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Parent involvement in a year one in-class reading practice program

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**PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN A YEAR ONE
IN-CLASS READING PRACTICE PROGRAM**

By

Sheelagh Tillotson

**A Thesis submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements of the Award of**

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USE OF THESIS

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

ABSTRACT

Parents play a crucial role in their children's literacy development, and their influence on early reading attitudes is profound. Many successful programs have been developed in England, US, Australia and New Zealand to involve parents in assisting their children's reading both at home and at school, but research has also shown that there are a number of difficulties associated with instigating classroom-based programs.

The purpose of this study was to investigate an existing, classroom-based reading practice program involving parents and to analyse how and whether it was successful for each participating group: that is parents, students and the teacher. The study examined how the parents, students and teacher perceived the program, what benefits or drawbacks they considered it to have, and the effects that it had on them. Data were collected by means of a questionnaire from 25 parents of children in a Year 1 class of one metropolitan Catholic primary school in Western Australia. Video observations and interviews with 4 participating parents and 6 students were carried out. The 4 parents also held a Focus Group discussion and provided written feedback on the discussion to the researcher. The final element of the data was supplied by the teacher-researcher's field notes.

Data indicated that all parents and children were in favour of the program and considered that the children's reading had benefited as a

result. There were personal benefits to be gained by all participants from their involvement in the program, and parents' motivation for assisting changed over time. Children whose parents were not actively involved accepted the situation without negative feelings. All parents involved in the study used a range of similar feedback and correction strategies, stressing praise, encouragement and sounding out, but some had developed additional helper practices. The data showed, however, that very little discussion took place during reading sessions. Skills developed by parents in the classroom had a carry-over effect on home reading practices. Reading was more highly valued in families where a parent had joined the reading roster, and this was reflected in increased motivation in the children. All children interviewed identified reading daily to a parent as a reason for their improvement in reading.

The study highlighted the value of daily parent involvement in the classroom to ensure regular practice for every child at each individual's pace and level, and to educate parents in effective strategies to use when hearing reading. Although initial instruction was given a need for on-going parent education was identified. With this in mind it is the researcher's intention to hold more regular parent briefings in the future. Evidence also emerged to show that a single class-based program can nurture a sense of mutual support within a school community.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature.

Date.....

July 1998

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To my children Matthew, Beth and Richard I express my gratitude for their understanding and acceptance of the importance of this study to me, and for their practical help with its presentation.

To my long suffering husband David "Thank you" for encouraging, supporting and believing in me during a very difficult year.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background

An important part of a child's first year at school is learning to read and make sense of written language. "Reading is a derived skill in that it builds upon spoken language; the reading process is grafted on to the listening process." (Tunmer & Bowey, 1984, p.152). In order to learn to read children need a certain level of metalinguistic awareness, which is "the ability to reflect on and manipulate the structural features of spoken language" (Tunmer, Pratt & Herriman, 1984; Tunmer, 1990). Children come to school with a range of understandings about the purposes of reading and how reading is carried out. There is often a mismatch between the knowledge and skills children bring to school and school expectations and reading practices. This mismatch may be improved by greater cooperation between parents and schools. Familiarity with the reading and writing practices, and the ways of talking about literacy which are used in school, are critical variables in children's early learning success (LoBianco & Freebody, 1997), which can be influenced by closer understanding between parents and schools.

Following the Plowden Report, Children and their Primary Schools (DES, 1967), carried out in the United Kingdom, which indicated the importance of parental influence on children's attitudes and attainment, many projects were set up to deliberately involve parents in helping their

children to read. Notable amongst these were the Haringey Project (Tizard, Schofield & Hewison, 1982) and the Dagenham Project (Hewison, 1982) in England, but similar studies have been conducted in US (Running Start, Gambrell et al., 1995), New Zealand (Mangere Home and School Project, McNaughton, Glynn & Robinson, 1981) and Australia (SHARE, Turner, 1987). However, all of these investigated the outcomes of parents assisting their own children with reading on a regular basis in their own homes, not in the classroom.

Parental involvement in children's reading can be directly linked to the reading achievement, as defined by the school, of young children, as has been shown in a number of studies of home reading programs (Tizard, Schofield & Hewison, 1982; Hewison, 1982; Turner, 1987; Elliott & Hewison, 1994; Goldenberg, 1989; Miller, 1986; Rathbone & Graham, 1981 and Tracey, 1995). There is a significant body of evidence which states the importance of parents as literacy models (Ollila & Mayfield, 1992; Bus, van Ijzendoorn & Pellegrini, 1995; Miller, 1996), and which acknowledges the value of making parents aware of how to listen to children reading and provide appropriate feedback (Builder, 1982; Cairney, Ruge, Buchanan, Lowe & Munsie, 1995). Where schools have worked together with parents, improvements have been achieved in terms of children's reading, and in greater understanding between parents and teachers (LoBianco & Freebody, 1997, p150).

Although active parent help in schools has a long-standing tradition, the areas of involvement have, in many instances, remained organisational, such as fundraising, or as practical helpers in activities like cooking or sewing (Cairney & Munsie, 1992a). In the teaching of reading many schools have invited parent participation, but on a 'help your child at home' basis only. However, one of the problems with home reading programs is that the frequency of practice is often low with the quality of feedback to children variable.

The importance of exposure to, and practice in, reading is clearly illustrated by Stanovich (1986) in his explanation of Matthew Effects. He states a direct correlation between a child's reading practice, and his or her ability to read well. The more children read, the better readers they become; the less they read, the wider the gap becomes between them and their more literate peers. Children need consistent practice in order to develop early reading skills (Stanovich, 1986). Regular assisted practice in reading at home has been shown to facilitate improvement in children's reading and encourage greater interest in literacy by the parents (Hewison, 1982; Gambrell, Amasi, Xie & Heland, 1995). Regular assisted practice at school has resulted in significant improvements in children's reading speed and accuracy, listening and reading comprehension, verbal efficiency and decoding skills (Shany & Beimiller, 1995).

When considering the implications of these findings on the teaching of young readers, regular daily practice within the classroom is one way of

achieving positive outcomes. However it requires the assistance of additional adult listeners. Shany & Beimiller (1995, p393) proposed that the listener role "does not require a highly trained educator" and therefore the teacher role can be supplemented in this task by alternative people. The most appropriate people for this may be the children's own parents. In the process of reading practice the students should gain vital experience, the parents should gain a deeper knowledge of the reading process and how to help their children, and the teacher should be able to oversee and monitor the progression of individual practice within the classroom reading program.

For children to become successful readers an environment in which home and school practices are mutually supportive has been shown to be helpful (Breen et al., 1994; Successful Intervention, Curriculum Corporation, 1996), where what the learner brings in language and literacy is recognised and built on in a two way process. Parental involvement in the classroom can offer the opportunity of regular guided practice to the students and instruction and modelling to their parents in how to offer assistance in line with classroom teaching.

In approaching this study the teacher/researcher holds the view that a structured, progressive phonetically based reading program can form an effective part of a broader more literature based literacy program. Whilst reviewing and discussing a wide range of parent involvement models, the researcher's particular perspective is that parent helpers can positively

assist children's reading development by following a regular pattern of in-class support with oral reading practice, as prescribed by the class teacher.

Theoretical Framework

Reading has at various times been taught with strong emphasis on one or other of two main theories. The 'bottom-up' model stresses word recognition and decoding in the early stages, and the 'top-down' model promotes the notion that meaning is derived from the text by prediction and confirmation together with reorganisation of the reader's prior knowledge (Lipson & Wixson, 1997).

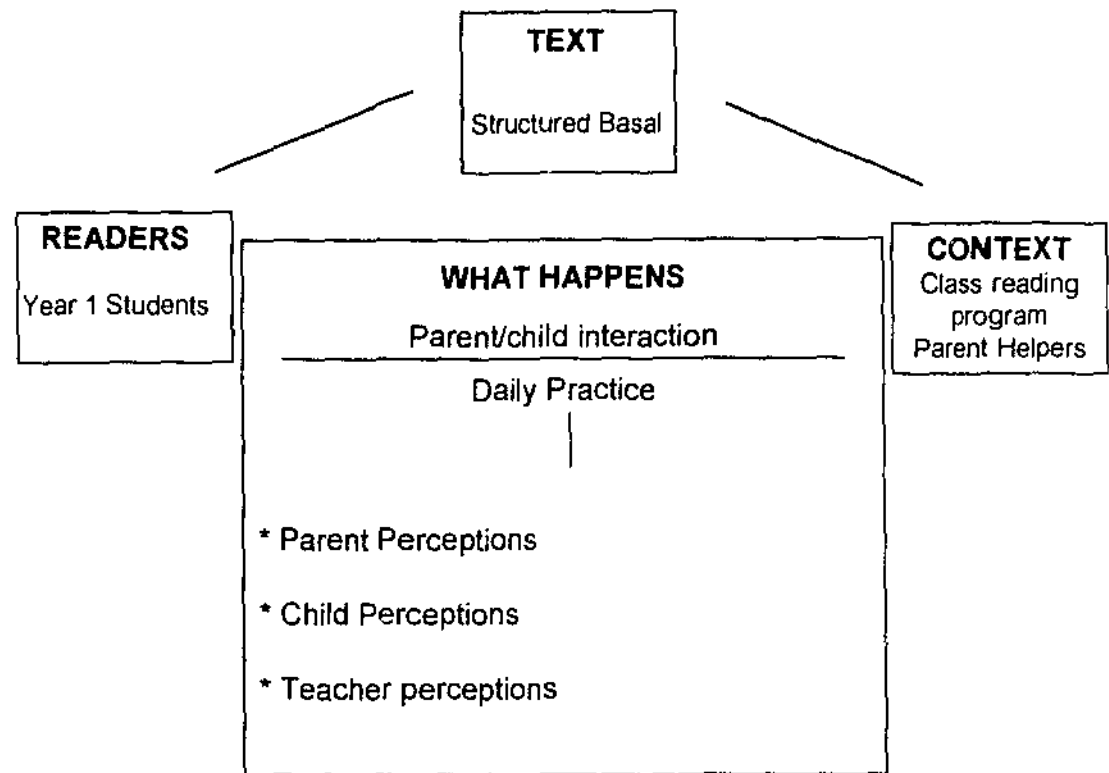
The interactive model, however takes into account that the process of reading and comprehending text is highly complex involving the interaction of many factors. There are specific decoding skills required to identify the written words, there are literacy conventions to be understood and utilised, there is prior knowledge to be activated and used to enhance comprehension and there is socio-cultural experience within which to orientate the meaning and message of the text. The underlying theoretical bases for the proposed research are the Interactive Reading Process and the Interactive Model of Reading (Lipson & Wixson 1991; Kibby, 1995), and Matthew Effects in Reading (Stanovich 1986). Kibby (1995, p5) defines the process of reading comprehension as "an interaction between aspects of the reader, and aspects of the text within a situational context for reading".

The Parent Helper Reading Practice Program which is investigated in this study illustrates this interaction by providing:

- i. A situational context: parents come into the classroom where reading is valued, and provide a purpose and an audience for the children's reading
- ii. Aspects of the text: word recognition and word meaning demands, prior knowledge requirements, demands of language style and text organisation. Instructional assistance is provided by the parents.
- iii. Aspects of the reader: word recognition and decoding skills, prior knowledge of syntax and semantics, prior knowledge of content, understanding of concepts of print and text organisation, and motivation and interest.

The child, the parent and the text interact and synthesise to form the reading experience. This research seeks to determine what happens from the perspectives of the parents, the children and the teacher (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Theoretical Model of the Parent Helper Reading Practice Program



(Adapted from Lipson & Wixson, 1991.)

Significance of The Study

Much of the research into parents helping their children's reading has been focussed on children with reading problems (Ashton, Stoney & Hannon 1986; Goldenberg 1989; Shany & Beimiller 1995). There would seem to be a dearth of data pertaining to average learners. Some studies have been set up to involve parents in Whole Language literacy activities in classrooms (Hooper 1994), but very few findings are available in the area of consistent parent participation in the hearing of young children's individual oral reading at school.

The evidence suggests that parents can be a valuable resource to teachers of early readers (Stierer, cited in Bloom 1987; Cairney & Munsie, 1995), and of benefit to the readers themselves. What still needs to be investigated is what happens when they are used regularly in the classroom to listen to children's oral reading and what are the perceived effects of this interaction. To date data have been rarely sought from representatives of all participant groups involved in reading programs.

This study will contribute detailed information from parents, students and the teacher about their different perceptions of the parent helper role, and its value to the children's reading in a regular Year One class.

Purpose of The Study

In order to develop as readers, young children need regular practice (Stanovich 1986). The practice needs to be monitored and feedback given (Campbell, 1981 & 1983), and may be most valuable when it is supervised by the teacher. However this is often not possible on a daily basis, and previous research has shown that parents can, with adequate instruction, effectively monitor children's oral reading and thus provide them with the opportunity to progress more rapidly with reading (Bloom 1987).

In my experience as a Year 1 teacher I have found it difficult to monitor each child's daily reading. I do not often have time myself to listen to thirty children read individually every day. In order for all children's

reading to be heard on a daily basis I initiated an in-class reading practice program involving parents.

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of the process and perceived effects of using parents in my classroom to listen to children reading.

Regular guided practice using texts containing high frequency words, is considered by some researchers to be essential to children becoming confident and competent early readers (Ediger, 1994; Shany & Beimiller, 1995). For this reason, in addition to a wide variety of Whole Language, whole-class teaching strategies, individual reading is organised in my class using a phonetically based structured basal reading scheme. This takes place for about an hour every morning after a short whole-class lesson, and there is an explanation of the language tasks which are to be undertaken whilst parents are hearing reading (see Appendix 13). Parents position themselves in isolated spots around the room or on the adjoining verandah. The students settle to work on their language activities and the parent helpers call them one-by-one to read, recording the progress made each day. Parents are asked to divide the available time up so that they can hear 6 children's reading, thus allocating approximately 10 minutes to each student. Each child progresses through the sequential texts at his or her own rate, developing the 'building blocks' of technique which will help them to grow as a skilled reader. The program requires daily practice at home,

and reading to an adult every day at school. Parent volunteers fulfil this in-class role.

This study seeks to establish a clearer understanding, from various perspectives, of what the different participants do, what the process achieves, and how it impacts on the children, the parents and myself as teacher. Previous studies have rarely included the opinions or insights of the parents and children involved in adult/child reading programs (Cole, 1996, p.29), so in this study deliberate action was taken to include these perspectives. Deductions can then be made as to whether it is perceived to fulfil its purpose of catering for the needs of all the children to practice oral reading regularly.

Possible Outcomes:

Parents who participate may become better equipped to assist with their own children's home reading, and may engage in more home literacy practices than formerly (Cairney et al., 1995).

Parents should become more familiar with classroom life, and might, therefore, feel more relaxed and involved in the school community (Cole, 1996).

Children whose parents do not hear their reading regularly at home should be able to experience valuable one-to-one attention and see reading as valued by adults other than the teacher.

Children should become more confident, risk-taking oral readers by frequent reading-aloud practice to a variety of adults.

The teacher should benefit by feeling confident that each student is receiving vital individual attention to their reading every day.

These possible outcomes are examined in the Discussion chapter within the context of the descriptive data collected from the questionnaires, interviews and detailed observations.

Plan of The Study

The remainder of this study is set out in accordance with the following outline.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature associated with parental involvement with young children learning to read. It commences with a discussion on the importance of parental influence in children's learning and a resume of projects which have been designed to involve parents in home reading activities to consolidate classroom teaching, and in school based programs. This is followed by a description of the different models of reading instruction used in primary schools, and a discourse on Basal Reading Schemes. There is a description of the qualitative research

methods used in the study and the chapter concludes with a summary and the Research Questions.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 opens with a description of the subjects and the circumstances of the study. A description is then given of the five qualitative data collection methods used and the measures taken to ensure reliability and validity of the information gathered. This is followed by details of data collection procedures and an overview of the data analysis methods which were used. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the research and the ethical considerations which have had to be made.

Chapter 4

This chapter describes procedures used to carry out data analysis and the results of that data analysis. It addresses each set of data separately and in turn and concludes each section with a summary of the most significant findings. The chapter concludes with a resume of the major findings from the teacher/researcher's field notes, and personal reflections.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the results of all the data collected in relation to each of the research questions.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 presents the major conclusions drawn from this research, followed by an acknowledgment of the limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the implications of the findings from this study for classroom practice and for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The development of children's language and acquisition of literacy skills are areas of intense interest and debate amongst both educators and parents. Reading is seen by many parents as the primary focus in the early years of school, and the child's level of success in this is often felt to be a measure of general achievement (Lipson, 1989). Many parents want to take an interest in their child's reading, and many become actively involved in assisting them. This review will examine the literature concerning the importance of parents in early literacy development, and the reading development of young children, with particular reference to parent interest in listening to their children read. It will detail a range of parent participation programs and discuss the matter of parent training. Models of reading relevant to this study will be outlined and the concept of using a structured basal scheme discussed. The review will conclude with a discussion of the theoretical basis of the qualitative research methods used during the study.

