions to choose a new activity. During the allocated time all participants were able to engage in at least one activity.

All the participants remained engaged in activities throughout the allocated time by changing computers with other pairs sitting close by as they finished particular games. Parents chattered and laughed with each other, especially during the first half of the workshop. They joked with one another that they would completely destroy the programs or that they would push the wrong button or wipe information from the computer, therefore rendering it useless. This bantering tone changed as they became more confident and they then consulted with each other about how to manipulate programs and functions and

brought each other's attention to the results of their efforts. By the end of the workshop the children in the group were able to operate the activities after some help from their parents.

After the workshop Nola Settler commented that it had been useful in that it helped her to be "less frightened" of computers. The participants indicated that they were pleased to have been given the opportunity to use the computers and were comfortable with having been taught by the Year 5 students. Judy Hart commented on the patience shown to them all by the Year 5 students as they were learning computer skills. Margaret West noted the ease and confidence with which the preprimary children approached and used the computers in spite of their limited experience.

I distributed two information sheets about information technology which I obtained from a teacher who had presented this information to the school staff at a staff development workshop. I read through these sheets with the mothers. Margaret West expressed surprise at information which indicated that children in school now will 'enter careers that don't exist now and will involve information technology that is yet to be invented'. The workshop concluded after participants finished their morning tea.

Overview of Workshop Six

Group members looked at the television program reviews they had written at home. They also examined issues arising from the guest speaker's talk in

Workshop Four. The group then discussed the visit to the school computer laboratory, in particular the issues of whether computers prevented children from becoming competent spellers; whether calculators prevented children from understanding mathematical processes; and the social differences between playing computer and table games.

Workshop Six

In preparation for the final workshop I created a questionnaire for parents to complete about their perceptions of the program and any effects of the program on their behaviour (See Appendix P). I listed the topics for discussion which included the results of the parents' television review, the parents' views on the guest speaker presentation and their reactions to the workshop held at the school's computer laboratory.

The participants began the workshop by sharing their television program reviews, which was the home task set in Workshop Three. Cathy Short reviewed The Simpsons. She thought this program was unsuitable for children to watch as some of the concepts contained in it were more appropriate for adults. Firstly she discussed the mismatch between the program style, the advertising methods used to promote it and the program content. She said:

It is aimed at, well they advertise it for children, but it is not a child's program.

It's got the animation which the kids like but a lot of the concepts are just totally

inappropriate. You go to the shops and there is Simpsons stuff everywhere.

That's aimed at fairly young children, no older than about ten but a lot of the concepts in the program aren't.

Anne Dunn added that she noticed that it wasn't advertised as a child's program:

But they don't actually advertise it on television for children do they? They don't actually say it's a program for children.

to which Cathy replied:

No but you'd assume it was. It's 7.00 o'clock on a Sunday night and you would assume it was for children. A lot of people would automatically assume as it was a cartoon, that it was for children.

Margaret West commented on advertising within children's programs. She had noticed that when her children were watching a program appropriate for their age group they were exposed to excerpts from less suitable programs which were screened at a later time. She cited the program <u>Hercules</u> as an example of this:

Like they might be watching something you think is appropriate and then there is an ad on for something that will be on later in the night. Like Luke will say "Can I watch <u>Hercules</u>?" And I will NOT let him watch <u>Hercules</u> I think that is a disgusting program. I think it's shocking, it's so sexist and so horrible. I hate it.

Cathy Short was aware of anomalies which existed when a program had adult content, even though much of the advertising was aimed at children. However, when asked if she allowed her children to view the program, <u>The Simpsons,</u> she said:

If it was on earlier I think we probably would let them watch it, but they are in bed by 7.00 anyway. It's a cartoon and my kids love it, they don't know it's inappropriate. My kids have watched it but a lot of it, you know, is going straight over their heads.

This issue led to further discussion about other television programs and movies which were unsuitable for children to view, but were linked to merchandise which would only appeal to young children. During the discussion the movie <u>Jurassic Park</u> was used as an example. The parents noted that during the time the movie was popular material such as dinosaur ice cream, colouring books, plastic toy dinosaurs and stickers were available in many shops.

This movie had been recently shown on television and although some of the participants acknowledged it was unsuitable for children, most had allowed their children to view it. Some of the children had been frightened, yet some had viewed it several times.

Cathy:	<u>Jurassic Park</u> - that was aimed at kids and I saw it on TV. I never saw it at the movies.
Anne:	I don't think it was aimed at kids.
Nola:	No I don't think it was either even though my kids love it.
Cathy:	My dad had already read it before, years ago. And he said, "You wouldn't let a child watch that", and I mean, I saw it on TV and there is no way I'd let my kids watch it.

Anne: I've taped it and Andrew's watched it five times since last
             Saturday but Andrew looks at the scientific things.

Margaret: My kids watched it and they were really scared.

Nola: Samantha and Rachel weren't. Well, they were the first time
             and now they've seen it a couple of times they're not.

It would appear, from the discussion, that for some parents the decision to allow their children to watch programs which they considered inappropriate was not an easy one and at times they said their children would also watch inappropriate materials with their husband or partner.

There was a concern within the group about the content of news programs. Some material contained in news programs disturbed some children. A few stories contained in the news broadcasts were of interest, particularly to older children. The discussion centred on whether parents should allow children to watch such programs. Margaret West felt it would be unfair of her to exclude the children from news programs she was watching regardless of the subject matter. She related how the reporting of a series of local murders had affected her 7-year-old:

Yeah but you can't stop them, I mean my kids, I don't tell them to watch the news but we were watching it and Luke was there too. He understood everything that had gone on and exactly what was happening. Well certain programs I won't let them watch but if I'm there watching the news it's very hard to say well, "You go in your room you can't watch this, I can watch it but you can't".

Danuta Zbigniew explained how she dealt with issues in some programs which she felt had the potential to adversely affect her children:

When things like that come up I ask my kids -"Would you do that?", or, "Is that a nice thing to do?", and they say, "No."

After the discussion of their television reviews, the parents briefly discussed the topics presented by the guest speaker. They agreed she had been entertaining and had influenced some of their habits. Danuta Zbigniew said:

I have picked up a lot of things from her, even from the group when we were discussing about the television and with the reading of the books. I decided that, right guys, one day a week at least we can do, one day a week - no TV and I told my husband, "No computers", and it's working. We have managed for a whole month so far, so I'm really pleased.

Likewise Cathy Short said that comments the guest speaker had made caused her to be more discerning about books she read to her children:

I found myself looking at books and saying, "Oh no, this one is useless."

These observations led to a discussion of inappropriate stories and the value of tapes, books and songs children brought home from the school library. It was found that generally parents read these stories to their children as they considered it encouraged the children to use the library.

The discussion then revolved around parents as role models for children's reading. Anne Dunn had noticed that her interest in stories of medieval England had interested her eldest daughter and most of the parents agreed that their

husbands or partners also provided a role model at various times during the week when reading both newspapers and reference materials.

The group members reported their reactions to visiting the school computer laboratory, saying the experience was enjoyable and had been of interest to them. Two parents who realised the value of computers in the home said that they did not own one because of the expense involved. The group then debated whether computer use in education would replace written work and prevent students becoming less competent spellers because of the convenience of computer spell-check programs. Margaret West expressed her concern that teaching spelling in schools would disappear and Cathy Short likened it to her attitude to the use of calculators in Mathematics. The issue was unresolved and I suggested it would be interesting to talk to the upper school teachers to hear their opinions on the matter.

The discussion concluded with group members comparing the differences between the value of computer games and games such as Monopoly played at a table. It was felt by some that table games enhanced skills like mathematics skills or money awareness and in general were of benefit for children. Cathy Short added that she considered it a disadvantage when these games were converted to computer programs because of the loss of human interaction.

To conclude the workshop I asked all the participants to fill in the final questionnaire. I issued the forms and read each question aloud to the group to eliminate any possible misunderstandings. When they were complete I collected them and the group had morning tea before leaving.

Summary

This section has described the nature of each of the six workshops. Four of the workshops were held in the Preprimary centre, one involved a guest speaker and was held in the school library, the other was held in the school's computer laboratory. During the workshop series parents were requested to complete four set tasks at home. One involved recording activities in the home which revolved around daily literacy practices, one involved keeping a personal reading log, another required participants to read a chosen story book to their preschool children using questions they had developed in the workshop to enhance the story. The final task was to rate a television program regularly watched by their children.

During the final workshop participants were asked to complete a questionnaire about the effects of the workshop on their home literacy practices and their perceptions of the workshop series.