Parent Involvement in Children Learning to Read

Learning to communicate is an interactive and social process requiring contributions from both the child and the care giver. Wells (1985, p.415) says that, "In the course of development, each child reconstructs

language afresh from the evidence that is made available to him or her.” He stresses the “important contribution of parents and other caretakers. They provide the scaffolding within which this construction takes place”.

As children develop the ability to reflect on and manipulate both the sound system and the grammatical system of language, that is they develop phonemic and syntactic awareness, they develop important prerequisites to learning to read and write. In order to develop literacy skills children need to be able to map a set of symbols to their spoken language (Goswami & Bryant 1990).

The rate and extent of language and literacy development are closely linked to a number of environmental factors such as, frequency and quality of child-adult verbal interactions, type and quality of feedback to questions and observations, the availability of literacy materials in the home (Ollila & Mayfield, 1992) the level of phonemic awareness (Adams, 1990) and the frequency of story-telling or story-book reading by adults (Wells, 1985; Miller, 1996). Indeed Eastman (1989) contends that,

“Who succeeds and who fails at school is being decided outside the school, primarily by family factors. Family factors outweigh school factors in determining educational success”. (p. 19)

This does not assume a deficit in the home, but rather a mismatch between home and school. Children's pre-school literacy experiences are unique, and consequently they approach their first year of formal schooling with individual levels of knowledge of literacy and language. At school they are immersed in a different and challenging literacy environment, which, for some, will enmesh well with what is done at home, but for many will represent a totally new and conflicting set of values and expectations (Miller, 1996). A community in which "reading and writing are peripheral and peripherally valued activities" is described by Heath (1983). Due to these prevailing attitudes children living there would enter school with little experience of basic literary conventions, as defined by the school. In the introduction to Literacy in its Place (Breen et al., 1994) it is stated that "Family literacy practices are embedded within a pattern of class relations and other social practices which open up or close down educational possibilities for individual children." If reading and writing school-like practices are valued and modelled at home children are more likely to succeed in the classroom because input from parents and teachers would be consistent (Phillips & McNaughton, 1990). Access to literature in the pre-school years is a vital determinant of reading success in school. Bus, van Ijzendoorn & Pellegrini (1995) maintain that the age at which young children begin to be read to by adults is a particularly strong predictor of language skills, and that "parent-preschooler reading is related to language growth, emergent literacy, and reading achievement ". (p.1).

For over thirty years the importance of parental influence on children's academic development has been recognised. The Plowden Report (DES, 1967) stated that parents have a strong effect on their children's attitudes and attainment at school, and argued for the concept of partnership between home and school. The Better Schools Report (DES, 1985) later advocated that more schools should take a wider view of how parents can be involved in education. Both past and recent research has consistently reported that, whatever their background, the vast majority of parents are intensely interested in their children's education; in particular, their reading (Plowden, 1967; Hewison, 1982; Bloom, 1987; Cairney et al., 1995). For a variety of social, cultural or economic reasons they may not manifest this concern openly, but within parents lies a rich resource for the better development of children.

"Parental interest is a more potent influence on children's learning success than parents' education background, parents' occupation, parents' cultural background or family income level."

(Snodgrass cited in Cole, 1996, p.19).

Cole (1996) maintains that active parent involvement can make the crucial difference to children's learning outcomes:

"When parents begin to see themselves as integral to their children's learning the benefits are widespread.

Parent participation has the potential to break the cycle of failure and set in motion a cycle of success". (p. 31)

The importance of a parent's self perception as a predictor of a child's early achievement at school was stated by Dunn (1981):

"It appears to be most critical for children's achievement at school-entry age that their parents perceive themselves as educators of their children". (p. 252)

How and why parents should be involved more closely in education is discussed by Cairney and Munsie (1992a) who outline a variety of levels on which this can and does occur. These range from helping tasks such as covering books, to serving on the School Board, and encompass many ways of supporting their individual children. Although Breen et al. (1994) and Cairney et al. (1995) looked at how parents and schools could be mutually supportive of children, and how each could adapt to develop children's literacy, their studies took a somewhat different view of the role of parents and family from that taken in this study, so that view of literacy is not investigated further.

Home Reading Programs

One long-established method of linking home and school is through the introduction of home reading programs. Cairney and Munsie (1992a)

and Cairney et al. (1995) describe a range of programs which have been used to involve parents in their children's reading at home. These include Paired Reading designed by Morgan (1976) and refined by Tizard, Schofield & Hewison (1982) and Topping & Wolfendale (1985); Read With Me (DEET, 1992) devised by Susan Hill in South Australia; Reading Recovery Parent Pack (La Trobe University); Parent Tutors Program (Max Kemp); Making a Difference (Furniss, 1991), Parents Sharing Books (Indiana University, 1993) and Parent And Child Tutoring (PACT Program) designed by Phillip Builder (Builder, 1982).

Reading is an area of constant concern amongst parents, and one in which a great deal of research has been done to investigate the value of parental help. Carbo & Cole (1995) emphasise that "good readers spend time practising reading", and this has been considered by many practitioners to be where parent assistance can be used to advantage. Eckermann (1994) recognises the value of using any available parent input in affording children the opportunity for increased "opportunity for small-group and individual work, thereby creating more effective teaching-learning situations." (p.176)

Granfield & Smith (1995) state that:

"Parents are the ones who have the clear ability to make the connection between what is being taught at school and what is practiced at home."

However, the reality is that some parents are willing and able to assist their children in practical ways, and some, for a variety of reasons, are not. One factor this study will investigate is whether the involvement of parent helpers in the classroom may have any positive or negative effects on children whose parents do not participate or who do not encourage reading practice at home.

The involvement of parents in reading activities and the value of this experience have been widely researched. This section of the literature review will examine a range of studies covering parent responses, forms of parent intervention in home and school reading, and parent training programs.

Cohen (1979), studied 50 parents of five-year-olds as they started school, investigating their initial academic expectations for their children and to what extent these were shown to have been fulfilled eight months later. They studied the parents' interactions with their children over three 'Rs' activities at home and found that their style of response coincided, in the majority of cases, with the child's level of achievement at school. These responses fell into four categories: *child led* for confident achievers; *gentle parent push* for those who needed parents to take the initiative; *strong parent push* for weaker children and *others*. The parents described their own reactions to helping their children as being strongly motivated by the behaviour of their children (p.193).

A substantial number of studies has been conducted into the effects of parental assistance on children's reading achievement. The Haringey Project in London showed clear evidence that seven-and eight-year-old children who read regularly to their parents made greater improvements in reading, on school based measures, than children who did not; and even than children who were withdrawn from class for extra tuition (Hewison & Tizard, 1980; Tizard, Schofield and Hewison, 1982). The Belfield Project (Jackson and Hannon, 1981) and the Dagenham Project (Hewison, 1982) produced similar findings with five-year-olds, and six and seven-year-olds respectively. Hewison concluded from her findings that:

"the factor which showed the strongest relationship to reading ability, when taken singly, was whether or not the mother claimed that she regularly heard her child read: children who were said to be heard read regularly were very much better readers than others who were reported not to be given this kind of help." (p.158).

It is possible that parents who value literacy, and who model reading practices in the home, are more likely to encourage their children to read to them at home. In other words, the previous studies did not control for such variables in the home environment. However, in a controlled study, Parents Encourage Pupils (PEP) in Pennsylvania, parents of an experimental group of middle school students were encouraged to tutor their children in reading at home and diary the activities completed (Shuck, Ulsh & Platt, 1983).

Results after one year showed a significant increase in the children's reading achievement over a control group who had received no specific additional parent input. The researchers concluded: "The overriding message of the investigation is.... Parents can produce significant, positive results for their children at a very small response cost to the educator. Teacher-parent involvement can increase student achievement" (p.527). Similarly the Running Start home reading program in the United States, resulted not only in improved reading performance, but also in parents buying more books for their children (Gambrell et al., 1995). Miller (1986), Goldenberg (1989) and Tracey (1995) also detail positive findings relating the frequency of reading to parents to increased reading achievement.

In Australia the SHARE programme at Doveton, Victoria (Turner 1987), developed from an assumption that two-way communication between parents and teachers is important to students' reading achievement. This has been replicated by other schools, notably in WA by Gibbs Street Primary School (cited in Breen et al., 1994). Cairney & Munsie (1995) describe the 1990 Talk To A Literacy Learner (TTALL) program in New South Wales which focussed on strategies parents can use to interact with their children in literacy activities. It resulted in positive outcomes for the students, their parents, the school and the wider community. More recently the Reading Coach Training Program described in Successful Intervention (Curriculum Corporation, 1996) was found to result in a "noticeable improvement in the self-concept and reading development of students who worked with the parent coaches" (p.30).

In New Zealand the Mangere Home and School Project (McNaughton, Glynn & Robinson, 1981) examined children's reading performance at home and at school when parents participated in home reading activities. Following on from studies by Bronfenbrenner (1974), Chilman (1976) and Donachy (1979) cited by McNaughton, Glynn and Robinson (1981), into the effects of training parent listeners, the researchers compared results from consecutive programs where parents were initially untrained, and then trained, in specific skills to assist their children. Results indicated a positive relationship between parent participation and improvements in children's reading achievement when the parents had been assisted in developing tutoring skills.

All of the programs described so far were home-based reading programs designed to reinforce what was happening in the classroom, or to give extra assistance to remedial readers.

School Based Reading Programs

Several other initiatives which have been taken, and extensively evaluated, including the Parent Tutor Program (Windsor South), Working Together (Altona Meadows PS), Towards Real Independence, Parents and Children Together (Gosford SESC) and Parents As Reading Tutors (St. Clare's School, Thomastown) are described by Cairney et al.(1995). All of these programs include clear parent guidelines, and in some instances training courses. Most of them involve direct parent participation in reading

in classrooms, a strategy also investigated in a Whole Language context by Hooper (1994). Classroom participation and a general 'open door' policy between schools and their parents is seen by Widlake (1987) as the reason for a raising of both reading standards and children's perceptions of reading.

Research shows that parent involvement is acknowledged as desirable in some form by the majority of teachers and parents (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Bartlett, Hall & Neale, 1984; Bloom, 1987; Cairney & Munsie, 1992b; Cairney et al., 1995), but the practicality of having parents in classrooms has problems for both parents and children. There are teachers who resist interference in their professional domain and parents who lack the confidence to get involved (Cairney & Munsie 1992a). Bloom (1987) clearly outlines many of the arguments for and against parents being in classrooms as revealed in Steierer's Parental Help With Reading In Schools Project (1985, cited in Bloom 1987). She concludes that some schools involve parents because reading is so important that it needs all the help it can get, and others do not involve parents because reading is so important that it should not be entrusted to anyone other than a trained teacher. Cole (1996, p.32) lists some of the more common obstacles, from both teacher and parent perspectives, to partnerships between home and school, but maintains that, whilst they are *real*, they can be overcome and "learning communities all around the world are working to solve these problems."

Whether parent help in class can be educationally valuable, as many have no formal training in education, must be considered. In his review of

teacher practices while listening to children reading, Campbell (1983, p.157) identified wait-time for self correction, grapho-phonetic, semantic and syntactic cuing, and the provision of positive and negative feedback as effective and widely used strategies. He describes the teacher as responding in a non-ritualised way, actively diagnosing and teaching whilst interacting with the child (Campbell, 1981). Most parents are not professionally trained to do this, but as Bloom (1987) points out, "where the teacher and parent helper are collaborating closely with good feedback, consultation and understanding, they will be reinforcing the same model" of correction and response. Whilst stressing that parents must have a "theory of learning" and an understanding of how to assist effectively, Kemp (1992, p.202) proposes that they may, in fact, be the best people to listen to reading, as they know, and are most sensitive to their children. One of the problems associated with the teacher listening to reading is the small amount of uninterrupted time able to be devoted to any one child. For example, in a study of teachers listening to reading in a normal classroom environment, it was found that the average effective time span for a teacher hearing a child read without interruption was only 30 seconds (Southgate et al., 1981, cited in Bloom, 1987). During individualised reading sessions there is the opportunity for the parent helper to give sustained, undivided attention to the child for considerably longer periods of time. Children thereby also receive more positive verbal reinforcement and praise, together with emphasis on correct reading which can act as an incentive to children to succeed (Burdett, 1986). Bloom notes that in many schools successful outcomes

were being obtained where children were reading far more to volunteers than to the teacher.

As the parents should not be substituting for the role of the classroom teacher, the reading materials used should be self-teaching and/or easy to use. Structured and controlled schemes are ideal for this purpose (Bloom 1987; Ediger 1994) and will be discussed later in this chapter.

Parent Training

Parents' perceptions of themselves as educators, or educator helpers of their children are crucial to children's achievement in the early years of school (Dunn, 1981; Cole, 1996). In order to foster these perceptions and to optimise the involvement of parents in children's reading, training in how to assist would seem desirable, and researchers report both teacher and parent demand for parent education in this area (Miller, 1986; Cairney & Munsie, 1992b; Bloom, 1987).

In his review of over 40 home reading studies Toomey (1993) differentiates between *parent listening* schemes and *parent training* schemes (p.223) and suggests that, when parents are given training in specific strategies to use when hearing their children read, the resulting improvement in reading achievement is greater. Whilst acknowledging the results of parent listening studies carried out in Britain (Ashton, Stoney & Hannon, 1986; Knapman, 1985; Gaines, 1989), he outlines three main types

of training schemes: the behavioural approach; pause, prompt, praise (PPP), and paired reading. All of these have been found to bring about significant gains in reading ability in studies conducted in Britain (Scott & Ballard, 1983; Topping & Whiteley, 1989; Topping & Lindsay, 1992) and Australasia (Fry, 1977; McNaughton, Glynn & Robinson, 1981; O'Connor, Glynn & Tuck, 1987). Other successful results using various forms of parent instruction have been described by Builder (1982), Shuck Ulsh & Platt (1983), Bartlett, Hall & Neale (1984), Counsel, Dominic & Portesi (1985), Hannon (1986), Jones & Rowley (1990) and Rubert, (1994). Although the majority of parents want to support their children's reading, particularly in the early years, it is not to be assumed that they automatically know what to do, and therefore parent education of some sort would seem advisable (Rubert, 1994). This instruction could then help to ensure that children are receiving similar input at home as at school, as the effectiveness of parent helper strategies "may depend on the extent to which they reinforce the help that is given in school" (Nicholson, 1980 p.20).

This area has been addressed in Australia in recent years through workshop and training sessions designed to teach parents how to assist their children's literacy development in line with evolving school practices. The First Steps program (Ministry of Education, WA, 1991) adopted by many schools in WA and other states, incorporates a Parents as Partners element whereby schools in-service parents to familiarise them with new teaching and learning strategies being introduced to their children. The Parent Factor (Australian Parents Council, 1996) is a program of self-

education in early literacy learning designed for parents to present to other parents under the guidance of a school adviser. Both initiatives have produced positive results in heightening parent cooperation and assistance between home and school (LoBianco & Freebody, 1997)

Although numerous studies of parental help for children's reading have been reviewed, there was little information recorded that compared parents' perceptions of parental involvement in classrooms from either a participant's or a non-participant's perspective.

Further, despite searching through an extensive range of research projects into children's reading and parental involvement, one element that seemed to be predominantly missing was the children's perspective. Few of the studies I reviewed interviewed children, and none investigated the differential responses of students whose parents helped in school and those whose parents did not. This is supported by Cole (1996):

"It is interesting that when exploring the issue of parent involvement in children's learning there is little record of researchers having surveyed or interviewed children."
(p. 29)

Cairney et al. (1995) detail some responses gathered from parent and student participants in a number of reading projects but the circumstances and criteria set for these studies were very different from those under

investigation in this study. They mainly related to middle or upper primary school students with established reading or socio-economic disadvantages, most of whom were working apart from the classroom program with volunteers other than their own parents. Often the child was working with the same adult for quite long sessions for a specified number of weeks (St. Clare's, Thomastown; Balaklava PS; Mt. Gambier and Mansfield Park).

In the program described in the current study all of the Year 1 students are involved and they read to a variety of different parents including, for some, their own. They are beginning readers without any recorded history of poor achievement, and are all given the same opportunity to read to volunteers regardless of their ability. These aspects are taken into account in this study and contribute to its significance within this field of research.

Models of Reading Instruction

Children's reading development is the focus of the parental help programs. It is pertinent, therefore, to examine the theoretical basis of reading development, and consequently methods of instruction based on that theory.

Reading development has tended to be polarised between the 'bottom up' and 'top down' approaches (Lipson & Wixson, 1997). The first relies upon a linear progression through a series of interdependent skills,

and has a heavy emphasis on phonology and the decoding of words. It "perceives the meaning of a text as residing solely in the text" (Kibby, 1995, p.4). The second "conceives of reading as an extension of the language acquisition process" (Kibby, 1995, p.4), where prior knowledge within the reader is used to make meaning from the text. There is merit in both of these but Rumelhart (1977, cited in Lipson & Wixson, 1997) defined reading as an "interactive process" during which readers use both decoding and in-head knowledge simultaneously and sequentially. Interaction with the text depends on the context and the reason for reading. This theory has been expanded by Kibby (1995, p.5) who states that "the process of reading comprehension is an interaction between aspects of the reader and aspects of the text within a situational context for reading".

Whilst supporting the benefits of the top-down model, Lipson and Wixson (1991) state that,

"... it is difficult for this model to accommodate the behaviours of young students just beginning to read. There are many times when their reading is text-driven because they are unfamiliar with both the text and the content". (p. 8)

They describe the benefits to beginning readers of being able to decode:

"Recognition of reliable sound-symbol patterns is useful, particularly when children are first learning to read, because knowledge of a few sounds and generalisations can be used to identify many new words" (p50).

In a study of young children learning to read, it was found that children use incomplete letter-sound knowledge, and knowledge of similar words in a process of analogy to work out unknown words (Goswami & Bryant 1990). Developing on from this, "children have to become able to break words up into sounds so that they can take advantage of the alphabetic system, in which the 44 or so phonemes of the English language are represented by the 26 letters of the alphabet" (Rohl & Milton, 1993).

Children need to be able to decode, but they also need to be able to make meaning from a text. Any model of reading development needs to take these factors into account as in the Interactive model.

A recent model of what good readers do, not how reading develops, was developed by Freebody. When investigating the conditions necessary and sufficient for good reading performance Freebody (1992, p.49) argues that, "a successful reader needs to develop and sustain the resources to play four related roles":

code-breaker:	able to understand sound/symbol relationships, punctuation markers and text conventions
text-participant:	able to understand and compose meaningful text, use grammar and identify word meanings
text-user:	able to understand the purpose of a particular text and its cultural or social context
and text-analyst:	able to understand the author's message and the orientation of a text, and to ask such questions as " <i>What does this text do for me?</i> " or " <i>How is it trying to influence me?</i> "

Regular assisted oral-reading practice should help develop the first two of these roles in very young readers, as decoding attempts are monitored, and interaction with the text encouraged by listener responses. The remaining two roles may perhaps also be developed during the early stages through questioning and discussion with the listener.

The debate over whether and when to teach phonics has persisted for over sixty years (Chall, 1967) and feelings amongst educators are still strongly divided despite a mass of research evidence which has been compiled on the subject. One of the major dilemmas facing teachers of

beginning readers is whether to withhold connected text from students until they have sufficient grasp of grapheme-phoneme correspondences to decode it, or challenge them by immersion in meaningful, interesting text from the start (Adams, 1990). The conclusion drawn by some experts is that a combination of the two is desirable (Resnick, 1979; Adams, 1990), but that an understanding of basic decoding skills is essential from the earliest stage. Historically, this factor was stressed in a discussion of 'The Great Debate' by Chall (1967):

"Early stress on code learning not only produces better word recognition and spelling, but also makes it easier for the child to eventually read with understanding." (p.83)

This assertion was repeated by Chall twelve years later in a review of contemporary research (Chall, 1979), and was supported by Resnick (1979):

"As a matter of routine practice, we need to include systematic code-oriented instruction in the primary grades, no matter what else is done. This is the only place in which we have any clear evidence for any particular practice. We cannot afford to ignore that evidence." (p. 329)

Despite the considerable research and changes in educational thinking which have taken place during the past two decades, and the strong tendency towards 'Whole Language' methods of teaching, current thinking is again moving towards the promotion of phonics instruction. Research by Gough (1983); Perfetti (1985) and Stanovich (1980, 1984, 1986, 1988) cited in Stanovich (1991) explored the importance of phonemic awareness and the existence of a causal link between phonological ability and reading skill (p.22). Tunmer and Bowey (1984) and Tunmer (1990) report that "to develop phonological recoding skills, beginning readers must be able to analyse the internal structure of spoken words to discover how phonemes are related to graphemes" (Tunmer, 1990 p.111). On the basis of their research Liberman and Shankweiler (1991) maintain that it is essential for successful readers to have phonemic awareness. They found that young children can be trained in phonemic awareness to assist with the development of both reading and writing (p.8) and recommend that phonological instruction should be fully integrated into all methods of reading instruction (p.14).

The importance of linking the phonics taught in lessons with the phonic structures present in reading texts was highlighted by Juel and Roper/Schneider (1985), Juel and Beck (1992) and the National Academy of Education's Commission on Reading (1985, cited in Adams, 1990 p.282). This connection may significantly increase the effectiveness of the reading program by enabling the reader to continually reinforce and internalise the different aspects of their instruction. Juel and Roper/Schneider identified a

considerable mismatch between phonic lessons and texts in some of the most popular basal reading schemes which are not phonetically based. These texts may not always be appropriate to be used where the teaching emphasis is on phonics, as they may not provide sufficient examples of the particular graphophonic relationship being studied.

Basal Reading Schemes

According to The Penguin Macquarie Dictionary of Australian Education (1989),

"Basal reading programs are used to teach reading skills in schools through the use of a series of textbooks graded on the basis of difficulty and style features of the approach are control of vocabulary and strict sequencing of the materials. A program often reflects a particular theoretical approach to language development." (p.47)

This is the description of a structured basal reader which I use in this study. Typical of this type of text are the Happy Venture Reading Books by Schonell (1971) in which the introduction and repetition of a controlled vocabulary can be clearly seen:

I see a big tree.

The ball is in the tree.

Jack will bring the ball.

Here is the ball.

It is a big big ball.

(“Fluff and Nip”. Happy Venture Introductory Book, 1971)

Within the quoted definition, which is broadly concurrent with Rodenborn & Washburn (1974), Page & Thomas (1977) and Huson & Postlethwaite (1985), there is also scope for enormous variety in text styles and structures. There is also a wide range of interpretations within the more recent literature about what sorts of texts constitute basals. Referring to an International Reading Association convention review of “major publishers’ basal reading programs” Vacca, Vacca and Gove (1991) state that major changes have occurred to include texts by award-winning authors. Reading series are being offered which cover a range from the traditional to those described by their publishers as ‘Whole Language’ programs (p355). Basal readers have developed considerably over the last 15 to 20 years from being highly structured with a tightly controlled release of new words through the sequenced books, to a more literature-oriented program of texts which use a broader, less sequential and more challenging vocabulary (Hoffman et al., 1994). Within this study these will be referred to as Reading Schemes. An example of this type of text is Story Box (Rigby, pub. 1980):

"I want some bread!" roared the giant.

"Get me some bread, or I'll hit you with my bommy-knocker."

So the people ran and ran and got the giant some bread.

(The Hungry Giant p2-3, Cowley, 1980)

The format and presentation of materials has changed from two or three-colour pictures to full-colour illustrated readers and texts in Big Book format for shared book experience. In order to extend and consolidate reading a range of additional materials and activities, together with lesson-planning suggestions, and sets of blackline masters is usually available with each basal series or reading scheme. These can assist the teacher in delivering interesting and varied lessons. Basal instruction can be further expanded and integrated to provide a comprehensive program adapted to the needs of all levels within the class (Winograd, Wixson & Lipson, 1989).

With so much change having taken place, and the process of evolution continuing, it is important to closely examine and learn from the results which are obtained from research and classroom experience (Hoffman et al., 1994). There are many basal series and other reading schemes which have been used by teachers over many years that, in teachers' experience, have been effective in aiding children's reading development. There would seem to be a strong case for retaining such successful schemes in current teaching (McCallum, 1988).

The problem for the teacher of finding resources which beginning readers can read in the early stages when their sight vocabulary is so restricted, is highlighted by Bridge (1989). One element of basals and some reading schemes that has contributed to their success is the provision of repetition within the texts to try to address this factor. Practice and repetition are essential elements in the mastery of reading fluency (Schonell, 1972; Allington, 1977; Resnick, 1979; Boyce, 1981; Reitsma, 1988; Adams, 1990; Shany & Biemiller, 1995). Together they help a reader to develop automaticity, based on the principle that tasks become easier, requiring less attention, through practice (Samuels, Schermer & Reinking, 1992). There are two quite different and distinct ways in which these can be accomplished through the choice of reading materials. Reinforcement of the restricted, often phonetically-based vocabulary of traditional basals like Happy Venture is achieved through frequent use of the same words juxtaposed in closely sequenced sentences. Basal texts which controlled the difficulty level of new words introduced in order to increase the success rate of word identification during reading practice were used by Shany & Biemiller (1995) in their study of students with reading difficulties. In the literature-based schemes, practice and repetition are promoted through the re-reading of the repeated and rhyming text. The choice of a traditional structured basal or a literature based scheme will reflect the teacher's underlying philosophy of teaching reading: essentially whether he/she believes in a Phonetic or a Whole Language approach. Some teachers use both approaches which would be congruent with aspects of the Interactive Model. Whatever the preference, basals, interpreted in the following quotes to include all types of

series and schemes discussed here, can "provide a management system for coordinating reading instruction.....they help translate research into practice, responding to changes in theory, and provide on the job training for teachers" (McCallum, 1988, p.204). They should not, as is suggested in Reading K-7 (Curriculum Branch, WA 1983, p.12), be automatically assumed to be stilted or "boring", but rather as a package designed to address a wide range of reading related skills in a variety of ways (McCallum, 1988).

There seems to be consensus amongst researchers that structured, code-oriented instruction in the earliest stages of learning to read assists in the development of word-recognition skills (Resnick, 1979; Juel, Griffith & Gough, 1986; Adams, 1990). Good decoding skills were found by Guthrie et al. (1976, cited in Resnick, 1979 p.328) to be associated with good comprehension ability; supporting the idea that code-oriented early instruction is likely to be most successful in allaying difficulties in learning to read. These findings provide some support for classroom teachers who choose to incorporate materials which use a structured approach into their early reading program. One view of a structured approach is one which uses regular letter-sound relationships, controls the introduction of new words, uses frequent repetition of those words embodied in familiar phrases in a variety of contexts (Schonell, 1972), and encourages some direct instruction of specific skills (Juel & Roper/Schneider, 1985).

This clear structure also makes the texts easy to use by non-professional listeners such as parents. The regularity of the format, the systematic building up of the reading vocabulary and the staged progression from one book to the next mean that parents can be given basic instruction in how to use the texts with their children and can quickly become competent in giving effective assistance (Bloom, 1987; Ediger, 1994).

While most present day teachers would not use basals or other structured approaches exclusively, many now see such texts as one aspect of a reading program which also includes literature based reading, language experience and other Whole language approaches (Morrow, 1989). Even so, basals have been effective in both whole class teaching (Juel & Roper/Schneider, 1985) and remediation (O'Connor, Glynn & Tuck, 1987). With the current administrative policy of integrating more children who would formerly have been classified as "remedial" into regular classes, attention must be given to how best to incorporate their needs into the normal classroom program. Consistency of teaching approach and emphasis was identified by Henderson (1993) as being of vital importance when teaching remedial readers. When designing additional, often out of class reading assistance programs, consideration should be given to "channel a failing reader on towards participation as a literate member of his/her peer group" (Henderson, 1993, p.119). Where a basal series or reading scheme is operating in the classroom it can be used to develop meaningful and integrated remediation with the student able to identify with other whole class work. This concurs with the Reading Recovery program (Clay, 1993)

which cites the use of reading scheme texts, such as 'Ready to Read' (New Zealand Ministry of Education) which are in use within regular classrooms (p16).

At the same time, the use of a structured approach as part of a school reading program will not disadvantage average or more advanced children if they are permitted to advance at their own rates, and if plenty of good children's literature is also available for them in the classroom (Ryckman, McCartin & Sebesta, 1976).

Despite the important role which structured basal texts can fulfil in the early teaching of reading they should be seen as one part of a literate classroom environment. Frequent interaction with meaningful and functional materials which provide purposes for reading is also essential to develop in children an understanding of the relevance of reading to their lives (Bridge, 1989).

Qualitative Research Methods

In order to investigate the process of parent in-class help, as perceived by the students, parents and teacher, a qualitative methodology seems to be appropriate. This study used a combination of three methods of research: the Case Study, Survey Research and Participant Observation, which are discussed in the following sections.

The Case Study

According to Isaac and Michael's nine basic methods of research (1971), the study described in this report is suited to a Descriptive Case Study method which describes systematically a situation or area of interest and accurately studies the background, current status and interactions. Stake (1978) denotes a case as being a "bounded system" which is studied, described and leads to a useful understanding and "thorough knowledge of the particular". This can then develop into a form of "natural generalisation" of the findings. He further states that, "this method has been tried and found to be a direct and satisfying way of adding to experience and improving understanding" (p.7). Hakim (1987) considers the Case Study to be the most flexible of all research designs, and "the social research equivalent of the spotlight or the microscope. Using a variety of data collection techniques and methods allows a more rounded, holistic study than with any other design" (p.61). It is suited to the use of open-ended questioning which permits understanding of the respondents' viewpoint, and inquiry by observation (Patton 1990).

Survey Research

Survey research is described as being part of the larger category of enquiry called 'field studies' (Jaeger, 1988). Written questionnaires, telephone interviews and face-to-face interviews are the instruments for data collection, in a situation where an existing scenario is being investigated. The researcher observes and collects information from the subjects without trying to impact on them or to alter anything. Survey

questions need to be structured as unambiguously and unobtrusively as possible to ensure accuracy of responses. Questionnaires generate data about a sample population which can be used to generalise to a greater population. Jaeger (1988) states that the most valuable of the three survey methods is the personal interview. This can reveal both verbal and visual data, the interviewer can better ensure that questions are fully understood and rates of cooperation are usually higher than with other methods. The semi-structured interview is discussed by Burns (1994), Layder (1993), Patton (1990), and Rosnow & Rosenthal (1996), with Layder describing the method as follows:

"In semi-structured interviews the interviewer has a list of topics or questions that he or she wants to cover, although this list will be flexibly adhered to according to the emergent demands of the interview situation. Semi-structured interviews are designed to let interviewees respond in an open-ended way.....

The semi-structured interview is geared to allowing people the freedom to respond in any way they choose. In this manner, the individual's own interpretation and meanings are allowed to surface in the interview data." (p.41).

Participant Observation

Qualitative researchers are concerned primarily with process and they are interested in meaning (Cresswell, 1994). The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection, which involves fieldwork, description of events and circumstances, interviews and inductive reasoning from the data. Much of the information gathered is observational and the researcher may assume the position of participant observer; that is, that he/she observes from inside the group (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1987). Four types of participant observation: *complete observer*, *observer-as-participant*, *participant-as-observer* and *complete participant* have been defined (Gold, 1958 and Junker, 1960 cited in Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). The level of participation chosen by a researcher will be determined by the particular circumstances of the study: e.g. the degree to which anonymity and covert observation is appropriate or desired; the existing relationship, if any, with the subjects; how best to retain the integrity of the context during the observation. Fundamental to participant observation is that it describes how people behave by watching and recording what they do and say in a natural, unstructured and flexible manner (Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1996; Sarantakos, 1993). It elicits from people their definitions of reality, including stories and anecdotes, and thereby indicates what they view as important and unimportant (Burns, 1994). Patton (1990) states that observational data, especially that gained through participant observation, enable a more comprehensive understanding of a program or situation than is possible using only the responses of subjects obtained through interviews. He

indicates six advantages made possible by direct personal involvement:

- i) direct observation enables the evaluator to better understand the context;
- ii) direct experience allows the evaluator to be inductive in approach;
- iii) the observer may see things that would usually go unnoticed;
- iv the observer may discover elements of a situation formerly unrealised by the participants;
- v) aspects may be elucidated through observation which the subjects may be unwilling to discuss in an interview;
- vi) first hand experience of the context allows the observer to utilise personal experience and knowledge to facilitate interpretation and understanding. (p. 203)

Validity

The internal validity of this study will be improved by the use of triangulation, which is described as "the use of two or more methods of data collection" (Burns, 1994, p.272). It is further suggested that in educational research there is justification for the use of at least three different viewpoints in analysis, as each point of the triangle holds a unique position with respect to access to relevant data about a teaching situation. Further, the teacher's perspective is valuable to an understanding of the whole (p.273).