Discussion of the Nature of the Program

Participants in the research project were all parents from the same school community, and had children attending preprimary classes at the Addington school. Some knew each other and others were newcomers to the school community. Participants became involved in discussions, contributing their own ideas and opinions, describing incidents from their daily lifestyle to the group. Their willingness to contribute reflects their confidence in the level of 'safeness'

they felt discussing these topics within the group. These factors and others which are described below, determined the nature of the program.

Joint Planning Of The Workshop Program

It was a fundamental premise of the researcher that the program be jointly constructed by the parents and herself. Accordingly, the participants were asked in the first workshop to contribute ideas for the workshop series. They found this task difficult and only a few ideas were contributed. Margaret West eventually commented that she did not feel able to do this. She explained her difficulty with the task:

> *How do you know if you need something - if your child is doing O.K. and he's*
>
> *happy and well adjusted and no problems about going to school? You know? I*
>
> *mean I don't know what to ask for. I don't know what they should be doing. It's*
>
> *such an intangible thing isn't it? It's like if you don't know how to teach*
>
> *somebody then how do you know what to ask for to help your kids?*

This response could have resulted from the parents being asked to contribute topic ideas at the first workshop session without warning and so they may have felt unprepared or lacked confidence in the workshop setting. The response could also have been based on the participants' previous experiences of parent workshops held by school which were pre-planned and based on the assumption by the school that school personnel knew what parents needed to know and did not ask parents to contribute. The parent comment above highlights a possible

lack of effective communication between home and school about literacy teaching and learning and expectations of parent-teacher meetings..

Eventually a list of topics was compiled, based partly on the facilitator's suggested topics. The group then discussed each topic briefly to determine if it would be appropriate for inclusion. Some of the topics on the list such as television viewing and computer use were included in the program design and some, due to a lack of available time were not, such as a discussion of the SHARE program and phonics.

After the third workshop when each participant was asked individually if she had suggestions for further workshops, Allison Dent and Sue Nowley said they had no suggestions to make but the other participants contributed further topics which included children's social development, dealing with behaviour problems, early reading and teaching children to spell. These topics were noted for use in a follow-up program.

Over the course of the workshops the participants appeared to gain some confidence in their ability to construct a program and at the conclusion of the workshop series Anne Dunn requested further workshops for the next school term. These were organised with the researcher and included activities suggested by the group, such as making jigsaw puzzles and table games based on oral language skills, for parents to use with their children at home.

Using the experience of this workshop series for Addington families, the school community applied for and was awarded a $7,000 grant to extend the family

literacy project. At the beginning of this new project parents were surveyed for workshop topics they would be interested in and this extension program was planned using the survey results. The survey results demonstrated that parents did have ideas to contribute for the program. Parents could have found the format of the home survey less threatening than that of the questionnaire given to them in the original workshop in this study. As they filled in the questionnaire at home they may have had time to reflect on their replies. In addition to this, older children at the school were used to collect information from their parents by canvassing their parents' ideas in a parent interview for class homework. Whilst involving parents in the planning stages of a family literacy program is the ideal to ensure that the program will meet the needs of the community for which it is designed (Cairney 1994; Barton 1995; Topping 1996), it would seem that this involvement may be difficult to achieve initially.

Features of the Workshop Series

Group Atmosphere

In order to encourage a positive and safe atmosphere in the group it seemed important that barriers created by some participants' unfamiliarity with others in the group were eliminated early in the first workshop. The participants were asked in this first workshop to relate to a partner their personal recollections of learning to read and write. These stories were then shared with the whole group and further details were added. This activity had the effect of allowing the

participants to share something personal with other group members in a short time, which helped to increase their understanding of each others past experiences.

The participants were committed to contributing to the sessions. This was evident when members, unable to attend a workshop, sent the results of their written take-home task for inclusion in the group discussion, asking for details of the next task and a copy of the audiotape of the workshop to listen to at home before the following workshop.

As shown by the excerpts from the workshop transcripts in this chapter, an atmosphere of mutual support developed between the group members. They made suggestions to each other on how they dealt with various aspects of general parent/child experiences, commented favorably when someone in the group shared effective parenting strategies and, in one instance, Judy Hart and Nola Settler arranged to meet during the school holidays to exchange the books they had borrowed to read to their children.

Content and Presentation

The content presented in the workshops was researched and gathered by the facilitator. Much of it came from research-based literature on the topic of emergent literacy and was largely based on the work of Strickland and Morrow (1989).

Information about ways in which television programs were rated and censored was gathered by the facilitator from the Australian Broadcasting Authority. Whilst this information was available by request to the general public, neither the facilitator nor the participants were familiar with it prior to its being obtained for the workshop. Generally the participants were surprised about the contents of this document demonstrating that in the workshops information new to parents and the facilitator stimulated a great deal of discussion within the group and challenged their ideas.

The inclusion of a guest speaker in the program to talk about the value of reading regularly to children and how to encourage reluctant readers presented to the participants a point of view, other than that of the facilitator. Her inclusion raised several discussion points which might not have otherwise been considered. These included the value of turning off the television regularly and finding alternative activities such as reading and playing games and that children should be encouraged to read whatever they were interested in, even if it was not seen as quality literature by others. The speaker also presented additional ideas on how to encourage literacy development. In addition to this, her inclusion signaled to the participants that resources outside the school were respected as sources of information, thus removing any misconception that the group facilitator might be the only informational source.

In workshop five when Year Five students helped participants and their children use the computers, intergenerational transfer of literacy skills occurred.

Intergenerational literacy as defined by Cairney (1994) is the "process by which the literacy practices of one generation influence the literacy practices of another". (p. 263). In this instance it was computer literacy that was shared by children with adults, demonstrating that computer learning can be a vehicle for intergenerational literacy learning.

Group Discussion

Group discussion played a large part in the workshops. It was the vehicle through which participants were able to identify and describe factors that contributed to the literacy events embedded in their day to day family activity. In the following example Margaret West described how the approach of a school excursion motivated her son to write on and use his calendar. This behavior was modeled on her own use of a calendar to record family commitments:

I mark it [an excursion to Underwater World] on my calendar. Luke will say, "What day are we going to Underwater World?". He had a look this morning, marked off yesterday and he said, "Oh 1,2,3, days I go to Underwater World". I haven't actually looked at what he's written, whether he's drawn a picture or written. No he did, he wrote the words, Underwater World so that he knows where he is going.

For some participants the discussion raised their awareness of the quantity of their literacy activities which, prior to discussion, they had not recognised. Cathy Short commented at the beginning of the second workshop that:

It's made me aware of literacy in the home. Everywhere I go it's made me aware

of how much we see without being conscious of it. You know they walk in and

you're looking in the phone book - you're reading.

Thus the group discussion gave the participants the opportunity for reflection on their own literacy activity and habits which they were able to value. When discussing the place of adult modeling for children's emerging literacy practices Danuta Zbigniew commented:

I'm not much of a letter writer but I will make sure I send them all a Christmas

card so that's when I get into it. I find it quite difficult switching from one

language to another - to remember the 'w' in Polish is 'wa' as here it is 'w'.

Participants frequently used the discussion to debate issues relevant to a topic. It gave them an opportunity to listen to each others' view of the topic and add their own ideas. The following debate occurred during a discussion on the children's television viewing practices:

Cathy: They wouldn't accept a program for a C rating if it had a really

strong, hard to understand accent 'cos the kids just couldn't

understand it. Like a Scottish accent or if it was a foreign language

'cos the kids wouldn't have a clue.

Judy: They would grasp it. After a while they would I reckon 'cos kids are

pretty good with foreign languages.

Cathy: If it is a really strong accent the kids aren't going to be able to

understand it.

Judy: But after a while they will pick it up. I mean two or three times and they'll understand.

Cathy: Yeah I suppose so.

Nola: I mean they are going to come across that. Australia is such a multicultural country. All different sorts, you know?

During the general group discussion the participants spent time describing their children's literacy practices and other behaviours. It seemed, in most cases, the participants enjoyed contributing these descriptions, although it sometimes resulted in irrelevant information being discussed, the discussion being sidetracked to other topics and some participants not being able to contribute or finish what they were saying about the topic. Nevertheless it did show that the participants had taken over the running of the discussion session from the facilitator and were indeed jointly constructing the program.