By collecting and analysing different sets of data:

“the evaluator ensures that the final evaluation report reflects the multiple realities of specific social relationships.” (p.273).

In this study triangulation was ensured by analysing and comparing data collected from selected parents and children. A combination of data collection methods was used: video observations were made of selected parents and students during reading roster sessions, face-to-face interviews were conducted with the selected parents and children, a Focus Group discussion took place amongst some parent helpers, and research field notes (Wolf, 1996) were kept by me, as participant observer, to record my perceptions of the program during the data collection period. Further information on parental perceptions of the program was gathered through a survey of all Year One parents.

Conclusions from the Literature

The substantial body of literature on the subject of parental help in children's reading indicates that it is closely related to achievement levels, as defined by the school. A great deal of investigation has been done into home-reading programs, resulting in some agreement over the need for providing parent education in this field. The benefits of parent-child reading practice can be successfully transferred to the classroom, as long as the

teacher has a positive attitude to it, and the parents are clear and confident about their role (Bloom 1987). Other research has taken a different view of the role of parents/family and would advocate success through the mutual adaptation of literacy practices which take account of home and school views of what counts as literacy and how literacy is carried out. This study is not investigating this view of literacy.

Structured basal readers are compatible as materials for the type of oral reading practice with very young students which uses parent helpers, and lend themselves to use by non-professional listeners. They are suitable for use with mainstream and remedial children, which enables the teacher to maintain some consistency in the materials presented to all members of a class; ie all students, regardless of ability, are able to develop their reading skills by progressing through the same set of texts at their own rates. Research by Cairney et al. (1995) and Bloom (1987), has considered the effects of various forms of in-school involvement on students, parents and teachers. However, the studies have not included minute investigation of the perceptions and responses of all parties during a structured reading-practice program within a single classroom community. This is the gap which this study proposes to fill.

Methodological considerations indicate that the qualitative case study approach, using triangulation through multiple data collection methods, is the most appropriate to enable detailed insights into the situation to be made. My close involvement as participant observer can be justified as I

am the only person who can represent the teacher's perspective within this research context.

The present study seeks to examine the perceptions of all parties involved, either actively or passively, in the Parent Helper Reading Practice Program operating in my classroom, and to evaluate its impact on and value to the Year 1 community. The following Research Questions are addressed through the data collection methods already described.

Research Questions

1. What happens when parents regularly help with reading practice in a Year 1 classroom?

Subsidiary questions:

- 1.1 What is the nature of the adult/child interaction in the in-class Parent Helper Reading Practice Program?
- 1.2 How do children perceive the in-class Parent Helper Reading Practice Program?
- 1.3 Are there differences for children whose parents participate and those whose parents do not?
- 1.4 How do parents perceive the in-class Parent Helper Reading Practice Program?
- 1.5 How does the teacher perceive the Parent Helper Reading Practice Program?

- 1.6 What are the perceived positive and negative aspects for the parents, students and teacher?
- 1.7 Do parents find the instructions and information guidelines provided by the teacher sufficient to fulfil the helper role?

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

Introduction

This chapter presents the design of the study. In it I describe the subjects and procedures and explain how and why the various forms of data collection (a questionnaire, video observations, semi-structured interviews, a Focus Group and field notes) were developed and used. I also outline how the data were analysed.

Subjects

The subjects of this study were the Year 1 class of a metropolitan Catholic Primary School in WA, their parents and teacher. I was both the researcher and the classroom teacher and had been running an in-class parent participation program in reading (known as the Parent Helper Reading Practice Program) for three years when this research took place. The class comprised 29 students, 14 boys and 15 girls, with an average age of 6 years 1 month at the time of data collection. The school is situated in a moderate socio-economic area, with a substantial proportion of students coming from 'blue-collar' families, but also a number from business and professional families. The school was in its sixth year of operation and had an active and supportive parent body who shared a feeling of ownership within this community.

Parent volunteers participating in this study had been involved in assisting with individual oral reading practice in Year One since Week 5 of Term 1. They were not selected but were invited to volunteer, and two one-hour training sessions were given by me before the commencement of the program (Appendix 13). There was the additional commitment that I would be available to give further advice and explanation as required. The number of helpers varied each day according to their availability, but between one and four came in for approximately one hour each morning. At the time of the research 19 parents (57% of families) had participated to some extent in the roster. Information for the study was sought from every family and of the 29 questionnaires sent out 25 were returned, giving an 86% response rate.

Throughout the writing of this study the parents who took an active role in the Parent Helper Reading Practice Program will be referred to as *participants* and those who did not as *non-participants*. Similarly the children of mothers who come in on roster will be called *participants' children* and those whose parents do not, as *non-participants' children*.

Inquiry Methods

The study used qualitative methods of inquiry to observe and record the different responses and perceptions of all participants during a parent in-class reading practice program. The objective was to observe an existing situation to better understand its characteristics and processes with a view

to detailed evaluation and possible modification. As the participant observer (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994) I assessed the impact and value of the parent participation program by gathering opinions from all parents, participant or not, looking closely at the interactions between a selected group of parent helpers and students, and also evaluating any associated repercussions for those parents who did not participate, and for their children. I also reflected on its impact on me as the teacher.

Data Collections

Data for this study were collected using five differing, though complementary, methods.

Questionnaire

A survey questionnaire, as used by Stierer (1985, cited in Bloom 1987), and as detailed by Cairney et al (1995), was the instrument used to collect initial data from one parent of each child in the class in order to give an overview of parental opinion. As the information sought was specific to this particular situation no existing questionnaire could be found which addressed all the research questions, so one had to be designed by me for this study.

An original 21 item questionnaire (Appendix 2) was amended after feedback from a graduate seminar and the reviewers of my Research Proposal. A question pertaining to parents' reasons for non-participation

was omitted, as it was considered to be too sensitive an issue. Two questions about the in-service session and one relating to parents' awareness that the program could involve family members other than parents were viewed as unnecessary as I already had this information. The remaining reduction to 16 questions was achieved by amalgamation.

A rewritten pilot survey of 16 questions was trialed with 6 parents from the previous year's Year One class. Their responses indicated that the purpose of the questions had been clear, and the information gained answered, as far as was possible, the research questions. No adjustments appeared necessary. The questionnaire (Appendix 3) was then distributed to each family in my class a week before the mid-year holiday. An explanatory letter (Appendix 4) accompanied it and parents were asked to return completed forms by the end of the term. The respondents were free to sign their name or remain anonymous if they preferred. There was an invitation at the end to become further involved in the research

Structure of the questionnaire

The questionnaire sought information from both participating and non-participating parents and it was decided to integrate questions which were applicable only to participants rather than put them into a separate section. This was so that it might not be considered judgemental of those who were not actively involved in the classroom. The first 7 questions were applicable to all parents, questions 8, 9, 11, 12, 13 and 15 could only be answered by participants, but questions 10, 14 and 16 applied to every

respondent. In this way it was possible for all parents to feel that they had completed the survey rather than many having to stop halfway through. Questions 6 and 7 were closed questions requiring a "yes/no" response; all other questions are either open-ended or in two parts, allowing the respondent to give short written answers to the second part.

Questions 4, 6, 7, 11 and 13

These questions relate to Research Sub-question 1.i: *What is the nature of the adult/child interaction in the in-class Parent Helper Reading Practice Program?* Question 4 relates to who listens to the child's reading in the classroom, and whether it matters to the parents whether it is the same or a different person each time. Questions 6 and 7 are closed questions relating to who actually participates in the program and who else in the family might wish to do so in the future. Question 11 probes the participants' understanding of their role and its effect on the students. Question 13 asked the participants to explain what they actually do whilst they are in the classroom on reading roster, thereby allowing them the opportunity to interpret and describe their role. It also demands details about the various procedures which they employ.

Questions 1, 3 12 and 16

These questions relate to Research Sub-question 1.ii: *How do parents perceive the in-class Parent Helper Reading Practice Program?* Question 1 asks parents to express their feelings about the concept of having parents in the classroom to assist their children's reading. Question

3 asks whether or not they feel that this practice has affected their child. As parental attitudes to reading and literacy practices are so crucial to a child's reading development (Breen et al., 1994) it was considered important to assess the overall level of support for the program amongst the class community. Question 12 requires participating parents to reflect on ways in which involvement in the program might have affected them. It had been found in the reviewed literature that parents want to be more involved in school activities (Bloom, 1987; Cairney et al., 1995) so feedback after active involvement was deemed important in evaluating the program. Question 16 invited all parents to add further comments if they wished to do so.

Questions 2 and 5

These elements relate to Research Sub-question 1.iii: *How do children perceive the in-class Parent Helper Reading Practice Program?* Question 2 dealt with how much children say at home about reading to parents in the classroom and the type of information they offer. Question 5 sought to discover whether parents thought their children differentiated between reading to the teacher and reading to another adult.

Questions 14 and 15

These questions relate to Research Sub-question 1.iv: *Are there differences for children whose parents participate in the program and those whose parents do not?* Question 14 asked parents to describe their children's reactions to either their involvement or their non-involvement in the classroom. Assessing the effect of parent action on the children was

considered vital to a comprehensive understanding of the value of the program as a whole. Question 15 asked participating parents to describe how their classroom involvement had affected their home reading practice with their child. As non-participating parents are not involved in the classroom their home reading practices would not be influenced in this way. Therefore this could lead to a difference in the home reading practices between the groups.

Questions 5, 9, 10, 12, 15 and 16

These questions relate to Research Sub-question 1.v: *What are the positive and negative aspects of the program for the parents, students and teacher?* The focus of Questions 5, 12, 15 and 16 have already been described as they relate to other research questions. They do however also contribute information to this research question. Question 9 investigated the specific positive effects which parents attributed to their involvement in the program. Question 10 asked about any aspects of the program which the parents disliked. These questions were designed to encourage a broad range of responses which would reveal the full spectrum of positive and negative perceptions from parents. They could not directly address this range of issues from the child's perspective, but did offer a parental interpretation. The teacher's perspective was indirectly addressed by some respondents.

Question 8

This question related to Research Sub-question 1.vi: *Do parents find the instruction, and information guidelines provided by the teacher sufficient to fulfil their helper role?* It was direct and closed but also provided the opportunity for elaboration of the response.

Video Observations

In order to examine the Parent Helper Reading Practice Program working in the classroom I invited 4 parents who regularly participated on the daily roster to be observed as they carried out their normal practices. These were all mothers, as we had no other relatives taking part at that time, but they represented a cross-section of the parent helper group. Two of them had older children so they had previous experience of being in classrooms, whilst the other two had their eldest child in Year 1, and this was their first experience of listening to reading in the classroom. They also presented a range of different personalities, reflecting the variety of people to whom the students read at school. Short profiles of these four parents are included in the appendices (Appendix 1).

The students selected for observation were the four children of these mothers (2 boys and 2 girls), and two other children, a boy and a girl, whose parents did not come in on roster. Each mother was observed listening to her own child and then each was also observed listening to one other of the 6 children. The pairings were arranged by me before recording began and they remained constant throughout the data collection period, with each

mother listening to the two students whom I had assigned to her at each session.

I assumed the role of participant observer during the data collection period. The original intention had been for me to sit with the participants and carry out the observations whilst a third year Assistant Teacher Practice undergraduate was teaching in the class. Although the volunteers were all quite willing, and enthusiastic about being involved, they were concerned about their ability to behave naturally and normally whilst being closely observed. It was suggested by my supervisor that a video camera be set up and left running throughout the sessions to facilitate the observations and this was accepted by the participant parents as a preferable option. From my point of view it had merit as it enabled me to appear relatively detached from the activity, yet scrutinise the interactions in detail later when viewing the films. As I was well known to all the research subjects, I had to be particularly careful not to influence their behaviour or responses, and thereby compromise the integrity of the study. In addition, it was hoped that video-taping the sessions could overcome the problem of my being interrupted by the students and thereby possibly missing vital information. From this perspective also, video recording was thought to be the most objective method of data collection about parent/student interaction. Each adult/child pairing was observed twice, making a total of 16 sessions in all from which data could be gathered. This process took place over a four week period, at the mothers' usual roster times.

The purpose of the video observations was to focus on:

- i) the behaviour displayed by the children during reading
- ii) the strategies employed by parents to encourage attempts at unknown words
- iii) the strategies used to correct reading errors
- iv) any discussion of the text or questioning
- v) whether the procedures outlined by the class teacher were carried out;
- vi) whether the child cooperated and responded to adult assistance
- vii) whether there were any differences in the helper's interactions with their own child and other children during reading sessions.

In order to focus on the above factors, the video film was analysed in four ways: analysis of the social interactions, including physical aspects (e.g. eye contact); analysis of helping strategies (e.g. error correction); analysis of the behaviour displayed by the children, and analysis of the responses of both parents and children.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews (Jaeger, 1988; Cairney et al 1995) with the same selected parents and students were carried out after the video observations had been completed. I interviewed each of the parent subjects individually and asked a series of open-ended questions (Appendix 5) designed to get them talking freely about their perceptions of the Parent Helper Reading Practice Program, from both their parental and their helper

perspectives. These interviews were recorded on audio-tape for later analysis.

Typical questions were:

Can you describe your experience of working in the Parent Helper Reading Practice Program.

What is it like working with your own/another child in the classroom?

What have been the major outcomes of your participation in the program?

Responses were probed and respondents asked to explain particular comments in more detail.

Students were interviewed in groups to encourage a richer, less inhibited set of responses. One group comprised the 4 children whose parents participated in the program, and the other the 2 whose parents did not. The groups had to be separated in this way as the purpose of the interview was to explore the possible differences for them in their experiences of the program. A similar open-ended questioning approach was used (Appendix 6), with some of the questions being common to both groups:

Tell me about reading to parents in class on Reading Roster

Do you think it is important to read to a grown up at school?

and others being slightly different:

Do you like having your own mum in on Reading Roster?

What do you feel about Mum not being able to come in?

Focus Group

It had originally been my intention to complete data collection from the parents at this point but, as a result of the findings, I became concerned at the predominance of positive comments about the Parent Helper Reading Practice Program and the lack of negative responses. It was thought possible that parents might have felt unwilling to voice negative feelings in an interview situation. However, if they did have any negative feelings, it was vital to the validity of the research that I record them. Therefore, to ensure that every possible measure had been taken to reflect the respondents' true feelings I set up a Focus Group.

I had been made aware during the interviews that a small group of mothers, who were friends, met regularly and shared experiences about their children. Two of these were parents I had observed in the classroom, and the other three were regular participants in the program, so I asked if they would be prepared to further assist my research during their next meeting. I explained the Focus Group process to them:

- * One person to act as scribe,
- * One person to act as leader,
- * Each person to respond to each of the three questions in turn with one comment

* The responses to be recorded and given to me

The three questions for consideration were:

- i. *What do you like about the Reading Roster program - for yourself, your child or in general?*
- ii. *What do you dislike about it?*
- iii. *Please comment on the 'Gay Way' reading books which are used for the program: ie. do they affect your job as a listener, or do you think that it makes no difference what books the children read?*

They agreed and were asked to give honest, unguarded responses which could remain anonymous.

Field notes and Journal records

In addition to the filming of classroom reading events I kept field notes (Burns, 1990) in the form of observational recordings as used by Wolf (1996). Field notes were used to record significant observations from the survey responses, record incidental classroom observations; consolidate and support interview data, clarify or confirm preliminary findings, and reflect on the research process. The majority of field notes were taken during observations or whilst reviewing and reflecting on the recordings of observations and interviews. All notes were taken openly and with the knowledge and consent of the participants.

Details were recorded of specific behaviours and interactions by the participants which occurred out of the range of the camera during change-over times. I also noted how the rest of the students and parents behaved during the reading roster sessions. Journal notes of my perceptions and feelings about the nature and quality of the process were kept. These included aspects of the Parent Helper Reading Practice Program which needed to be reconsidered or changed for the future, perceptions about what worked well, my reactions to the interview responses and comments about my own role.

Procedure

Questionnaires were distributed and collected at the end of Term 2. Parents had two weeks in which to respond.

On receipt of the responses I selected the 4 parents using a variety of criteria:

- i) They had to have stated on the survey that they were willing to assist further with my research;
- ii) They had to be regular participants in the reading roster program;
- iii) Their children had to represent a cross-section of ability and gender;
- iv) I needed to be reasonably certain that they and their children would be able to respond naturally whilst being observed and interviewed.

The children of these mothers were 4 of the 6 observed. The other 2 were selected to represent a gender and ability range, and their parents had to have responded positively to the request for further assistance in the survey.

A brief outline of what would be involved was then given to the selected parents who all agreed to participate. A meeting was held in school during the holidays during which I gave a full explanation of what would be happening, the time-frame, and confidentiality issues, all of which were confirmed in writing (Appendices 7 & 8). This meeting was attended by the four participating parents and the mothers of the other two children. Written permission in the form of pre-drafted letters (Appendices 8 & 9) was obtained from them covering their own involvement and that of their children.

Observations took place between weeks 2 - 5 of Term 3 during the usual reading roster times. When these were completed I conducted the interviews with both children and parents. The Focus Group was facilitated the following week, and the whole process took five weeks.

All parents were kept informed periodically of what was taking place with regard to the study through the school Newsletter.

Teaching Materials

A structured, phonetic basal reading series, Gay Way Readers (Boyce, 1977) provide the texts used during the Parent Helper Reading Practice Program (see Appendix 12). This has a restricted, repeated vocabulary of short, easily decodable words which gradually builds as the difficulty level increases. Each child progresses through the books at his/her own level and speed, and the parents note their daily progress in a record file.

The Parent Helper Reading Practice Program volunteers come in every morning during the Language program block. A brief description of what they do and the instructions given to them is contained in Appendix 13.

Data Analysis

The structure and distribution of the questionnaire allowed for data from all parents, both participating and non-participating, to be analysed. This gave a comprehensive perspective of the entire Year 1 parent community, as the response rate was very high. The survey was analysed question by question, and the responses to the open-ended elements were then grouped according to recurring themes which emerged.

Analysis of the video observations was in accordance with the categories stated earlier in this chapter. Further categories were created as

they emerged from the data.

Recordings of the face-to-face interviews were transcribed and categories of responses allowed to emerge. This was supplemented by information from the Focus Group.

My field notes, observations and journal records were classified using categories reflecting the impact of the Parent Helper Reading Practice Program on my role and practice.

Limitations

In developing the methods of data collection I had to be aware of:

- i. The phrasing of the questions to avoid any impression of a judgement being made;
- ii. The subjectivity of the responses to the questionnaire, due to parents possibly desiring to conform to perceived teacher expectations;
- iii. The difficulty for me as teacher/researcher in observing interactions in my classroom during normal school activities;

In interpreting the data I had to remain constantly aware of:

- iv. The difficulty of my remaining impartial to the questionnaire and interview responses and totally objective in interpreting the data, whilst at the same time acknowledging that, as teacher/researcher, I was an integral part of the classroom reading program;

- v. The validity of parent responses during the interview, due to the possibility of their answering with what they thought I wanted to hear.

These factors were considered throughout the research and precautions were taken to avoid their effects, thus retaining, as far as possible, the integrity of the work.

The following limitations however apply to the completed study:

- i) Accurate collection of data relied on the parents' ability and willingness to complete the questionnaire honestly. Accuracy of information given during interviews with parents was also partially reliant on these factors, although video observations were used to compare what parents did with what they said they did.
- ii) All participants believed that the children's reading improved as a result of the program but no measures were included to verify or evaluate this.
- iii) Impartiality of the teacher/researcher, though striven for, cannot be fully guaranteed.
- iv) Only one Year 1 class in a non-Government school was studied, so the findings cannot be generalised to other year levels or other school communities.

Ethical Considerations

Permission to circulate the questionnaire to the parents was obtained by means of a letter from the school Principal (Appendix 11).

A meeting of all adult participants and the parents of child participants was held to explain exactly what information would be sought, the methods of data collection and the use to which it would be put. Each parent involved signed a letter giving permission for this information to be collected and used in the study (Appendices 8 & 9), and participants were told that they were free to withdraw at any time.

All subjects were assured of anonymity in the final document, and individuals, named in the data, were assigned pseudonyms rather than their own names being used. The four observed mothers were shown and approved the profiles of themselves which are included in the study (Appendix 1). They were invited to make alterations if they wished but none asked for amendments to be made.

Data collected were only viewed by the researcher and supervisor. All written and transcribed data were kept secure in a locked filing cabinet at my home, and will be destroyed after five years. Tapes and video-tapes were wiped once they had been transcribed and/or analysed.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

In order to obtain triangulation of data a number of different data collection methods was used. The results and analysis of each instrument/collection of data will be presented separately in this section. For example, the parent questionnaire will be analysed question by question, followed by a summary of the overall findings. This will be followed by an analysis and summary of the video observations, parent and child interviews, Focus Group and researcher's field notes. The principal findings of all data will be drawn together in the Discussion section.

Analysis of Parent Questionnaire

Twenty nine questionnaires were distributed to parents and twenty five were returned completed, giving an 86% response rate. The four unreturned questionnaires were from parents who have never participated in the program. Each question will be addressed in chronological order and a summary of results given. All results are expressed as percentages of the total number of returned questionnaires. Results will be illustrated by quotation of typical comments written in italics.

Question 1:

**HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT HAVING PARENTS IN THE CLASSROOM
TO LISTEN TO YOUR CHILD READ?**

Positive responses: 92%

Negative responses: 4%

No response: 4%

The following positive statements were common:

- * *I feel comfortable with this,*
- * *I think it is a great idea*
- * *Very good.*

A variety of supporting reasons for the positive responses was offered:

Beneficial for children to experience reading to a variety of adults: 36%

because:

- * *They have a variety of people encouraging their efforts*
- * *It boosts their confidence and self esteem*
- * *Parents can give time which the teacher may not have*
- * *They love having you there to hear them*

Enabling children to be heard reading every day is a major benefit: 28%

Parents enriched by the experience which helped build a sense of
community: 12%

Having helpers in reduces the burden on the teacher to hear each child: 8%

Important to maintain the current level of teacher monitoring of children's progress: 8%

The negative response was a concern expressed about the confidentiality of information about individual children's reading: 4%

- * *Other parents get to know how good or how bad my child can read and perhaps that should only be known by the trained professional teacher.*

Question 2

DOES YOUR CHILD TALK TO YOU ABOUT READING TO PARENTS AT SCHOOL? IF SO, WHAT SORTS OF THINGS DOES HE/SHE SAY?

To the first part of the question

No: 40%

Yes: 32%

Sometimes, but not regularly: 28%

In response to the second part, the main substance of the children's comments to their parents involved:

- i) the name of the parent who had listened to them
- ii) how many pages they had read
- iii) that they moved onto a new book
- iv) that it was fun

One child had expressed concern that his class work was interrupted by having to go and read.

Question 3

DO YOU THINK THAT HAVING PARENT HELPERS FOR READING HAS AFFECTED YOUR CHILD? IF SO, HOW?

Yes: 52%

No: 44%

No response: 4%

Reasons cited for these responses:

Their child's reading progress had been more rapid because of the program than it otherwise would have been: 40%

This interaction with adults had improved their child's confidence: 28%

The variety of approaches used by different parents had been beneficial: 4%

No negative effects on the children were expressed.

There was a high number of 'No' responses to this question; however there were no supporting negative comments. All of the comments were positive. This seems to indicate that the question may have been misinterpreted by the parents who gave a 'No' response. The 'No' response to this question also conflicts with answers given by the same respondents to later questions. Although the questionnaire was trialed and this question was not

identified as flawed, it appears that some parents interpreted it to mean 'was there a *negative* effect on the child.

Question 4

DO YOU THINK THAT CHILDREN SHOULD READ TO THE SAME PARENT EACH TIME OR TO DIFFERENT PARENTS? WHY?

Preferred their children to read to different adults: 64%

Felt that it made no difference: 28%

Felt that the same parent should hear their child regularly: 4%

No response: 4%

Supporting reading to a variety of parents, respondents felt that:

This built the children's maturity, and confidence with other people: 28%

Different adults would focus on different ways to assist the reading: 20%

It taught the children to be adaptable: 16%

Encouragement and confirmation from different people was good: 8%

It gave the children the opportunity to meet their friends' parents: 4%

Qualifying their replies that it made no difference who listened to their child, two parents made the following additions:

- * *As long as the parent is paying full attention and assisting with sounding out properly it wouldn't matter if it was the same one.*
- * *As long as each child gets heard by the teacher once a week, I don't think it matters.*

No reasons were given for children reading to the same adult, other than that they liked to read to their own parents whenever they were on roster.

Question 5

DOES YOUR CHILD TELL YOU WHEN HE/SHE READS TO THE TEACHER? DOES HE/SHE SEEM TO VIEW THIS AS DIFFERENT FROM READING TO PARENTS?

Yes their children did tell them: 52%

No their children did not tell them: 44%

No response: 4%

In answer to the second part of the question:

Some parents said that it made no difference to their child whether they read to the teacher or a parent: 40%

No particular reasons were given in all but one case.

Only one parent gave a reason: she stated that when questioned her son

- * *Will confirm who he read to. If it was the teacher, the response is not a different one. His success is based on his own performance.*

Parents said their children viewed reading to the teacher as different: 36%

They gave such reasons as:

- * *She views the teacher as extra special*
- * *She appears to find it more exciting and preferable*

- * *He seems to be more proud when the teacher has read with him*

One parent said that their child felt safer reading to the teacher, and another stated that her child preferred reading to a parent because it was 'quieter' than reading with the teacher.

Question 6

DO YOU PARTICIPATE IN CLASS READING ROSTERS?

Yes: 60%

No: 24%

Sometimes: 16%

The total of participants for the purposes of this analysis is taken as 76% of respondents to the questionnaire. (This equates to 57% of the total of Year 1 families, and is in line with my estimation of the number of families who participate in the program).

Question 7

ARE THERE ANY OTHER ADULT CARERS FROM YOUR FAMILY WHO WOULD BE INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING? IF SO WHO?

No: 76%

Yes: 12%

No response: 8%

Maybe: 4%

In response to the second part of the question two husbands were named as interested, but neither was available at the present time. Two grandmothers were also named, one as interested and one as 'maybe' interested.

Question 8

WERE YOU GIVEN SUFFICIENT GUIDANCE IN HOW TO HELP THE CHILDREN WHILST THEY ARE READING TO YOU IN THE CLASSROOM?

Yes: 80%

Not applicable, as respondents were non-participants: 20%

The discrepancy between the percentages of participants and non-participants between Question 6 and Question 8 occurred because one parent attended the guidance session but did not participate in the classroom.

Elaborating on the preparation offered, parents commented that:

- * *Reading Roster was very well explained at the start of term*
- * *We had a special very detailed meeting*
- * *We are encouraged to ask if not sure, just like the children.*
- * *Yes, but as the roster progresses I find that there is certain information that I still have to attain from the teacher - which is understandable.*

Question 9

WHAT DO YOU FIND MOST REWARDING ABOUT ASSISTING IN CLASS?

Responded: 76%

Not applicable: 24%

Some people gave more than one reason so therefore, the percentages of parents quoted add to more than 100%.

Responses fell into five main categories:

i) Rewarding to witness the children's achievement: 36%

- * *It's wonderful watching a child striving to achieve and witnessing the pride they have in themselves when you congratulate them for doing well.*
- * *Seeing the pride on the children's faces when they achieve a particular word or phrase.*
- * *Listening to them read and how they've achieved so much in such a short time.*

ii) Enjoy being part of the class community and interacting with the children: 32%

- * *Being able to participate in the classroom*
- * *I feel I am more in touch with what they are doing*
- * *Enjoying the friendship and confidence made with each child*

iii) Being there for their own child was the most rewarding aspect: 24%

- * *The joy that it brings to my son, and to see how proud he is to have me there.*
- * *Letting my son feel proud Mum is in class with him and being part of the class.*
- * *The look on Jamie's face when he finds out I'm staying for reading - he's happy.*

iv) Helping the children: 16%

- * *Helping them enjoy learning.*
- * *I like to be able to help the kids sound the words and read the books.*

v) Opportunity to gain information about the classroom: 12%

- * *It gives me the opportunity to see what happens in the classroom.*
- * *It enables me to see how my child participates and responds in class with the other students.*

Question 10

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU DO NOT LIKE ABOUT THE PROGRAM?

No: 92%

Yes: 8% (answered with negative comments):

- * *There doesn't seem to be any area in the room allocated for reading so we sit anywhere. It would be better if the children could read to me in another room or area where they are not disturbed by other children.*
- * *It could be very difficult to control the 'educational integrity' of parents when they impart bad grammar and speech to the children in the reading times.*

Additional comments made by those who responded positively included:

I wish more people would volunteer to assist.

Are we allowed to be part of any other activities during the week?

In the breakdown and listing of responses to Questions 11-15 some parents made more than one comment and percentages given reflect the percentage of responding parents making that comment. Therefore they add to more than 100%.

Question 11

IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU THINK YOUR INVOLVEMENT AFFECTS THE CHILDREN IN THE CLASS?

Responded with comments: 68%

These comments were divided into Positive: 60%

Negative: 8%

Not applicable: 24%

No response: 8%

The responses fell into the following five categories:

Positive

- i) Involvement contributed to classroom atmosphere and relationships: 32%

The children feel they are more at home having mums and dads helping.

I'm assisting in developing a relaxed more warming learning environment.

A friendship from each child to each parent encourages confidence and trust.

- ii) Believed that they benefited the children's reading development: 28%

The children are listened to daily which I believe assists their progress.

They get to do more reading as there are more listeners.

- iii) Felt the praise and encouragement they gave affected the children: 12%

I think they like reading to us because they are praised by somebody else other than the teacher or their parents.

I think a lot of people showing their interest and encouragement makes these children feel interested and special.

iv) Parents helped to take pressure off the teacher: 8%

Negative

v) Felt that parents might be a distracting influence on the children: 8%

Sometimes distracting when they see a new face.

In the beginning my child knew I was in the class he wasn't listening to the teacher he would look to see what I was doing.

Question 12

IN WHAT WAYS HAS YOUR INVOLVEMENT AFFECTED YOU?

Responded with comments: 72%

Not applicable: 24%

No response: 4%

Responses were sorted into the following six positive categories. There were no negative comments.

i) Gained personal satisfaction or enjoyment from their involvement: 44%

It's a good feeling to be able to help children read.

I get satisfaction in helping a child finish a book.

I thoroughly enjoy being there.

This is a very rewarding time to share with children.

ii) Enjoyed the opportunity to observe their own children: 20%

I like spending time in the classroom as it gives me great satisfaction to see my child working to her own ability.

It helps to see what my child is doing in class, which we can discuss later.

It enables me to gauge how my child is performing in class.

iii) Had developed a better appreciation of the diversity of the students: 20%

- * *I have a better awareness of the varying developmental stages of children's reading ability.*
- * *They all have different ideas.*
- * *My involvement has made me understand that all children are so different I shouldn't compare.*

iv) Felt that they had a better understanding of classroom operation: 16%

- * *It has enabled me to see how the class operates and what is expected of the children in both behaviour and work.*
- * *I've realised the many changes to the curriculum since I was in Year One.*

v) Said they were better able to assist children: 12%

- * *It has helped me to know how to help them.*

- * *I've got more patience with children now.*

vi) Said they knew the children better: 8%

- * I've gained the trust of a lot of children. They get to know me personally.

Question 13

DESCRIBE WHAT YOU DO DURING THE SESSION WITH EACH CHILD.

Responded with descriptions of their actions: 76%

Not applicable to them: 24%

Described two or more practices: 76%

Responses were sorted into the following six categories:

i) Said that they listened as the child read to them: 68%

ii) Said that they listened to each child read their word-list: 40%

iii) Said that they encourage or help children to sound out difficult words:
32%

- * *I help with sounds of letters to prompt them.*

- * *I always ask them to sound out difficult words.*
- * *I encourage spelling of difficult words, help with sounds th, ar, etc*

iv) Said that they used praise and encouragement: 32%

- * *... encourage and praise their efforts.*
- * *I always praise them.*
- * *I say "Good reading".*

v) Said that they greet and make conversation with the child: 24%

- * *I always say "Hello" and how are they today.*
- * *Ask each child to take a seat and say "I'm Dominic's Mum".*
- * *Speak happily to the child.*

vi) Said that they carry out the prescribed recording procedures: 16%

vii) Mentioned additional strategies which they use: 12%

- * *Sometimes the book situation is talked about, and expectations of the book.*
- * *Test different sentences and words to check they really know them.*
- * *Wait for them to think about a difficult word.*
- * *Relate it (difficult word) back to a previous sentence.*

Question 14

HOW HAS YOUR CHILD REACTED TO YOUR INVOLVEMENT, OR YOUR NON-INVOLVEMENT?