<u>Home Tasks</u>

The participants were asked to complete written tasks at home. These tasks included compiling a list, watching and rating a children's television program and keeping a personal literacy journal. In each instance the facilitator prepared a format sheet for participants. This helped to standardise the collection of information and made the task convenient for the participants to complete. These tasks also led to participants comparing their family literacy practices with others and making a fuller description of each literacy practice as the group asked

questions when details weren't clear. It appeared that the use of set home tasks gave each member of the group something unique to bring to the group for discussion, gave her the opportunity to speak with authority to the group about her own experiences and created a common focus for group discussion.

The data that the participants brought with them was discussed at the beginning of each workshop and this had the effect of generating an immediate and open sharing of information which then continued throughout the workshop. For those participants who might have experienced a sense of failure during their own school life, talking about themselves immediately took away the fear of having to have the 'right' answer before contributing.

The Facilitator

The facilitator's role in the present study was to encourage discussion of the chosen topics through the use of comments and questions to individual participants and as far as possible, to keep the focus of each discussion on the chosen topic. The facilitator also organised many features of the workshops such as the information to be collected, contact with the guest speaker, reminders to the participants to attend each workshop and preparation of the home-tasks. It was also seen as important to value the experiences and contribution of all parents.

<u>Conclusion</u>

The data presented in this chapter were collected during the course of the six workshops. When initially asked to help plan the workshop series during the first workshop, the parents in this study appeared to have difficulty with the idea of contributing ideas and suggestions for future workshop topics. However, having had the experience of this workshop series they gained confidence in their ability to make suggestions and became accustomed to being asked to articulate what they needed to know. This was evident when parents suggested a further series of workshops at the conclusion of this study and were able to contribute topics they were interested in.

Certain elements present in this workshop series contributed to the nature of this program. These include the presence of the facilitator who organised resources and information and kept the discussion mostly focussed on the topic and the overall planning of the whole workshop structure after the topics had been negotiated. This served to inform the participants of the intended direction they would be taking. Finally the set home tasks and informal nature of the group discussions were planned to encourage parents to contribute their own experiences and observations in an attempt to break down barriers which might have existed for some participants, making them reluctant to contribute.

CHAPTER 6

Evaluation of the Program

<u>The Parents' Perceptions of the Workshops</u>

The family literacy program described in the thesis was evaluated in two ways. Firstly the parents were asked to fill out a questionnaire at the final workshop session, which asked for their perceptions of the program. Secondly, the program was evaluated by the researcher in terms of the criteria for program evaluation identified in Chapter Two. Data was collected at the conclusion of the workshop series in a questionnaire. Participants were asked to write short statements in response to three questions about their perceptions of the workshop series. The group participants listed:

(a) new information they had gained from the workshops;

(b) ways in which their interactions with their children during literacy activity at home might have changed since attending the workshops;

(c) which workshop activities they found useful, such as the guest speaker, take home tasks, and group discussion.

A list of the responses can be found in Appendix Q. This data has been classified in this chapter under headings which emerged from the analysis. The responses from the questionnaire are augmented by interview and session transcriptions where appropriate.

Parents' Expectations of the Program

For some of the parents, the expectations they had of the program were different from the actual experience. Expectations varied from not knowing what to expect, to preconceived ideas about what would happen during the program. None had expected to be asked to help construct the workshop topics and as a result Judy Hart's expectations of the program were quite different from her experience. She voiced her opinion during an interview:

I thought it was going to be a lot of speakers come in and they controlled it - about parenting things and I thought it was going to be like that. The educational side of it. I thought it would be interesting. I didn't think we were actually going to participate and be doing things like we have.

Thus Judy Hart had expected to receive information and play a passive role in the program. During the initial workshop Margaret West expressed doubt about the personal value she would get from attending the sessions. It appeared to her that while her children were making good progress at school and were competent, capable literacy users, she did not feel a need new knowledge. Her perception was that the program would be suitable for parents whose children were in some way experiencing difficulties and needed help, so her expectation was that she would not gain anything from attending. Her experiences changed her ideas. When she was interviewed after the completion of the third workshop she described what had happened:

It's really made me aware of what my children, what input, not just that I have

on my children but everything, TV, everything. You know I've never really

thought about how they learn to read. I've never really sat down and thought

about how Paul's learnt to read or how Luke has learnt to read until now. I'm

more aware of how much influence everything...I mean how vulnerable they are

you know... it's scary. And discussing it with the other women, it's quite

interesting to see what their children do compared to my children.

New Knowledge

Responses to the question "Have you learned new information coming to the sessions?" showed that the group participants considered new knowledge was mostly gained about computers and television rating criteria. The following comments from the questionnaires indicated that the participants felt that they had gained new knowledge about computers:

That was the first time I had ever used a computer. I would like to learn properly

even though I'm sure the kids could teach me.

I've never used a computer so found this a good opportunity.

This knowledge included the value of computers in education and identification of the advantages of having a computer at home for their children. For some participants the workshop they spent at the school computer laboratory was the first time they had used a computer.

Participants also made comments on the information they had learnt about how children's television programs are classified, the different categories of television program ratings for young children and how the Australian standards are used for classifying children's television programs. These comments indicate that for some participants this information was new:

I learnt about television ratings, and influence TV has on kids.

Television is not controlled as much as I thought TV rating - how it's done.

A comment on one questionnaire indicated that the participant gained new information from the guest speaker on children's literature. The following two comments show that some participants found information regarding the value of books was important for them:

To know the difference between a good and bad book.

Books are important for our children today and always.

Heightened Awareness and Reflection

Awareness raised in the workshops varied between participants. It would seem that they became more aware of the influence a child's environment has on the formation of attitudes towards literacy practices. This was reflected in the following comments extracted from the questionnaires:

I am more alert about what the children are doing, thinking and saying, their interests, what they understand, what they don't.

I am more aware of my surroundings and the things I say and do.

Participants commented that they had become more aware of the programs their children watched on television. This awareness caused them to examine and reflect on their children's viewing practices and this was evident in the following comments:

It made me more aware not to use the TV as the only entertainment at home.

It was interesting to see how much reading and TV we actually did in the household.

Some comments were made which illustrated that parents were able to reflect on themselves as parents and the influence they had on their children's development. The group discussions appear to have also led to an increased understanding of the opinions held by other parents. This was reflected in the following comments in answer to new information learned by attending the sessions:

Different ways and opinions on parenting.

How everything I take in is passed on to my kids.

Change Of Behaviour

The results of the final questionnaire indicated that all the participants felt that they had experienced some change in behaviour as a result of the new knowledge and heightened awareness they had experienced through attending the workshops. This perceived change of behaviour tended to fall into two categories, that is television viewing and general reading practices.

The television viewing behaviour changes as reported by the participants related to the parents being more critical about programs their children watched. Comments included:

I take more notice of the sorts of programs the kids watch on TV.

I find that I now censor the children's TV watching more.

Parents also indicated their general reading practices with their young children were altered as a result of discussion in the group sessions. Parents indicated this change through comments such as those listed below:

I pay more attention to my children's books, and find myself reading to them more

and asking questions about the book.

I have become more involved in what we're reading. Kids became more interested

in story time. We talk more about the stories.

Exchange Of Ideas

Many of the comments written on the final questionnaire suggested that the participants enjoyed listening to and exchanging ideas with each other on a whole range of topics. In some cases the exchange confirmed their own thinking and others found it a relief that they were not alone in the challenges they faced in parenting. Their comments show their interest in sharing ideas and opinions with each other:

Gave me a chance to listen to other parents about their experiences.

Interesting to hear other people's views.

As the others are going through the same as us, I've learnt more in these talks.

Evaluation of the Program in Terms of Specific Criteria

As shown in Chapter Two evaluation of the design and implementation of a family literacy program helps to describe the program, gives an indication of the level of parent involvement and demonstrates the potential the program has to affect the family literacy practices of the participants involved. Cairney (1996) acknowledges the diversity which exists in family literacy initiatives in the United States, United Kingdom and Australia and proposes:

> that a more useful way to describe programs might be to assess each project on a number of key variables, with the assumption being that on each of these there will be a continuum ranging from one extreme to another. (p. 133)

The variables Cairney suggests a program could be evaluated on are content, process, source and control. Details of these criterion are contained in Chapter Two under the heading: Evaluating a Family Literacy Program.

The table below presents an evaluation of the workshop program conducted in the present study, using Cairney's criteria.