Results have been divided into participant and non-participant responses but are still expressed as percentages of the total number of respondents.

Participants

Said that their child had reacted positively to their involvement: 76% (all)

Said that there had also been a negative reaction: 4%

Said that their children were proud and happy to have them in the classroom: 72%

- * *My child loves it if I am there doing reading.*
- * *I think she likes other children to know her Mum is involved.*
- * *It makes her feel important.*

Believed that their child performed better when they were in the classroom: 4%

Said it encouraged their child to read more at home: 4%

Said that initially their child found it hard to have them in class, but that he had settled as they had come in more regularly: 4%

Non-participants

Said that their children had shown no particular reaction to their non-involvement: 12%

Said that there had been a negative reaction: 8%

* *My child is disappointed I can't come in.*

No response: 4

Question 15

HAS BEING INVOLVED AFFECTED WHAT YOU DO WITH YOUR OWN CHILD AT HOME?

Yes: 56%

Not applicable: 24%

No: 16%

No response: 4%

Changes noted in home reading practices fell into two categories:

i) Parents felt better able to link home work with school work: 36%

* *Me doing reading at school gives me a better understanding of what to do at home.*

* *I am able to make the connection between the classroom work and now to keep this up at home - especially on weekends and holidays.*

- * *Yes, as I seem to have more patience and realise there are other children at her level.*
- * *It enables us to discuss what happens at school, with me having some idea as to what she is doing.*

ii) Said that home reading was more positively encouraged: 20%

- * *I always make sure she reads now because I know other people are giving up their spare time to listen to her.*
- * *I now know not to put up with lazy reading.*

Question 16

PLEASE MAKE ANY OTHER COMMENTS WHICH YOU FEEL ARE RELEVANT TO THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.

No response: 56%

Made positive comments about the program: 52%

Commented about themselves: 8%

Made a negative comment about the program: 4%

Made two responses: 20%

Positive comments were categorised as follows:

i) Had a beneficial effect on the parent/own child relationship: 12%

ii) It provided an opportunity for everyone to be helping each other: 12%

iii) It gave participants personal satisfaction: 8%

iv) It bridges the gap between home and school: 8%

v) It is good for the children's learning: 8%

vi) Participants could ensure that their children were progressing appropriately: 4%

Negative comment:

Child was distracted by mother's presence in the classroom.

Summary

Overall the responses to the questionnaire indicated that both participant and non-participant parents felt that the program is beneficial to their children's reading.

Analysis of Classroom Video Observations

Pairing the subjects

The reading sessions observed in the classroom were videotaped to facilitate detailed analysis later, and also to minimise the intrusiveness, to

both the students and the parents, of being observed. Two sessions were recorded with each pairing to help identify the consistent behaviours, and the observations were then analysed together. Each of the four parents was observed with their own child; two were then observed with the child of another in this group, and the remaining two were observed with children whose parents were unable to participate in the parent rosters. This produced eight different pairings, each recorded twice, and representing the three main relationship combinations:

- i) parent with own child
- ii) parent with another participant's child
- iii) parent with non-participant's child

Analysing the data

Observations made from viewing the video recordings were coded according to a variety of themes which emerged. Within each theme there were behaviours which were common to all parents or to all children, and others which occurred with only some. This chapter will take each theme in turn dealing first with the common elements of the reading interactions and then with the more particular or individual aspects. As this is essentially a social as well as an educational experience for the participants the social and physical aspects are presented first to describe the environment in which the reading practice took place. These include social interaction, body language and eye contact. The specific strategies used by parents are then addressed. Strategies used included: correcting errors, giving praise

and encouragement, and allowing wait-time. Finally the attitudes displayed and the responses observed during the sessions are analysed. These include enthusiasm, confidence and cooperation.

Social Interaction

Collecting the first child to be heard was done personally by each of the parents, but as one child finished his or her turn, the parent asked the child to send the next child to her. This request was always phrased as an invitation, not a demand, and sometimes the child who had read would offer before being asked. None of the children seemed to mind this task; all appeared to enjoy telling their peers that it was their turn as if viewing this individual reading time as a treat.

At the commencement of each child's reading session all four of the parents initiated some kind of conversation to help make the child feel comfortable. This would take the form of commenting on or asking about what work they were currently doing, what they had done on the weekend or previous evening, or whether they had contributed to some recent classroom display.

"Were you singing that song with the other children?"

"Hello Francis, have you got some News to tell today? Is it about you or somebody else?"

Sometimes, but much less frequently, the child would initiate the conversation, as in the case of Emily who launched into an animated description of how she had lost her book at home and how her big sister had helped her to find it.

References to which book the child was reading, what the title of the story was or which page they were on were made by all the parents to orientate the child to the task in hand.

** "We're onto a new story are we what's this one called?"*

** "Have you read any of this at home with Mummy? Gee wizz, aren't you clever!"*

Comments about the storyline or the characters before the reading commenced were infrequent from any of the participants, but this had not been asked of them at their initial training session.

All the mothers verbalised the page numbers, with two of them encouraging the children to find the correct place in the book themselves, whilst the other two located it for them.

They all confirmed for the child at the end of the reading which page they should continue from at home in the evening.

The children all showed a keen interest in how many pages they had read and how much further they had to go.

On most occasions it was the mother who got the reading materials out of the child's reading bag, and in every instance she packed everything away. The children were compliant with this, and apparently enjoyed having it done for them.

Body language

In all cases the parents presented a happy, caring and interested demeanour. They were attentive to the child from the start of the session, prepared and organised their reading materials, and sat close beside and turned slightly towards the child. The proximity of the child to the adult remained fairly constant throughout all sessions where the adult was not the parent, with the child staying seated in roughly the same position on a chair adjacent to the listener from start to finish. However, there were marked fluctuations in where and how the children sat when reading to their own mothers:

Dominic started reading seated very close to Dianne, then moved across to the far side of his chair as he became tired and wanted to stop. Dianne responded by moving closer as his concentration lapsed. Dominic remained calm and relaxed throughout the event, and gave a smile at the end.

Abigail sat close beside Anne and rested her arms on the table in a very relaxed manner. She then got up onto her knees to be closer as the words presented difficulties, and her mother bent her head closer to her.

Both Brian and Charmaine were extremely fidgety as they began, looking around a lot and wriggling. They then got up onto their mothers' knees and settled down once comfortably situated. The two parents concerned responded to this by apparently simply accepting it and concentrating on the reading rather than their child's physical stance. Bernadette showed obvious delight at this show of affection by smiling, and both put their arms around their child an action which did not occur between the adult listeners and other children.

The rest of the children did not observe these behaviours as the parent/child pairs were seated at the back of the room, partially screened off.

When reading to an adult other than their own parent Abigail and Emily were relaxed and smiling, whilst Francis was sometimes restless and Dominic appeared tense. He sat very straight and stiff and showed none of the smiling and enjoyment that was evident with his own mother. He grimaced as he tried to identify unknown words in the text, (this did not happen when reading to Dianne), he became increasingly fidgety as the reading drew to a close and he was less able to sustain his concentration.

There was a noticeable change in the behaviour of three of the children, regardless of who was listening to them, when they came to read their Word List. Each got up onto their knees and bent closer to the text as if to concentrate better on the task. This part of the activity was apparently

different from the reading of the text and seemed to provide an additional element of personal challenge.

Throughout all sessions with all pairings both participants were focussed only on each other and the text. The children paid the greater part of their attention to the page whilst the adults fluctuated between the text and the child. Background classroom noise hardly ever appeared to intrude into their interaction. The adults nodded frequently in response to the children's efforts and showed pleasure in their achievements by smiling, more to themselves than to the readers.

Eye contact

All parents made a deliberate effort to make eye contact at the beginning of each session, and on most occasions this was achieved. The level of contact, however, and its length and frequency varied a great deal. When approaching their own parent all four children made eye contact immediately, and sustained it as the reading materials were prepared. Dominic smiled and fixed his gaze on his mother as he manoeuvred himself onto the chair beside her and did not turn his attention from her face until it was time to begin reading. However the two children of non-participating parents were less consistent, making eye contact at the greeting stage on one occasion each and avoiding it on the other.

As stated under *Body language* the parents' gaze was trained constantly between the text and the child, and eye contact was made intermittently as the child looked up from the page.

During the reading there appeared to be four reasons for eye contact to be made:

- i) The most common was when the child turned in search of reassurance. This occurred with all pairings and after at least one attempt had been made at decoding the word. Abigail read her attempts with a questioning expression as she turned to the listening adult for affirmation.
- ii) Three children also sought eye contact almost immediately when faced with a totally unfamiliar word. After an initial glance at the listener they then attempted to sound out, looking up periodically for approval. Once the word was accomplished the two children who were reading to their own mothers smiled at them.
- iii) A third cause of eye contact related to the children's queries about continuing or stopping. Dominic just looked up and then carried on, but Abigail asked 'Can I read more?' before turning back to the page. Both children were reading to their own parents.
- iv) Eye contact was also made on one occasion when there was a loud interruption from the class lesson at which the reader and the parent shared a momentary giggle.

When the session was complete eye contact was made again as the parent congratulated the child on his/her reading and asked him/her to fetch the next reader. At this stage the period of contact was again usually longer when the adult was the child's own parent.

Parents' strategies to encourage word-attack skills

All parents used pointing as a frequent strategy when emphasising a word which needed to be addressed or tried again. Three used a finger whilst one used a pen, but the action was invariably done gently and encouragingly, not in an authoritarian manner.

Verbal encouragement figured very strongly when problems were encountered by the children. Comments such as *'well done'* or *'that's right'* quickly followed a child's successful sounding out of a word over which they had struggled. Where a word proved particularly difficult, or the child was reluctant to try decoding it, responses such as *'That's a tricky one, let's sound it out'* encouraged the child to persist.

Sounding out was the major strategy used to assist children to work out unknown words. Asking the children *'what's the first sound?'* was common, and was often followed by similar support through the word until the sound pattern was built up and identified. Repeating the sound patterns established by the child was sometimes necessary to complete the process. All parents were reluctant to tell the child a word unless several unsuccessful attempts had been made; they tried consistently to get the

child to work it out for him/herself.

In the case of Francis, the weakest of the group, Carole did change strategies at one stage and sounded a word out for him, getting him to repeat the process after her. On one occasion Dianne waited patiently as her son tried over and over 'b a c k, b a c, b a c k, back'. 'No,' she responded quietly, pointing to the word again. 'Black' said Dominic triumphantly as he suddenly recognised what it was. Anne was also persistent with her daughter when she encountered a word which she had recently decoded 'No, there's no n, remember.' 'No, spell it out, remember this one Sweetie.' Both parents followed these interchanges with positive reinforcement.

When children were having particular difficulty the parents diversified their use of sounding out. Bernadette and Carole sounded out the words with the child, sometimes stopping after the initial letter, and with other words interjecting part way through in an encouraging way to keep up the child's momentum. Carole made particular use of pointing to reinforce each sound. Anne repeated the child's sounding out but stressed the letters which they mispronounced when saying the whole word. Dianne emphasised blends and digraphs to assist the child.

The parents used opportunities presented by the texts to explain blends and digraphs: Dianne and Carole both explained that 'o o' in roof made an 'oo' sound, and that the two 'e's in feel said 'ee'. Anne drew

attention to the 'l' sound made by the 'y' on the end of 'fly', and Bernadette pointed out the 'oo' sound made by 'e w ' in 'flew', the 'ou' sound of ' o u' in 'out' and the 'e r', 'er' sound. She also confidently explained that there were sometimes silent letters as with the 'ight' sound in 'right'.

Exceptions to the basic phonic system were dealt with by letting the child sound out and then simply telling them that with this word, although it has those letters in, it is actually said *'like this'*. This happened when Francis encountered 's o m e': *'That's right, but we don't say s o m e,'* explained Carole, *'we say some'*.

Two parents used segmentation of words:

Anne: *'You can split that word up, can't you? in doors.*

Now say it all together, indoors.'

Dianne: *'If I cover this, what does that word say?'*

Use of word structure and the similarity between words was noted in Bernadette's sessions. She pointed out the very slight differences between 'pit', 'pat', and 'pad' reinforcing which was which and why, and getting the child to repeat each.

Anne drew attention to similarities in the roots of some words, drawing attention to their construction. She also used the child's prior knowledge of particular words to encourage recognition: *'Now, what's this one again?'*

Parents' strategies to correct reading errors

The close proximity of the parent to the child and the use of pointing to indicate that a word had been incorrectly read, encouraged the child to self-correct without overt intrusion by the adult. All four parents used this strategy when a word had been skipped or mispronounced. Some parents pointed out errors immediately, while others waited until the end of the sentence. The self-correction rate was about 70%. A consequence which evolved from this was that the children were given wait time, or thinking time, as the parents held back from giving the correct answer. There did not appear, in my perception, to be any feeling of judgement, only support.

If a child's fluency declined during the reading, or they started to experience difficulties, pointing was again used by the parents to reassure, encourage and maintain progress. Bernadette and Anne used this behaviour particularly, gradually withdrawing when the child's confidence and reading rate were restored.

Indicating errors verbally by comments such as: '*You need to look at that one again*' or '*This one, Sweetie*', or by asking directly '*What's this word?*' or '*Sorry?*' was a tactic employed by all but Dianne. It was put more firmly in one instance where Charmaine was not really trying and her mother insisted, '*Come on, look at it.*'

On some occasions when an error word had been solved by one or other means three of the mothers reinforced the new learning by getting the

child to repeat the correct word before continuing. In one case Anne had the child reread the whole sentence as the sense had obviously been lost.

Rereading part of the text which preceded an error or problem featured several times. Dianne pointed to an error word, then repeated the preceding word read by the child in a questioning way to provoke another try. This proved quite successful. When a child misread the last word of a phrase the mother repeated the first two *'the big'* and waited for the child to make another attempt.

Rereading at the end of a section of text was used by Carole to reinforce the child's comprehension. She also explained new or problem words within their context to make the text more meaningful, and sometimes constructed a context to help reinforcement: *'Remember when you see w h a t it's really what what are you doing today?'*

Direct verbal correction was used occasionally. It tended to involve mispronunciations of little words such as *on*, *do* or *my*, when the correct word was supplied; or when there was the unnecessary insertion of a word. This strategy was used most by Anne, but was also observed in Bernadette and Dianne.

Feedback

Feedback was given to the children intermittently but consistently through all reading experiences in a number of different ways:

There was constant on-going encouragement.

Three parents nodded spontaneously and made 'mmm', sounds of reassurance during the reading.

All four interjected words of approval and encouragement such as 'Good', 'yes', 'well done', as the children were reading, but this seemed to be an accepted part of the process and did not cause interruptions.

When a child hesitated before mastering a word, sounded one out correctly or had a successful guess the parents responded positively: 'Well done', 'Good girl/boy to spell it out', 'Yes, that's right'. Although this was a feature in all pairings, it happened more frequently when the reader was the listener's own child.

'Good girl/boy', 'well done' and 'good reading' were typical comments made as the children completed a double page and prepared to turn over.

Attention was drawn to particular successes as a form of encouragement. After a rather laboured session Carole reacted very positively to Francis: 'Well done ... you're doing really well, and you remembered that one, came, didn't you.' 'Good, you did it, didn't you' said Dianne to Dominic after he had agreed to read one extra page.

When reviewing the Wordlist Bernadette congratulated Emily for recognising straight away a word she had struggled with in the text.

Instructional feedback in the forms detailed under *Parents' strategies to encourage word-attack skills* and *Parents' strategies to correct reading errors*, was quite frequent.

Explanation of expectations was another form of feedback which occurred quite often. *'You read it to me so that I can hear the story'* Bernadette explained to Emily who was almost whispering. *'Keep going, you can read another two pages.'* *'We'll look at the Wordlist quickly. I think we did lots of ticks yesterday didn't we, so we'll just do a few more today.'*

Responses were typically gentle and encouraging, but were at times firm when directed at their own children. Carole would not accept errors from Charmaine which she knew her child could read perfectly. She did not always interrupt the flow, but waited until there was a natural break and then drew the child's attention to the mistakes. However, when listening to Francis she encouraged and supported every word as he plodded through his text.

The children invariably ended their session by being congratulated on reading well and thanked for their efforts. All four parents were consistent in doing this, and appeared to deliberately reinforce a feeling of success in each child as they left. Anne and Bernadette built upon this by encouraging the children to read at home to Mum/Dad. *'Good boy, Dominic. You'll be able to read that new book to Mummy when you get home'*.

'Will you practise those tricky words at home tonight, Emily, and then you can read them to me tomorrow.'

Discussion and questioning

Discussion did occur but was not a frequent component of the reading interactions.

The most common causes of discussion or comment were the illustrations, and remarks or questions were initiated both by the children and the adults. Dianne made significantly more use of this device than the other three mothers. During observation with both the children who were observed reading to her, she referred to the pictures, asking questions designed to test the reader's understanding of the storyline. She tried to encourage responses and further comment from the children. In the case of her own child she gave him noticeably more time to explore and talk about the pictures. Anne also used this strategy but much more briefly, and not at all with her own child.

All four children of the participating parents initiated discussion about the text which did not refer to the illustrations: *'That won't be very strong. I've heard this story before,'* stated Brian as he read about the little pig who built a house of straw. *'How come the Little Red Hen had scissors with her?'* asked Abigail as she realised that the story had taken an unexplained turn.

Dianne was the only parent to recap on the storyline periodically to ensure that the reader was comprehending: *'So she's walking back onto the grass. Let's read on, we want to know what the story's about don't we?'* *"So they sat down ... what happened next?"*

When listening to Emily, Bernadette discussed the components of the book. When Emily asked how many stories there were in her new text, Bernadette used the Contents page to help the child to answer her own question. She also pointed out the title of the story to be read, and why the first line (title) was repeated at the start. Emily was very interested in how many pages she had read and how many more there were left in the book.

Silence/Thinking time

All parents allowed the children thinking time in which to work out difficult words, make sense of the text they had just read, or ponder the pictures and decide how they related to the story being read. This was of a short duration.

Implementation of teacher prescribed procedures

Parents were meticulous in using the Reading Group folders to check where each child was to start each day, and later to record the pages that they had read. Every adult also recorded the day's progress on the child's bookmark to inform their parents. Whilst listening to a rather slow reader Carole rechecked the file to see how many pages this particular child usually managed to read.

Anne was the only parent to adhere closely to the time guideline for each reader, and checked her watch at the start of each session.

Getting the child to follow the text with his/her finger, as requested by the teacher, was not consistently encouraged. This seemed to be left to whether or not the child chose to do it.

Checking the child's ability to read words out of context by testing the Wordlist for their particular book was done on almost all occasions. The only exception was Carole with her own child whom she had apparently satisfactorily tested at home before coming to school. The list was usually discussed with the child and marked with a tick or a dot beside each word as it was read to indicate success or need for further practice.

Children's behaviour displayed during reading

The following descriptions of the children reading come from the teacher/researcher's perspective and are therefore a subjective account of a person who knows the children well.

Displayed behaviour observed in the children during the reading sessions relate to two main factors: enthusiasm and confidence. Enthusiasm was assumed when the children smiled, jumped up quickly to go to the parent helper, opened the book straight away and showed interest in the text and pictures. Confidence was assumed when children got into

reading quickly, talked freely to the parent, and were willing to take risks whilst reading.

Five of the six children demonstrated overt enthusiasm for the prospect and process of reading to parents in the classroom. Three arrived smiling, and all settled down quickly ready to begin. Enthusiasm was heightened when they were either beginning or about to go on to a new book. As soon as the starting page was confirmed they eagerly commenced, even those who were initially fidgety. Abigail asked enthusiastically, *'Can I read all my book?'* Dominic showed great interest in what was coming next, and scanned ahead a few pages to try to work out what was going to happen. Emily also explored ahead, smiled at the parent and commented that she only had a few more pages to go. Brian became quite involved in the story and his animated expression was evidence of his level of both interest and comprehension.

Only Francis, the least advanced of the children, and son of a non-participant, did not appear enthusiastic about going to read. He did not assist with attempts by the parent listener to build a rapport. He was not unwilling to read but was certainly not excited by it.

Confidence was in most cases linked to enthusiasm, although the identity of the parent was also a factor. All children reading to their own parents displayed behaviours which indicated that they were very confident and did not seem to be at all concerned about making errors or being

unsure of words in the text. Charmaine, in particular, launched straight into her reading without even waiting for her mother to say that she was ready. The child seemed to be reading only for herself and was unconcerned about the audience. Dominic, Abigail and Brian were also quite relaxed and confident in their mothers' company.

However, when reading to someone else's parent the situation for some was different. Abigail remained quite self-assured and showed little change in attitude, but Dominic became very hesitant and read in a far more halting manner than he had done with Dianne. Of the children whose parents did not participate, Emily showed a high level of self confidence and was quite at ease even when she encountered difficulties in the text, but Francis displayed a definite lack of assurance. They both appeared to be less familiar with the books they were reading, indicating that they may not have been involved in as much home reading practice as the other children.

Children's responses to adults' intervention

No instances were observed of a child responding negatively when an adult pointed out an error or required them to try a word again. All children accepted correction, or the indication that they had made an error, quite naturally, and turned to the adult either for assistance or for approval after self-correction. Even Dominic, the most nervous of the children, sought help from the adult listener without hesitation. By the end of the session he was happily attempting to sound out unseen words from his new Wordlist, and was not much perturbed when he could not manage them all.

Carole's encouragement of Francis effected a very positive response. During both observations he began to tire quite quickly and wanted to stop reading after a very few minutes. However, Carole gently persuaded him to read a little more and a little more until he was really pleased with himself when he realised what he had accomplished. At the same time he became more ready to attempt the sounding out of problem words.

All sessions concluded in a friendly manner, with the children seemingly satisfied with what they had achieved and the responses that this had engendered.

Children's responses to reading to their own parent

Initially the children appeared to be less on-task when reading to their own mothers. Their behaviour was more casual and they paid less attention to the physical conventions of the process than they did when reading to another adult. Brian was restless and eventually climbed on Bernadette's knee, Dominic was inclined to chatter and took longer to orient to the task, and Charmaine virtually ignored her mother. Once settled their concentration level was high, and this was encouraged regularly by words and actions if they strayed from the text.

All but Charmaine were keen to read to 'Mum', and smiled on and off throughout the session. These children appeared to be very familiar with their books from having read them previously at home, but this did not

appear to detract from their interest and willingness to re-read them in the classroom.

When errors were indicated by the parent, the children took note and modified their reading accordingly. They responded quickly and carried on undisturbed by it. The only exception to this was Charmaine who sometimes resisted admitting that she had misread a word or phrase. The mistakes which she made generally did not alter the sense of the passage, and she appeared not to want to make changes as she physically backed away from Carole to avoid making a correction.

Dominic was most concerned that his mother should record his progress correctly, and talked to her about what she was to write in the folder.

Parents' responses to hearing their own child read

Physical contact was closer and more obvious in these pairings, extending, in some instances, to a shared kiss at the conclusion of the session. Bernadette and Dianne showed obvious delight in their sons' achievements, and evidently enjoyed this time together.

In all cases there seemed to be additional expectations set by these parents for their own children. Dianne expected Dominic to identify which page he had read up to the previous day and then to locate it in the book. She also persuaded him to read on for much longer than she did with the

other child. Anne would not accept Abigail kneeling up on the chair, but insisted that she sit down properly. Bernadette asked Brian to read the title of his new text sight unseen, and Carole insisted that Charmaine read every single word accurately, even when her errors made no difference to the comprehension.

They also allowed their children a little extra licence as well. If the children wanted to read on further they were usually allowed to do so. If they were nearing the end of their book they were invariably permitted to finish it, even if that considerably over-ran their time allocation.

Parents were more likely to try to activate prior knowledge in these pairings, as they were familiar with their own child's experiences.

Length of time spent with each child

There was a substantial variation in the length of time given to hearing each child read. The guideline given by the teacher was 5-8 minutes, but more often than not this was exceeded.

When listening to their own children Dianne and Bernadette spent between 10 and 15 minutes on each occasion. Carole stayed within the suggested parameters during one session but exceeded them on the other. Anne was the only parent who regularly looked at her watch, and she listened to her daughter for approximately 5 minutes.

When listening to their second readers Dianne adhered to the guidelines with 5-7 minute sessions, but the other three parents gave considerably longer. Carole spent between 11 and 15 minutes with Francis, who was quite a slow and hesitant reader. Bernadette listened to Emily for 9-12 minutes, and Anne had one 5 minute and one 10 minute session with Dominic.

Interactions relating to time were observed with both of Dianne's readers. When Abigail asked if she could read another page she was permitted to do so, but when Dominic asked *'Can I go on to the end?'* his mother responded *'No, it's too far. I've got other children to listen to.'*

Summary

Analysis of the recorded observations showed that reading to adults in the classroom is apparently viewed by both parents and children as an enjoyable experience. It is treated as a working situation where the child has to put in effort but where the adult in turn will provide help and support. Parents used a range of helper strategies which varied in application, and there was a strong emphasis on positive encouragement and feedback. Initially some children appeared to be somewhat uneasy about reading to an adult other than the teacher or their mother, but this apprehension quickly subsided. There was a detectable difference in the interactions of mothers with their own children and with other people's children.

Analysis of Interviews with Parents

The four parents were interviewed individually and each was asked the same set of questions (Appendix 5). However the responses tended to overlap, and similar information was given in response to different questions. Therefore the data were analysed in terms of recurring themes or reasons which emerged. Each reason is stated below, and explicated by typical comments from parents. These comments are written in italics. The category which emerged as the most important is presented first; the rest are in no particular order.

Participating for their own children

The overriding reason for their initial participation in the reading roster was to be there for their own children:

Bernadette: Well I enjoy it. I like coming in for Brian and Ben it's nice to help your own child because they enjoy it.

Anne: I do it mainly for my child's happiness. It makes my own kids happy. They always want you in the classroom to do reading. I don't know why because you hear them at home , but it's a different situation.

Carole: For Charmaine, she likes the fact that I come along and she asks me to, and most of the time she wants to read to me.

Dianne: I know Dominic likes me to be in class, and I could be in class every day, that's Dominic I've had to limit that to a certain extent.

Helping all members of the class

The feeling that they were helping all the children in the class to progress was strong in all of the mothers:

Dianne: The whole hour that I'm there I'm there for the kids. I concentrate for the children, I help the children on their books, and with the slow ones my patience kicks in and I can go through and we try and we try and we try.

Anne: Well I hope I'm helping a child, contributing to helping them read and I'm sure it helps the other kids.

Bernadette: You're participating in the way of helping them helping them out with words they cannot sound out, or if it's a new word telling them how two letters can go together. You're just helping them to get the word right.

Carole: I put my name down to help. I was a helper, I was participating, I was guiding them and doing whatever needed to be done.

Daily oral reading practice

All four parents felt that it was most important for every child to read to an adult every day at school. Their reasons fell into two categories: a) to assist reading development, and b) to ensure that every child had the opportunity to practise even if they did not read at home.

Carole: It's important to the children because they're getting more reading done, and they're getting more confidence in their reading by having it done on a daily basis, and they're getting better at itI've just seen such a huge development in the children over time.

Bernadette: I think that the kids are progressing faster than we did because they are being listened to at school and it's part of everyday work; and if they're not being listened to at home it's done at school.

Encouragement and praise

Maintaining each child's confidence by constant encouragement and praise was another very important factor to all participants.

Carole: Giving them lots of praise, I really like that and I think they enjoy it.

Anne: *I just think if you praise and praise them it helps like one child, I think I've really boosted her ego, and she's reading faster now. I said, 'Come on, you can do it, I know you can do it ... that's excellent.'*

Dianne: *... and they need to get that back-up from you: 'Yes everything's fine and you're doing well.' I can see there's a reason behind all this encouragement encouragement turns into success.*

One parent related what she did in class to her knowledge of her own child's needs:

Dianne: *If I'm listening to Garry read I do what I do for Dominic, praise, praise, praise, encourage, encourage, encourage and he reads more, and it's like I get more from him.*

She also showed an awareness of the benefits he received from other people's praise:

Dianne: *They praise him and encourage him and all that sort of stuff. So he gets that little bit of extra feedback from them as well.*

Two of the four parents felt that they tended to praise other people's children more than they did their own at school:

Dianne: I may give them a little bit more praise, or I might emphasise that praise a bit more just to let them know that someone else thinks they're really good as well.

Anne: I think we might give them a bit more encouragement. Maybe someone else saying, doing it too might boost them a little bit.

Participant role

All respondents were very clear that they viewed their role on the reading roster as an active one. They were participants in, not observers of the children's reading experience.

Dianne: You're a participant in their reading, because even though you're listening to them you're participating because they are needing guidance or instructions or whatever else. They look to you with their eyes and with their body expressions.

Anne: Hopefully I'm teaching them, or trying to teach them.

Bernadette: You're participating in the way of helping them; helping them out with words they cannot sound out it's no help to them if you just let them read, just listen to them and they're not saying the right word.

Preparation and ability to fulfil the role

When asked about their initial training and their ability to competently carry out their role on the parent roster, all four parents said that the process and the requirements had been clearly explained. They had felt able to clarify with me any queries which subsequently arose, and to ask advice when necessary:

Dianne: Well I was given that knowledge by you, the teacher, in the beginning, the instruction, and I wouldn't have started if I had misunderstood anything, or thought that I hadn't grasped it, and I would have come to you and asked 'is there anything else?'. So, yes, I felt as though I had that knowledge to start with and it's guided me through.

Carole: I've felt quite confident doing it. I can't think of anything where I got stuck with it. Oh, perhaps in the beginning when the children were just starting out and they'd get to the end of a book and we weren't too sure if they were really ready to move on. But then the (instruction) cards helped back that up, and I think one time I did have some doubts on one child and I asked you.

Bernadette: I never felt as though there was something I couldn't interrupt you with. There was the courtesy part there where obviously I

didn't come before what you were doing, that came first. But I always knew that you were approachable on it, and I could ask you about it, whether or not I had to stay in there for a minute or five minutes or just find you.

Anne: That was a learning stage for all of us mums too. So even if I thought, 'well yes I think so but I'm not sure,' I would still come and ask you. But then as my experience has gained that has lessened.

Listening to their own child or another student

All parents identified differences in their interactions when listening to their own children on reading roster and listening to other class members. Two said that they felt more relaxed with their own children:

Carole: I'm probably more blase with her ... a bit more casual, 'cos' she's mine.

Dianne: I relax, I suppose, a little bit with him.

Three felt that they were stricter:

Anne: I'm probably stricter with them. With my own I won't let them get away with anything see, you know your own child so

you can be sort of rougher. I don't know if you get more frustrated with your own kids.

Bernadette: I must admit I seem to push my own kids a bit harder. I'll get a bit annoyed if they don't not annoyed, but you know they've read it the night before.

Dianne: I'm more critical when I hear Dominic read, because when he's with me he's more relaxed, he's got that wall down "I'm with Mum, maybe I'll get away with a few things."

Two parents said that they gave more assistance and were more patient with other people's children:

Bernadette: With the other kids I'll get them to sound it out as well, and if they still find it hard I seem to help them out a little bit more, be a little bit more lenient with them.

Anne: With the other kids you say "well, come on, let's try", and you're a bit more patient, because you don't want to upset them.

Use of repetition within the texts

All four parents related the children's reading development, and their ability to help them to progress, to the constant repetition of the growing sight vocabulary.

Bernadette: There are standard words throughout and with each book you're learning new words it's like a constant set of words and each book has a few new words in it, rather than getting a different book each time and sort of chopping and changing It's repetitive ...I mean they're always swapping words around, but it's good in that it keeps the kid's mind working.

Anne: I prefer these because ... like it starts off from the beginning and it just slowly builds up and up and up. I like the repetition stuff, I think it helps. They don't get bored to start with because they think they're so good they can read.

Carole: I like the system ... the repetition of the words in the books and the carry on. I was very surprised at how well they coped with it and are getting through it.

Development of the storyline

Two parents felt that the continuity and the developing storyline in the texts used for the reading roster program was beneficial to the children.

Dianne: I know from Dominic who's quite a sensitive child, his progression from Book 5 to Book 6 and so on, he knows where it's going. It's all the same context but the story goes on. The story evolves. I do like that because they've always stayed with those characters. Those characters are building in the storyline, and those characters are keeping on going.

Bernadette: Brian is eager to read now. He's getting to know that there's something more in the story and he has to find out by reading. You can hear it in his voice, you can hear the expression. He's understanding, and watching him you know ... "I want to get to the end" ... and it's good.

Discussion of the text

When asked to comment on how much discussion of the text they did, three parents said that they talked about the story or the pictures sometimes, as and when they felt that it was appropriate.

Dianne: I have very much followed the child's lead; if the child stops and looks at the picture and wants to discuss it then I would, but otherwise I let them read until they want to talk about it

Bernadette: I don't discuss it with them all the time, but you can tell with most kids that they're understanding what's going on most

of them are eager to find out what happens. If something funny happens I'll say to them, "What did you think of that?" but not all the time. I let them read and make sure they stop at the full stops and stuff like that.