Table 15

Evaluation: Family Literacy Workshop Series by Variables Described by Cairney (1996)

Criteria	Program Evaluation
Content of the workshop series.	During this workshop series the researcher acted as the facilitator. Topics for each workshop were negotiated between the researcher and the participants during the first workshop and due to the nature of the research questions all topics focused on literacy activity within each family. The researcher contributed some workshop topics, participants were encouraged to do the same. After a list of possible topics was constructed, specific foci for each workshop were chosen by the group.
Process of the information presented during the workshop series.	The researcher collected information and presented it briefly to the group during four sessions. This included information from a number of sources including texts, government bodies and the participants themselves. One session was conducted by a guest speaker and one session was conducted by Year 5 students in the school's computer laboratory. During each session there was guided group discussion on the focus topic, some of the information discussed came from the results of information each participant collected during the home tasks. The researcher set four home tasks for participants to complete.
Source of the program.	This family literacy initiative was a research program designed by the researcher for this particular group of parents, to fulfil the requirements of a Masters Degree in Education.
Control of the family literacy program.	The researcher had the largest portion of control in this program. However an attempt was made to involve the participants as much as possible in the choice of content, discussion of information and sharing of each family's home literacy practices through the set home tasks. It took place in the preprimary centre which was used by the preprimary children. As the workshops proceeded the parents took over much of the direction of the discussions. Participants became involved in the program by volunteering.

The results of the evaluation in terms of Cairney's criteria show that the family literacy program from the present study sought to involve the participants in the family literacy program and presented information from a number of sources. The program was initiated in response to the research brief.

As was suggested in Chapter Two, other possible criteria for evaluating a family literacy program could include the philosophy of the program designer and the short and long term outcomes for the participants involved. In the present study the researcher undertook to follow the description given by Auerbach (1995) in which she described an ideal family literacy program as being 'participatory' and 'empowering'. Evidence from the description of the sessions and transcripts suggests that the parents did indeed participate.

The short term outcomes of the study as reported by the participants can be found in this chapter. Long term outcomes for a study of this nature are difficult to obtain and would probably not be appropriate given the short term nature of the program. As has been noted in the Senate report <u>Childhood Matters</u> (Commonwealth of Australia, 1996) there has been very little longitudinal research conducted on this topic. The report notes that one of the main reasons for this lack of research information is the prohibitive expense which would be involved in a long-term study.

Conclusion

The responses to the final questionnaire give an indication of the participants' final perceptions of the workshop series. It appeares that attendance at the workshops contributed to parents enhanced knowledge of literacy learning and, for some, affected the way they included literacy activities in their homes. Due to the short nature of the program it is difficult to gauge the long term effects of any behaviour changes and new knowledge. However, it was noted that all participants with children still attending the school participated in a further workshop series at the school the following year. Further the process of becoming aware of the value of their own literacy related experiences and practices and the integration of new knowledge with these existing practices had the potential for empowerment.

CHAPTER 7

General Discussion

The present study has provided answers to three research questions. The first question asked about the literacy practices in eight families containing preprimary children in a low socio-economic neighbourhood and it was found that all families reported a wide variety of literacy practices. These included the literacy practices of individuals and families as a group.

The second research question investigated the nature of a program of six workshops constructed with parents. The workshops included the topics of the literacy skills, knowledge and behaviours of young children, children's literature, viewing and computer literacy. This workshop series led to the participants requesting further workshops and also to the award of a financial grant to conduct a larger program in the school community.

The final research question examined the parents' perceptions of the family literacy program conducted with the researcher and some perceived changes in behaviour were noted, along with an increase in the parents' awareness of the importance of the literacy practices of the home on children's early literacy learning. A number of issues arose from the examination of the literacy practices of the families involved in the study and from the design of the family literacy program.

Issues Arising from Parents' Discussion of their Family Literacy Practices

Acts of Literacy in the Home Environment

During this research project it became clear that families in this low socio-economic neighbourhood engaged in numerous formal and informal acts of literacy outside the classroom. Many of the acts described occurred in ordinary, everyday situations in which the literacy practices might not have been the central purpose but were found to be embedded in the fabric of family interactions. An example of this is the fact that television viewing took place mostly in a family group and was the catalyst for talk around text. Reid (1998) describes the literacy experiences in Australian homes in the late 1990's as "very different for different children". She explains how, for some children, literacy events in the home environment may be focused around television, video, electronic games and computers, whilst for others they might be "predominately centred around functional, social and economic interactions of buying and consuming"(p. 239).

Thus it would appear that within the general community there is a need to acknowledge and support the literacy practices that already exist in homes. Family literacy practices are often viewed as merely supporting what children are learning at school. It is important to recognise the important role that family literacy events play in developing attitudes and understandings about literacy in young children. Therefore, where family literacy programs are offered by a school the program should support the practices already existing in the home environment not attempt to ignore or replace them.

Snow, Burn and Griffin (1998) have suggested that a preschool home environment which provides fewer opportunities for children to acquire skills and knowledge about books and reading might result in a child having a higher risk of developing reading difficulties than a child in a rich literacy environment. Accordingly, it seems important to help make parents aware of ways in which they might build on and extend their practices to include activities that will further develop their children's literacy learning.

Family Circumstances and Home Literacy Activity

In the present study the regularity, length and quality of home literacy practices were reported by the parents to be affected by family circumstances. Parents were aware that their 'mood', their degree of weariness, presence of a baby or the support of a partner in the home all affected the frequency and opportunity to provide uninterrupted interaction with their young children around literacy. Freebody et al. (1996) have commented on this phenomenon. When examining homework practices they found that, in some cases, it was elements of domestic structure which determined the length and complexity of the literacy events rather than the number of books or 'motivational aspects' of the family. It is important to take family circumstances into account when studying their literacy practices. Some of these may be specifically related to socio-economic circumstances whilst others may transcend social class.

Parents' Educational Experiences

During this study it was revealed by the parents in discussions and interviews that some of them had experienced difficult and, in some cases, traumatic school experiences. This was, for some, a result of cultural and linguistic differences between the home and school environments, a transient family lifestyle, or learning difficulties which resulted in them being labeled and isolated in the school environment. It is likely that these experiences affected the expectations and attitudes to education that this group of parents held for their children. These included the frequency of and ways in which they interacted with their children's school. Given this, it becomes crucial that schools, particularly those with low socio-economic populations, present information to parents and provide opportunities for them to interact and communicate with school personnel in ways which make them feel comfortable and their contributions valuable.

Expectations of Parents

Freebody et al. (1996) reported that parents in their study held similar ideas to each other about the education of their children, in that the parents considered they were responsible for and expected their children to 'get an education', defined by them as "reading, writing and mathematics"(p. 5). Similarly it has been shown in the present study that parents of children in this low socio-economic area held many positive expectations for their children which they were

willing to describe and were able to articulate through interviews and during general discussions in the workshops.

Issues Arising from the Family Literacy Program Design

Joint Construction of the Program

The results from this study demonstrate that it is possible for a teacher/researcher, over the course of several workshops, to construct a family literacy program jointly with participants from a school community. However, as was shown, the parents initially were reluctant or were not able to contribute their ideas. Whilst Auerbach (1995); Barton (1995); Morrow and Paratore (1993) have pointed out that while it is commendable to aim for joint construction, it might not necessarily be initially possible. The participants might not have the skills, knowledge or expectations that they will be asked to participate in this manner. This could be in part a result of long-standing expectations about the type of parent involvement accepted by schools, both within the school and in children's education in general. Cairney and Munsie (1992) refer to much current parent involvement in schools as the 'tokenism' or superficial approach and suggest that it is time for schools to move beyond this attitude by finding ways to communicate with parents and to share the responsibility of educating children. The results of this study suggest that parents should be given increasing opportunities to contribute to the planning and implementation phases of school activities and programs which involve them. As the program described in this thesis

progressed, the parents were able to take more control of its direction and demonstrated in their interactions in the workshops that they were indeed jointly constructing the program with the researcher. Further evidence of this joint construction is the fact that the participants asked to continue the series, and spontaneously suggested topics and formats for the following workshops and asked the researcher for advice.

Encouraging Communication about Home and School Literacy Practices

The family literacy program described in this study contained elements which were designed to make participants feel relaxed, to give them ample time to discuss content presented by the researcher, to share the literacy practices of their homes through discussion and the completed home tasks which encouraged each participant to observe and report the daily literacy practices in their home environment. This study has demonstrated that strong home-school links can be created which provide opportunities for parents to communicate to schools the ways in which literacy is used in their home environment. This is in accordance with a key recommendation from the research project: Everyday literacy practices in and out of schools in low socio-economic urban communities (Freebody et al. 1996). Recommendation 3.7 states that processes and structures should be set up to:

- explore ways of enhancing understandings of the differences and similarities between features of home and school literacy practices

among the school community that may lead to more effective mutual recognition of these practices in both sites;

• identify ways for teachers and parents to examine and study their own literacy practices with children, and identify challenges they should pose themselves about how their own views and interactions can be changed in line with their goals and aspirations. (p.23)

The present study gave parents the opportunity to examine and describe their home literacy practices in relation to the ways in which literacy skills are understood by schools to emerge in the early years of schooling. Opportunities for comparisons about the ways in which literacy practices are used in the home and at school also arose. The parents involved in this study were encouraged to identify the literacy practices they shared with their children, discuss issues about these literacy practices and use various strategies to enhance already existing home literacy practices.

Barriers to Parents Attending School Based Programs

Only 20% of the parents of preprimary children in the Addington area who were invited to participate, volunteered to be involved in the present study. There are many factors which prevent parents becoming involved in school initiated workshops, several of which have been highlighted in this study. These factors may include:

- work commitments which prevent some parents attending workshops at the time chosen by the school;

- parents not considering the workshop topics interesting or relevant to their children's level of development;

- previous experiences within school environments which may result in parents having preconceived ideas about the format or expectations of school-based workshops;

- some parents' inability to read or understand communications sent from the school;

- cultural factors in the home which might make attending school functions inappropriate for some families;

- perceptions held by parents about school based workshops that they are only for parents with children experiencing difficulties at school;

- social issues, such as not knowing other participants attending the program, lack of self confidence and the fear of invasion of family privacy;

- lack of child minding facilities for yo·..ger children during the duration of the workshops.

It is important that such issues are considered when planning for parent involvement in school based initiatives.

Program Organisation

Whilst some barriers to parents attending school based initiatives have been identified, for those parents who took part many organisational details appear to have had a positive effect on the atmosphere of the workshops and the participants' willingness to contribute details about their family literacy practices. These included:

- holding the workshops in familiar surroundings;

- planning an initial activity which was non-threatening and introduced the participants to each other early in the first session;

- maintaining an informal atmosphere during workshops;

- sending reminder notes to the participants prior to each workshop;

- providing a data collection sheet for home tasks to facilitate regular recording of information and to give a purpose to further meetings;

- audio-taping of the workshop sessions for participants who were unable to attend to ensure they were kept up to date on the topics discussed;

- accepting and valuing the social practices of the participants, which demonstrated to them that they were already facilitating their children's' literacy learning.

Implications of the Study for Educational Practice

This study has shown that it is possible, within a school setting, to offer a family literacy program which is tailored to the needs of a school community by actively involving the participants in the planning and implementation of the program. In the words of Topping (1996) family literacy "is not something that is done to families. It is something done with families to give them greater adaptive control over their own future as literacy demands are constantly increasing" (p. 149). This means that schools need to:

- search for creative ways to encourage parents to participate in the planning and execution phase of family literacy initiatives;

- consult with their communities about content and delivery style of family literacy programs;

- develop tailor-made programs to meet the immediate needs identified by the school community;

- break down barriers created by parents' reluctance to attend school based initiatives;

- improve ways in which information about literacy practices is exchanged between school and home environments;

- include a family literacy component in their whole school planning;

- include families in the evaluation processes of these initiatives.

Suggestions For Further Research

In addition to the gathering of information on the home literacy practices of the families in this study, the use of a formative experimental design has enabled a description of literacy practices and a short family literacy program jointly constructed by the teacher/researcher and a group from the school community.

Future research in the area of family literacy is needed to examine:

a. longer term family literacy programs, which explore topics of interest in more detail;

b. the relative effectiveness of different modes of program presentation, for example, transmission and collaborative models;

c. longitudinal descriptions of the development of family literacy programs within a school community (in the present study, the program for preprimary parents led to the development of further collaborative programs with parents in the school);

d. the evaluation of the long and short term effects of family literacy projects in terms of child literacy outcomes;

e. the nature and effectiveness of family literacy programs jointly constructed by schools and parents in different socio-cultural and linguistic communities.

Finally, further research is necessary to address issues for those parents who do not normally volunteer to participate in school activities. Research of this nature would include identification of factors which prevent family participation in

school activities and the development of strategies which will create equal access to available resources for all families.

This study has shown that in using a formal experimental design it was possible to investigate and describe some of the literacy practices of families living in a low socio- economic area and to jointly construct a family literacy program with parents in a school community. The implications for educational practice are that schools should investigate and build on the literacy practices of the home environment, avoid making 'deficit view' assumptions about the home literacy practices and attempt to include families in all aspects of family literacy program design.

References

Amm, R., & Juan, S. (1994). A Parent Education Success Story: The Parents as Teachers Program in the U.S. and Australia. Australian Journal of Early Childhood, 19 (2).

Anstey, M., & Bull, G. (1996). The Literacy Labyrinth. Sydney: Prentice Hall.

Auerbach, E.R. (1995). Which Way for Family Literacy: Intervention or Empowerment? In L. Morrow (Ed.), Family Literacy Connections in Schools and Communities (pp. 11-26). International Reading Association.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (1996). Basic Community Profile: Small Area Data Report. ABS Catalogue No. 27722.5. Commonwealth of Australia.

Australian Parents Council Inc. (1995). Collaborating for Successful Learning: the Parent Factor. The National Federation of Organisations Representing Parents of Non-government School Children. Commonwealth Dept. of Employment and Training. AGPS.

Barton, D. (1995). Exploring family literacy. Reading, 29 (3), 2-4.

Breen,M., Louden,W., Barrat-Pugh,C., Rivalland, J., Rohl, M., Rhydwen, M., Lloyd, C., & Carr, T. (1994). Literacy in its Place: Literacy practices in urban and rural communities. Overview and Interpretations. Australian Language and Literacy Policy. DEET

Bull, G & Anstey, M. (1996). The Literacy Lexicon. Sydney: Prentice Hall.

Burns, R. (1994). Introduction to Research Methods, Second Edition Melbourne. Longman Australia Pty Ltd.

Cairney, T.H. (1994). Moving towards new partnerships in education. Australian Journal of Language and Literacy, 17 (4), 262-273.

Cairney, T.H. (1996). Developing Partnerships with Families in Literacy Learning. In S. Wolfendale and K. Topping (Eds.), Family Involvement in Literacy. London. Cassell Education.

Cairney,. T.H., & Munsie, L. (1992). Beyond Tokenism: Parents as Partners in Literacy. Victoria, Australia: Australian Reading Association.

Cairney, T., Ruge, J., Buchanan, J., Lowe, K., & Munsie, L., (1995). Developing Partnerships: The Home, School and Community Interface. Vol. 2 DEET Commoinwealth of Australia.

Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs. (1998). Literacy for All: The Challenge For Australian Schools. Australian School Monograph Series No.1/1998 DEETYA.

Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs. (1996) Childhood Matters. Senate Reference Committee. Canberra: Senate Printing Unit.

Edwards, P.A. (1995). Empowering Low-Income Mothers and Fathers to Share Books with Young Children. The Reading Teacher, 48 (7), 558-564.

Eisner, E.W. (1985). Qualitative Inquiry in Education. New York. Teachers College Press.

Englemann, S., Haddox, P., & Bruner, E. (1983). Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons. S. Schuster. New York, U.S.A.

Freebody, P. (1992). A Socio-cultural approach: resourcing four roles as a literacy learner. In A. Watson & A. Badenhop (Eds.), Prevention of Reading Failure. Ashton Scholastic.

Freebody, P., Lugwig, C., Gunn, S., Dwyer B., Frieberg, J., Forrest, T., Gray, S., Hellsten, M., Herschell, P., Luke, H., Rose, J., & Wheeler, J. (1996). Everyday Literacy Practices in and out of Schools in Low Socio-Economic Urban Communities. Executive Summary. Commonwealth of Australia: Curriculum Corporation

Gee, J.P. (1996). Literacy and Social Minds. In G. Bull & M. Anstey (Eds.), The Literacy Lexicon. Sydney: Prentice Hall.

Greaney, V. (1986). Parental Influences on Reading. Reading Teacher, 39 (8), 812-818.

Hannon, P. (1996). School is Too Late. In S. Wolfendale & K. Topping (Eds.), Family Involvement in Literacy. London. Cassell Education.

Heath, S. (1991). The Sense of being Literate: Historical and Cross-Cultural Features. In R. Barr, M.L. Kamil, P Mosenthal,.& D.P. Pearson, (Eds.), Handbook of Reading Research (Vol. II). New York: Longman Publishing Group.

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training. (1992). Literacy Challenge - Strategies for Early Intervention for Literacy and Learning for Australian Children. Canberra: AGPS

Jacob, E. (1992). Culture, context and cognition. In M.D. Lecompte, W. Millroy, and J. Preissle (Eds.), The Handbook of Qualitative Research in Education. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Jimenez, K.T. (1997). The strategic reading abilities and potential of five low-literacy Latina/o readers in middle school. Reading Research Quarterly, 32(3), 224-243.

Lankshear, C. (1996). Language and the Cultural Process. In G. Bull, & M. Anstey (Eds.), The Literacy Lexicon. Prentice Hall. Sydney.

LoBianco, J., & Freebody, P. (1997). Australian Literacies. Commonwealth of Australia: Language Australia.

Luke, A., Comber, B. & O'Brien, J. (1996). Critical Literacies and Cultural Studies. In G. Bull, & M. Anstey (Eds.), The Literacy Lexicon. Prentice Hall. Sydney.

McNaughton, S. (1995). Patterns of Emergent Literacy. Oxford University Press Melbourne.

Moll, L.C. (1994). Literacy Research in Community and Classrooms: A Sociocultural Approach. In R.B. Ruddell, M.R. Ruddell & H Singer. (Eds.), Handbook of Reading Research Delaware: International Reading Association.

Morrow, L. (1995). Family Literacy - New Perspectives, New Practices. In L. Morrow (Ed.), Family Literacy Connections in Schools and Communities (pp. 5-10). International Reading Association.

Morrow, L., & Paratore, J. (1993). Family Literacy: Perspective and Practices. The Reading Teacher, 47 (3), 194- 200.

Paratore, J. (1995). Implementing an Intergenerational Literacy Project: Lessons Learned. In Morrow, L.(Ed.), Family Literacy Connections in Schools and Communities (pp. 37-53). International Reading Association.

Purcell- Gates, V., L'Allier, S., & Smith, D. (1995). Literacy at the Harts' and the Larsons': Diversity among poor, inner-city families. The Reading Teacher, 48 (7), 572- 578.

Reid, J., (1998) 'Show me a child before s/he is...'? Prior-to-school literacy experiences of children in Australia. The Journal of Language and Literacy, 21 (3), 234-248.

Rohl, M., & Pratt, C. (1995). Phonological Awareness, Verbal working memory and the Acquisition of Literacy. Reading and Writing, 7. 327-360.

Snow, C.C., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (1998). Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children. National Academy Press. Washington, DC.

Spreadbury, J. (1995). Collaborating for Successful Learning- The Parent Factor: A Review of the Family Literacy. Commonwealth Dept. of Employment, Education and Training. Canberra: AGPS.

Spreadbury, J. (1994). Read Me a Story. Australian Reading Association, Victoria: Australia.

Strickland, D.S., & Morrow, L.M. (1989). Emerging Literacy: Young Children Learn to Read and Write. Newark. Delaware: International Reading Association.

Sulzby, E., & Teale, W. (1991). Emergent Literacy. In R. Barr, M.L. Kamil, P. Mosenthal & D.P. Pearson (Eds.), Handbook of Reading Research (Vol II.). New York: Longman Publishing Group.

Taylor, D. (1983). Family Literacy. London: Heinemann Educational Books.

Topping, K. (1996). The Effectiveness of Family Literacy. In S. Wolfendale & K. Topping (Eds.), Family Involvement in Literacy. London. Cassell Education.

Topping, K.J. (1997). Family Electronic Literacy: Part 2- Home-School Links Through Computers. Reading, 31(2), 12- 21.

Topping, K.J., Shaw, M.C & Bircham, A.M. (1997). Family Electronic Literacy: Part 1- Home-School Links Through Audiotaped Books. Reading, 31(2), 7-11.

Topping, K, & Wolfendale, S. (1995). The Effectiveness of Family Literacy Programs. Reading, .29(3), 26- 32.

Venezky, R.L. (1991). The Development of Literacy in the Industrialized Nations of the West. In R. Barr, M.L. Kamil, P. Mosenthal & D.P. Pearson (Eds.), Handbook of Reading Research (Vol II.). New York: Longman Publishing Group.

Wolfendale, S. (1996). Transitions and Continuities in Home-School Reading and Literacy. In S. Wolfendale & K. Topping (Eds.), <u>Family Involvement in Literacy.</u> London. Cassell Education.

Appendix A

<u>Letter of Consent: Principal</u>

I give permission for Jenny Jayatilaka to conduct the research project titled - <u>An Investigation of Family Literacy Practices in Families with Preprimary Children in one School Setting.</u> This study will also consider the development of a jointly constructed home literacy program in this school setting.

The research will be completed by the end of Term 2, 1997.

Signed: _____

       (Mr. Roy Reynolds).

Date: 14th February 1997.

Appendix B

Letter of Introduction

Dear Parents,

I am a teacher at Addington Primary School and am currently studying for a Masters Degree in Education at Edith Cowan University. I wish to undertake a study on how literacy activities in the home help children in preprimary learn to read and write. I am asking for your help.

I require a group of families prepared to participate in this study for 6 months. This would include being interviewed before and after attending about 6 parent workshops of one hour in length. The workshops will look at ways you may help your child at home while they are beginning to learn to read and write. They will be held fortnightly on Monday mornings.

From this information I will write my thesis. I would like to stress that in no way will the school, parents, teachers or children be identified in any way in the final publication.

Please consider becoming involved in this project and if you have any questions - don't hesitate to contact me.

If you are willing to participate in this project please complete the consent form attached.

Thank You,

Jenny Jay - Teacher, Addington Primary School.

Appendix C

Letter of Consent: Participant

Addington Primary School

Research Agreement

I (the participant) have read the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realising I may withdraw at any time.

I agree that the research data gathered for this study may be published provided I am not identifiable.

_____

(Signature of Participant)   (Date)

_____

(Signature of Investigator)   (Date)

Appendix D

Literacy Practices in the Dent Family As Identified by the Mother.

	By Whom	Literacy Practice
Reading.	Children.	Completed reading homework.
	Whole family.	Read the television guide.
		Read the community newspaper.
		Made regular visits to the library.
Writing.	Children.	Had access to writing and drawing equipment at home.
	Mother.	Enjoyed completing crossword puzzles.
Viewing.	Whole family.	Watched children's TV programs such as cartoons, Playschool.
		Watched soap operas such as Blue Heelers, Home and Away.
		Watched videos from the family's collection such as Care Bears.
Computer Use	Jessie	Had limited classroom access at school.
Talk Around Literacy		None identified.
Other Family Activities	Whole Family	Played games together such as Naughts and Crosses; jigsaw puzzles; Scrabble Nintendo.

Appendix E

Literacy Practices in the Dunn Family As Identified by the Mother

	By Whom	Literacy Practice
Reading	Mother, children.	Read books at bedtime.
		Visited the local library regularly.
	Julie.	Completed reading tasks for homework.
	Mother.	Read novels during leisure time.
Writing	Children.	Had access writing and drawing equipment in the home.
	Julie.	Wrote during homework activities.
	Mother, children.	Wrote weekly shopping list and got the children to help.
	Father.	Made lists of names from the newspaper classified section.
	Children.	Watched children's TV programs such as Thomas the Tank Engine, Postman Pat and Playschool.
		Watched videos of programs taped from the television such as Jurassic Park
Viewing	Mother	Watched general programs such as Homes and Gardens.
Computer Use	Julie.	Had limited access to computers at school.
Talk Around Literacy		None Identified.
Other Family Activities	Mother and children.	Picnicked at a park.

Appendix F

Literacy Practices in the Hart Family As Identified by the Mother.

	By Whom	Literacy Practice
Reading	Mother, children	Read books at bedtime.
		Listened to taped stories.
		Visited the local library regularly including storytelling sessions.
		Played with the alphabet jigsaw puzzle.
	Ryan.	Did reading tasks for homework.
		Read books from school.
	Mother.	Made up oral stories at the children's request.
	Father.	Read novels and newspaper.
Writing	Children.	Had access writing and drawing equipment in the home.
	Ryan.	Wrote during homework activities.
	Mother.	Wrote letters to overseas relatives and encouraged the children to help.
Viewing	Children.	Watched videos- had their own large collection, mainly Disney stories.
		Watched the children's afternoon TV programs.
	Mother.	Sometimes joined the children watching the afternoon TV programs if the baby was playing on the floor.
Computer Use		None identified.
Talk Around Literacy		None identified
Other Family Activities	Whole family.	Visited relatives, went to the movies and the zoo.
		Picnicked together.

Appendix G

Literacy Practices in the Nowley Family As Identified by the Mother.

	By Whom	Literacy Practice
Reading	Mother, children	Children read to at bedtime. Took part in the school SHARE program. Visited the municipal library.
	Children	Completed reading for homework.
	Mother	Read novels.
	Father	Read information books on topics such as fishing.
Writing	Children	Had access to writing and drawing equipment in the home. Completed written homework.
	Parents	Kept the books for the family business.
Viewing	Children	Watched children's videos.
	Whole family together	Watched TV evening news programs. Watched family style TV programs such as Hey, Hey Its Saturday.
Computer Use	Children	Had limited classroom access to the school's computers.
Talk Around Literacy		None identified.
Other Family Activities	Children	Played commercial games together - such as Scrabble, Trouble, Snakes and Ladders
	Whole family	Attended children's sporting commitments. Visited grandparents.

Appendix H

Literacy Practices in the Settler Family As Identified by the Mother.

	By Whom	Literacy Practice
Reading	Children.	Read together in bed.
	Samantha.	Completed reading for homework.
		Read during leisure time.
	Mother, children.	Made regular visits to the local library.
	Mother.	Read novels during leisure time.
	Rachel.	Read print in the environment when shopping with her mother.
Writing	Children.	Had access writing and drawing equipment in the home.
		Play acted schools together.
	Samantha.	Wrote letters while her younger sibling watched.
		Did written tasks for homework.
Viewing	Mother, children.	Watched TV game shows such as Who Dares Wins, Sale of the Century, The Price is Right.
	Rachel.	Watched children's preschool TV programs such as Sesame Street and Playschool.
	Children together.	Watched videos together such as ABBA Gold and The Rocky Horror Picture Show.
		Watched TV situation comedies together such as Home Improvement, Sabrina the Teenage Witch.
	Mother, Children.	Watched current affairs TV programs such as Australia's Most Wanted.
Computer Use	Samantha.	Had limited access to school computer.
Talk Around Literacy		None identified.
Other Family Activities	Mother and children.	Played board games together.

Appendix I

Literacy Practices in the Short Family As Identified by the Mother.

	By Whom	Literacy Practice
Reading	Whole family.	Read books at bedtime.
	Mother, children.	Children read to during the day when tired or requested a story. Occasionally visited the local library.
	Children.	Read to each other as part of their play activities. Read their books in bed alone and together.
	Father.	Studied textbooks. Read novels during leisure time.
	Mother	Read novels during leisure time.
Writing	Children.	Had access writing and drawing equipment in the home.
	Jennifer.	Wrote her name and other letters she knew.
	Mother	Helped Jennifer with her writing by spelling words aloud and modeling letters.
Viewing	Children.	Watched children's TV program after school on some afternoons.
	Whole family.	Watched nature programs e.g. Bush Tucker Man. Disney and Nature video from the local library.
	Mother.	Watched the evening news program.
Computer Use	Father.	Used the family's computer for his studies.
	Children.	Used the family computer for educational games such as number and letter awareness.
Talk Around Literacy	Mother, Father, Jennifer.	Mother wrote a message for the father on the child's Magnadoodle board. Next day child asked how the spell the words that were in the message.
Other Family Activities	Whole family.	Reading, puzzles, drawing, colouring.

Appendix J

Literacy Practices in the West Family As Identified by the Mother.

	By Whom	Literacy Practice
Reading	Whole family.	Read books at bedtime.
		Read letters from New Zealand.
	Father	Read work related documents, novels, magazines, newspaper.
	Mother, children.	Took regular visits to the local library.
	Both parents with Luke.	Listened to him read for homework.
	Paul.	Read books made by his class.
		Listened to taped stories from the school library.
	Mother	Read recipes.
Writing	Children together.	Had access to writing and drawing equipment in the home.
		Drew maps together in play.
		Made signs for their bedroom door.
		Created a shop in the play room.
	Luke.	Completed writing tasks for homework.
		Drew and wrote a comic strip.
		Modeled for and taught Paul to write some letters and words.
Viewing	Children.	Children's TV program after school on some afternoons
		Videos from the local library and the family's collection such as The Swan Princess.
Computer Use	Luke.	Limited access to computers at school.
Talk Around Literacy		None identified.
Other Family Activities	Whole family.	Dined at restaurants
		Picnicked and played ball games at a park.
		Visited the museum and art gallery.

Appendix K

Literacy Practices in the Zbigniew Family As Identified by the Mother.

	By Whom	Literacy Practice
Reading	Mother, children.	Children read to at bedtime.
	Children.	Practised reading for homework.
	Mother, children.	Visited the local library regularly.
	Whole family.	Read Polish story books.
	Father	Read the newspaper.
	Mother.	Read recipes.
Writing	Children.	Had access to writing and drawing equipment in the home.
		Used an old typewriter in their play.
		Did written homework.
	Mother.	Studied at TAFE - wrote assignments.
Viewing	Children.	Watched children's TV program after school some afternoons.
	Whole family together.	Watched TV nature programs e.g. Bush Tucker Man.
		Watched Disney and nature video from the local library.
	Mother.	Watched TV evening news program.
Computer Use	Father.	Used work laptop computer at home.
	Whole family.	Whole family learnt to use it computer purchased as a gift for the children.
Talk Around Literacy	Mother, youngest child.	Used ideas from a story book they had read to construct a box rocket.
Other Family Activities	Whole family.	Picnicked at a local park.
		Played games at the park.
		Played some games together, such as dominoes.

Appendix L.

<u>Letter to Participants: Notification of Workshop Dates.</u>

—————————————,

Thank you once again for participating in my research project. All the initial

interviews have now been completed and I am ready to begin the parent workshops.

I intend to conduct these fortnightly for an hour on MONDAY mornings.

Our first session will be next Monday 24th March

starting at 9.00 am.

If you are bringing your children we will organise a 5 minute roster between us

for child minding.

Coffee and biscuits will be available for those who wish to stay on for a cuppa.

I am giving you a list of the dates for the 6 sessions for your diary.

SESSION 1   24TH MARCH 1997

SESSION 2   7TH   APRIL 1997

SESSION 3   28TH APRIL 1997

SESSION 4   12TH MAY 1997

SESSION 5   26TH MAY 1997

SESSION 6   9TH JUNE 1997

Sessions will commence at 9.00 am. at the preprimary.

I am really looking forward to working with you all on this project. Thank you once

again for your participation.

Appendix M

Set Home Task: Reading Log

Name (Optional)..
Record time spent each day in hours/minutes

READING	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
Newspaper: West Australian							
Australian							
Community Newspaper							
Other (_____)							
Magazines: Sport							
Home/Garden							
Women's							
Technical							
Pamphlets - Type (_____)							
Environmental: Advertisements							
Street Signs							
Shopping Information							
Letters							
Documents							
Bills/Accounts.							
Notices Community, School, Church etc.							
T.V. guides.							
Leisure Reading: Novels							
Short Stories							
Poetry							
Other							
Directories -Phone, Street etc.							
Informational - Atlas, Dictionary, Encyclopedia etc.							
Computer Use.							
Television Watched.							
Videos Watched.							

Appendix N

List of Observed Home Literacy Practices as Identified by the Participants.

The following list, which includes tasks observed and participated in by both the preprimary aged child and other family members, is a compilation of the written sheets returned by the parents and includes:

- watching older siblings complete homework tasks

- watching older siblings read and write

- using a typewriter

- listening to bedtime stories

- drawing and writing on a blackboard

- helping or watching parent compile a shopping list child pretends to read a book

- looking at junk mail

- child pretends to read the TV guide

- watches children's television program which includes numbers and letters (Sesame Street)

- asks how to spell words when practicing writing skills

- pretending to write letters to a grandparent

- "reading" books by looking at pictures and remembering the story

- playing schools and "teaching" a younger sibling to "write"

- recognizing grocery items by the picture and sometimes the shape of the words after the parent has given the instruction "please get the WeetBix out of the pantry"

- child watches Father read his college books

- child sees Father typing and using his computer

- child watches Mother writing shopping lists and reminder notes

- child watches Mother read to get information such as recipes and the newspaper

- child watches Mother read for pleasure

- child is present when parents read a letter from overseas family members

- child works in a book club activity book

- child watches as Mother reads older siblings work progress folder from school

- child watches as Mother completes a list of "things to do tomorrow"

- child draws and writes at a writing desk set up in the home

- child sings songs and plays rhyming games

- child listens to a music audiotape and asks parent to explain the meaning of a

word

- child plays with letter stickers from a video tape label

- older sibling creates a "Batman" comic and reads it to the family

- Mother reads recipes

- Parents red weekend newspapers

- child collects mail from the letter box and 'reads' who each letter is for

- older sibling reads to younger child

- children play in a shop they have created

- child reads a book about himself made at school

- Father reads an atlas

- Older sibling reads an information chart about spiders and asks parent questions about the information read

- children play with movie tickets the family has brought home from a trip to the movie theater

- children enter a colouring in competition from the newspaper

- Mother uses the telephone book and dials the telephone

- child has letter shaped magnets on the refrigerator

- child recognises her own cup labeled with her name

- Mother writes memos in a family photo album

- Father worked at the family business books recording relevant details

- Father played Monopoly with older sibling

- counted cars and read road signs on a family trip

- Father reads a book on fishing and shares information with the children

- child watches Mother count money and write amount in the bank book, later child goes with Mother to the bank to complete transactions

- child and Mother search a book for an Easter hat design

- child and parent reread child's birthday cards

- older sibling wrote a two page story about a proposed family holiday which included food items Mum had stored for the trip. He used the food packages to copy names of what the family was taking. Preprimary child watched him and began to copy names from the packages too.

Appendix O

Set Home Task: Viewing Review Sheet

Choose a television program, rated 'G', that your child likes to watch - any day, before or after school. Watch it with your child, if possible or tape it to view later. Using the Australian Broadcasting Authority rating criteria as your guide give your opinion of the program. Ask your child for 'in depth' comments on the show. Find out why the program may or may not appeal to them. Ask other children in the family for their opinion too.

Program Title: Day and Time Shown:

CRITERIA	YOUR EVALUATION
a. is made for children or groups of children within the preschool or the primary school age range.	
b. is entertaining.	
c. is well produced i.e. has a strong story line, is easy to understand, has characters your child can relate to.	
d. enhances a child's understanding and experience.	
e. is appropriate for Australian children.	
f. your opinion of the program or other comments.	

Appendix P

Final Questionnaire

Name_____

Question 1: Have you learned new information coming to the sessions? Yes/No.
If yes please list below:
* _____
* _____
* _____
* _____

Question 2: Has this information changed the way you interact with your child in
literacy activities?
Yes/ No.
If yes please comment how below:

_____

_____

_____

Question 3: In which of the following did you find the most informational?

1. Informational talks, why? _____
2. Guest speaker, why? _____
3. Computer workshop, why? _____
4. Homework sheets, why? _____
5. Group discussions, why? _____
6. Handout sheets on T.V. programs, why? _____

Appendix Q

Final Questionnaire: Raw Data

Question 1: Have you learned **new** information coming to the sessions?

Yes/No - *All seven responders replied yes.*

If yes please list below:

RESPONSES

* *Have never used a computer until these sessions*
* *Am more aware of different influences on literacy skills*
* *Television ratings, and influence TV has on kids.*
* *It is interesting just hearing everybody's different point of view.*
* *I take more notice of the sorts of programs the kids watch on TV*
* *I now ask questions when I'm reading a book.*
* *The importance of computers, how vital they are and will be in the future.*
* *Television is not controlled as much as I thought.*
* *Learning about computers*
* *Ratings on TV.*
* *Listening to the guest speaker.*
* *How everything I take in is passed on to my kids.*
* *The influence of the written word around us.*
* *Different ways and opinions on parenting.*
* *Mums (parents) have similar views as I do.*
* *We all care about the future and present life for our kids.*
* *TV rating - how it's done.*
* *Became more alert about what children are doing, thinking and saying,*
their interests, what they understand, what they didn't.

Question 2: Has this information changed the way you interact with your child in literacy activities?
Yes/ No.- *All seven responders replied yes.*
If yes please comment how below:

RESPONSES
* *I am more involved with my kids when they are reading, so that they get*
more out of the book.
* *I find that I read more to the children than I used to and ask them more*

questions.

- *I pay more attention to my children's books, and find myself reading to them more and asking questions about the book. I also find I am monitoring my children's TV viewing more closely.*

- *I tend to look at ratings in TV more. Ask the children more question when reading.*

- *I am more aware of my surroundings and the things I say and do.*

- *Viewing how my kids are progressing literally and helping them out more.*

- *Looking at teaching the youngest at starting to read, I got one book that. looked at DISTAR.*

- *Became more involved in what we're reading. Kid became more interested in story time. Talked more about the stories.*

Question 3: In which of the following did you find the most informational?

Informational talks, why?

- *Always interested to learn new skills and information.*

- *TV- making us more aware not to use the TV as the only entertainment at home.*

2. Guest speaker, why?

- *to know the difference between a good and bad book.*

- *She was inspiring and left me thinking about what books the children should be reading.*

- *Books are important for our children today and always.*

3. Computer workshop, why?

- *I've never used a computer so found this a good opportunity*

- *That was the first time I had ever used a computer but I would like to learn properly even though I'm sure the kids could teach me.*

- *Didn't know the range of educational games.*

- *Finding out there are games for young children which are educational.*

- *Because I knew nothing before the session.*

- *How much children are involved at school with them.*

4. Homework sheets, why?

- *Made me think.*

- *Made me look at what I learned.*

- *It was interesting to see how much reading and TV we actually did in the household.*

- *Helped me stop and view our family lifestyle and improve on it.*

5. Group discussions, why?

- *Interesting to hear other people's views.*

- *I liked learning everybody's ideas.*
- *Interesting to hear other's views.*
- *Listening to the different views of TV programs.*
- *Gave me a chance to listen to other parents about their experiences.*
- *All opened my eyes.*
- *As they're going through the same as us, I've learnt more in these talks.*

6. Handout sheets on TV programs, why?

- *Haven't given much thought to ratings in the past.*
- *I find that I now censor the children's TV watching more.*
- *Very interesting on how TV is controlled.*
- *I found the criteria interesting.*
- *Ratings - checking for ratings if correct.*

Further Data Analysis

Statements rearranged to show:

New Knowledge or Skills Gained

- *Have never used a computer until these sessions*
- *Television ratings, and influence TV has on kids.*
- *The importance of computers, how vital they are and will be in the future.*
- *Television is not controlled as much as I thought.*
- *Learning about computers*
- *Ratings on TV.*
- *Listening to the guest speaker.*
- *TV rating - how it's done.*
- *to know the difference between a good and bad book.*
- *Books are important for our children today and always.*
- *I've never used a computer so found this a good opportunity*
- *That was the first time I had ever used a computer but I would like to learn properly even though I'm sure the kids could teach me.*
- *Because I knew nothing before the session.*

Heightened Awareness

- *Am more aware of different influences on literacy skills*
- *How everything I take in is passed on to my kids.*
- *The influence of the written word around us.*
- *Different ways and opinions on parenting.*
- *Mums (parents) have similar views as I do.*
- *Became more alert about what children are doing, thinking and saying, their interests, what they understand, what they didn't.*

- I am more aware of my surroundings and the things I say and do.
- TV- making us more aware not to use the TV as the only entertainment at home.
- She was inspiring and left me thinking about what books the children should be reading.
- Didn't know the range of educational games.
- Finding out there are games for young children which are educational.
- How much children are involved at school with them.
- Made me look at what I learned.
- It was interesting to see how much reading and TV we actually did in the household.
- Very interesting on how TV is controlled.
- I found the criteria interesting.

Change of Attitude

- It is interesting just hearing everybody's different point of view.
- We all care about the future and present life for our kids.
- All opened my eyes.

Change of Behaviour

- I take more notice of the sorts of programs the kids watch on TV
- I now ask questions when I'm reading a book.
- I am more involved with my kids when they are reading, so that they get more out of the book.
- I find that I read more to the children than I used to and ask them more questions.
- I pay more attention to my children's books, and find myself reading to them more and asking questions about the book. I also find I am monitoring my children's TV viewing more closely.
- I tend to look at ratings in TV more. Ask the children more question when reading.
- Viewing how my kids are progressing literally and helping them out more.
- Looking at teaching the youngest at starting to read, I got one book that. looked at DISTAR.
- Became more involved in what we're reading. Kid became more interested in story time. Talked more about the stories.
- Always interested to learn new skills and information.
- Made me think.
- Helped me stop and view our family lifestyle and improve on it.
- Haven't given much thought to ratings in the past.
- I find that I now censor the children's TV watching more.

- *Ratings - checking for ratings if correct.*

Exchange Of Ideas

- *Interesting to hear other people's views.*
- *I liked learning everybody's ideas.*
- *Interesting to hear other's views.*
- *Listening to the different views of TV programs.*
- *Gave me a chance to listen to other parents about their experiences.*
- *As they're going through the same as us, I've learnt more in these talks.*