Carole: At times I do, like the other day I had a lovely experience with Dominic. He loved saying "oo-oo-oo" with the wind blowing and we had a little laugh about that. Yes, at times I will but for the main I would let them continue reading.

One mother perceived that she never discussed the text but, as can be seen from the following comment, she actually does react in similar ways to the others.

*Anne: I must admit I haven't discussed the storynot to go right into the story. I might just say, "oh he **was** a fat pig" or just little things, but it's only minor because you're trying to get on to the next kid.*

Impact on home reading practices

Experiences gained through participation in the reading roster program were seen by parents to have affected what they do with their children's reading at home.

Dianne: In the first term I would have given in so that we didn't read on a Friday or Saturday or Sunday night, but because I can follow now from being in the classroom what your aims and goals are, and where you want them to be, I can see that there's a reason behind all this encouragement so I keep it up. I keep it up and keep it going, so I'm not lax about it.

Carole: I'm not as hard on her (at home) as I was at the beginning. It's made me realise that she's doing exactly what all the other children are doing. I can understand more that they all seem to go through these little phases.

Assisting the class teacher

Three parents saw their role as a means of helping the teacher as well as the students.

Bernadette: I know that you can't listen to them all every day, so if you can have parents listening to them you know that they're developing at a certain rate.

Carole: It's important to the teacher to free up time.

Anne: I'm helping you and if I can help you out as much as I can, that's fine.

Perceived personal benefits of being a participating parent

It became clearly evident during the interviews that, in addition to their initial expectations of fulfilling a process, the parents experienced a variety of personal benefits from their time in the classroom.

Carole: I've got a lot of satisfaction out of it seeing all the different children and how well they've progressed. We sort of take an interest in each other's children too, especially those who are having problems.

Bernadette: You sort of build up a bit of a relationship with the children.

Anne: Some kids'll say "Can I read to you?" that makes me feel good. And some of them are the timid kids, so I must be, I don't know, all right I suppose, if they're asking.

Dianne: It's brought me a lot of achievement in being able to help other children. I suppose I just want to be a member of the group of all these mums that help and just be like one of the cogs in the wheel that all fit together in this group thing. I've liked being able to be with Dominic and with the other children. I know them and how they think now they're in Grade One, and how my child fits in with all of them. I get feedback from the other mums too on how they enjoy it and how much I'm enjoying it.

Suggested improvements to the roster:

When asked to suggest ways in which the reading roster program could be improved, all four parents said they thought it worked well, and were unable to suggest possible improvements.

Dianne: From my personal opinion I've been very happy with it. And because you're not giving us a time restriction, there's that full hour and we can get a lot done.

Carole: With the parameters that you have, with the amount of volunteers and the time frame in the day, I don't see how it really could.

Bernadette: Not really, no. I think it's good as it is.

However when probed to consider further, two areas of concern emerged:

Children missing class instruction during reading

One mother was concerned that children who were doing their reading with a parent sometimes missed crucial instructions given by the teacher.

Dianne: If instructions have been given on the floor mat while I've got a child with me reading, and I've taken them back to their seat,

they've sat there bewildered in a way. They're not too sure what to do. And especially a child like Garry or Dominic who hasn't got the gumption to put their hand up or ask or something.

Need for more parent volunteers

Two parents felt that more volunteers were needed to ensure that the objective of every child being listened to by an adult in school was maintained.

Anne: I think it would help if you had more mothers.

Carole: More volunteers that's the only way it could improve

One made the further comment that she was aware of complaints from other participant mothers that, on days when they did not come into the classroom for reading, their children were not always heard.

Summary

Interview responses showed that although parents assisted in the classroom to be there for their own child they recognised their potential to help other students and enjoyed being actively involved in providing them with daily reading practice. They identified differences in the ways they interacted with their own and other children, and suggested aspects of the texts which assisted the children's reading success. All mothers stated that

their experience of the Parent Helper Reading Practice Program had impacted on their home reading practices with their children, and they made a few suggestions as to how the program might be improved in the future.

Analysis of Interviews with Children

The six children who were observed reading to parents in the classroom were interviewed in two groups. One comprised the four children whose parents participated on the roster, and the other the two children whose parents did not. Their responses to the Interview questions (Appendix 6) were analysed within five categories which emerged from the data. Responses from all children in both interview sessions have been combined and are presented together in this section. Some of the children's initial responses were explored through the use of direct questioning to clarify the information being gathered.

Importance of having parents in for reading

When asked whether they thought that it was important to read to a grown up every day at school, every child responded affirmatively:

Because you need to learn words

You can't read books because you don't know the words

Cos then you won't know many words, cos there's not many mums

They said that, if parents did not come in the teacher and teacher assistant would have to do it all, and there may not be enough time for everyone to read.

You would have to do it. You or Mrs. Fisher, and some days we just get you.

Attitudes towards having parents in the classroom.

Every child stated that they enjoyed having parents in to do reading.

It's fun

It's good because you get to stop and don't do your work.

It feels nice having Mum in the classroom

The participants' children liked reading to their own mothers when they were on roster, but were all happy to read to someone else's mum on other days.

Well I like my mum, she's a nice mum and she helps me with the new words. And sometimes I forget the new words but she helps me I like to read to my mum, after I read to another mum what's different and my mum's listening to a different group. Then I like to read to her.

I don't mind who I read to.

The two children of non-participating parents appeared to accept that their mothers were unable to come in for reasons which they (the children) appeared to feel were justified:

She has to go to work

She has a baby

When asked the question, *What do you feel about Mum not being able to come in?* They each replied, *I don't mind.*

Preferences as to who listens to them read

When asked if they had particular parents they liked to read to, two of the children whose parents participate nominated specific mothers as their favourites:

I like reading to Mrs. Drummond.

I like Charmaine's mum and Garry's mum.

The other four children said that they didn't mind, or they were not sure. All six also said that they preferred to be chosen by the parents rather

than make the choice themselves. No child could think of anyone they didn't like to listen to them read.

All students said that the parents were kind to them during reading time, and were never cross.

When asked to include the teacher and teacher assistant in their range of choice three of the participants' children said that they would prefer to read to the teacher than to someone else's mum, and one of the non-participants' children stated a preference for the teacher assistant.

Differences between listeners

The children were asked whether reading to their own mother at home was different from reading to mums at school, or the same. They all agreed that it was different with the most significant factors being their voices, and that what they said varied.

Hearing different voices.

But it's just their voice ... they say different words.

One child also mentioned that some mothers carried out practical tasks for them:

Sometimes they get my stuff out and sometimes they don't.

When comparing reading to their own mothers in class with reading to another helper the participants' children cited three main differences: their voices, their relationship and the amount that they were allowed to read:

They have a different voice.

Then you know them ... you know each other.

Wanting to read more and not being able to (with helper mum)

Mummy takes me onto a new book.

What the parents do when on roster

When asked what actually happens when they read to parents the participants' children all commented first on the number of pages that could be read, and then how their progression was recorded.

They start at the page that you're already on, then you read to another page, or ten pages, and they put it on your book marker.

The two non-participants' children focussed on the fact that they were allowed to turn the pages, and that the grown ups helped them:

You get to turn pages ... and read words

(They) tell you some words and letters

Five of the six children mentioned getting a new book when they had read to a parent was an important feature:

(I especially like) Getting a new book

Then when you've finished your book you go onto a new book and then the mums put the number on the list.

Summary

The children's responses indicated that they enjoy and value the involvement of parents in their classroom reading and that they attribute their reading success partly to their input. None of them held a negative opinion of reading or of themselves as a reader. All students were happy to read to anyone but most expressed a preference for someone in particular. They identified differences between parent helpers in terms of their voices and how much they let them read. They identified getting a new book as a very significant event.

Focus Group

Having conducted the interviews as planned, I was concerned that the vast majority of opinions and comments expressed by the respondents were positive, with very little negative to balance it. I felt it likely that the

parents may not have felt comfortable saying anything negative to my face but might be more open if given the opportunity to talk freely amongst themselves about the program without me being present. I therefore arranged for a small group of participant parents to do a Focus Group at a venue of their choice. The structure of the focus group questions encouraged the participants to express any negative feelings which may have been difficult to state in the interview with me.

The group was given a clear format to follow. They had three questions to answer in rotation, and only one comment or response could be given by each person to each one. One mother recorded all the answers to each question and the results were given to me later. The participants and their responses could remain anonymous.

Each question will be addressed here in order and a summary of results given.

Question 1

What do you like about the reading roster program - for yourself, your child or in general?

Four of the five parents liked being in the classroom because it made their children feel good and increased their confidence.

Two liked being able to see what goes on in the classroom.

One felt reassured that her son fitted well in the classroom.

One gained personal satisfaction from participating.

Question 2

What do you dislike about the program?

Two parents disliked the variation in the amount of reading done by their children from one day to the next. They felt that it adversely affected their children's enthusiasm if they took too long to complete a book.

One parent suggested the retraining of parent helpers each term in order to maintain consistency.

One remarked that progress was sometimes incorrectly recorded on the child's book marker and this also led to frustration.

One expressed concern that children who were called out to read to a parent sometimes missed out on teacher instruction. She stated a preference for an uninterrupted reading time.

One said that she would prefer a separate room where reading could be heard away from the rest of the class.

One mother said that her child was afraid of reading to parents and only liked reading to the teacher or teacher assistant. (This had not been mentioned in the parent survey).

Question 3

Please comment about the reading books which are used in the program. (Do they make your job as a listener easier or harder, or do you think that the books the children use make no difference?)

Four of the five parents said that their children responded better to the prescribed texts than to others available as extension. Of these one felt that the structured progression appealed to her daughter's competitive nature; one said that her son found them more exciting; and a third felt the use of repetition assisted word recognition.

One parent said that her son preferred the extension series as he could start and finish books more quickly.

None of the parents commented on how the texts impacted on them, or on their role as helpers in the classroom.

Covering Letter

When the recorded responses were given to me they were accompanied by a short letter from the parents (Appendix 10) in which they

made two comments which are particularly pertinent to the body of data being gathered:

We all agreed that as a group of parents on roster we need an update or we need retraining as the children's books and style of reading change.

We felt the opportunity to come together over coffee more productive for ourselves. It is not often we can meet together, more relaxed, freer to talk openly about our children's education.

Summary

Although the Focus Group was not originally planned as a data resource it proved to be most informative and elaborated on what had already been gathered. It did fulfil its objective of generating negative comments and from this emerged several factors with regard to on-going parent training and possible rearrangement of the classroom.

Teacher/Researcher's Field notes

Throughout the data collection period I kept field notes to record incidental observations and to reflect on aspects of the research. Direct observation notes were taken in the classroom of incidents or procedures involving participants which may not have been recorded on the video tape. Notes were also made of incidents or practices involving students or parents

on roster who were not being specifically observed but whose actions or reactions contributed to the understanding of the Parent Helper Reading Practice Program. These observations have been categorised according to which data collection they complement:

Parent Survey

- * The very high response rate did not surprise me but it was reassuring and affirming of what I am doing.
- * I was amazed by the degree of personal satisfaction parents expressed at being involved in the Parent Helper Reading Practice Program.
- * That the majority of parents signed their names on the survey forms rather than opting for anonymity was both reassuring and interesting. It also made it possible to cross check the survey responses of the observed group with their interview answers and the video observations.

Classroom observations

- * Parents sit in a variety of locations within the classroom, some of which are more conducive to undisturbed reading than others.
- * Parents usually choose to listen to the group which includes their own child.
- * One mother of a weaker reader checked on his work periodically between listening to other children.

- * There are not always sufficient parents for each child to be listened to within the allocated time period.
- * While I am welcoming the children and orientating them to the work for the session, the parents who are waiting to hear reading do not always have a purpose or task to carry out in the room.
- * The amount of time spent with each child varies enormously with different parents. However, my assumption that parents spent longer with their own children was not consistently true.
- * Viewed as a whole, children of mothers who participate in the roster appear more eager to read, whether or not their mother is in class, than children whose parents do not participate.
- * Some children seem motivated to work harder on days when their parents are in class on roster.
- * Most parents are very confident in moving around the classroom to collect the children, change books or refer some query to me.
- * Once the reading session begins there is no socialising between the parents; they focus totally on the reading until they have finished.
- * Some mothers offer to help finish another group once theirs has been heard if there is a need. In this case parents accept help readily.
- * Parents all exhibit patience and concern when interacting with the children. Frequent comments of encouragement and praise can be overheard.

- * There are often smiles and snippets of conversation as the child is reading.
- * Most children are aware of the length of their reading book, how far it is to the end and what the next book will be.

Interviews with parents

- * The mothers are most perceptive in analysing what they do, and how they respond differently to different children.
- * They are supportive of one another and have a sensitivity towards each other's children.
- * The program has given the parents a vehicle for acquiring and discussing shared knowledge about how to help their children's reading.
- * Although at first I felt that they were giving me responses they thought I wanted to hear, as the interviews progressed their honesty was apparent and their answers did seem to reflect their genuine feelings.
- * The parents were surprisingly relaxed talking to me, and I feel that my openness with them in discussing this research project has created an atmosphere of closer communication throughout the parent body than I have hitherto experienced.
- * Two mothers indicated quite an advanced insight into reading development, and all of those observed showed an appreciation of the range of stages and ability levels within the class.

- * The satisfaction derived from helping in the classroom is very evident.
- * Almost all comments were positive; I needed to probe further, or give parents a different, less potentially inhibiting forum in which to express any other negative perceptions they may have about the program. Hence the Focus Group was arranged.

Interviews with children

- * Most children found it difficult to expand their answers and had to be probed to give more than a few words.
- * The two non-participants' children were apparently surprisingly positive about their parents' inability to participate.
- * All children really valued the parents coming in to listen to them. They talked about them with ease and enthusiasm.
- * All children saw themselves as readers despite their level of ability

Personal Reflections

The Parent Helper Reading Practice Program was set up to facilitate daily practice for each child because I believed this to be essential to success in reading for my students. I believed also that it had benefits for me as the teacher because it enabled this practice to take place without me having to hear every child read myself. The research has indicated that the parent participants gain confidence and obtain personal satisfaction from their involvement, which are aspects I had not previously considered.

That the parents have identified a need for further instruction has indicated their understanding of the importance of their role as models for the children. I need to address the suggestions made regarding this and the areas available in the classroom for listening.

Concern has been expressed by another staff member that, having experienced the program in Year 1 the parents expect that it will continue in subsequent years. Obviously it might not be an appropriate or a desired strategy for other teachers, and the preconception by parents that it is as necessary in the later years may need to be addressed so that they can be helped to identify the many other forms of reading which occur in school as the children progress.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the discussion of the results detailed in Chapter 4 and integrates the findings in relation to the research questions. The principal research question was searching for an overview of what occurs during the Parent Helper Reading Practice Program. As the sub-questions investigate different aspects of the program they have implications which must be taken into account when answering Question 1. Therefore each sub-question will be discussed in turn with the major research question treated last.

Question 1.1

What is the nature of the adult/child interaction in the in-class Parent Helper Reading Practice Program?

Interviews with the parents revealed that their initial motivation to participate in the program was to be with their own children in school. Survey responses further showed that some wanted to know what went on in the Year 1 class, while others were concerned to observe how their children behaved and worked and how they related to their peers. Although these appear to reinforce the results obtained by Cairney et al. (1995) they differ in their order of importance: in the Cairney study assisting poor readers and learning how to help their own child with their reading problems were significantly more dominant than being with their child or observing the

classroom procedures. This would seem logical given that most of the programs described were for failing readers, and volunteers were not necessarily working with their own children or in their classrooms. In the current study, parents indicated in the interviews that these early objectives had mostly been satisfied prior to the commencement of this study. Since then the focus and motivation of the interactions had changed to a more general concern to be of help in the reading development of all students in the class.

Interview responses and observations confirmed that there was a positive atmosphere surrounding all adult/child interactions. Other studies have found that when parents read together with their children within the context of a home-school project the experiences were generally enjoyable and rewarding (Bartlett, Hall & Neale, 1982; Cairney & Munsie, 1992b). This would also appear to be the case for the adult-child pairings that occur in my classroom, even when the children are not paired with their own parent. All children enjoyed the parents being there and the parents had made the choice to give up their time because they wanted to participate. These factors together also provided a purpose for the children's reading. As revealed by their interview responses, the children saw the purpose of reading to parent helpers as a means to improving their reading. Having a purpose for reading is an integral feature of the Interactive Model (Kibby, 1995), and has been shown to have a positive input on children's effort and performance (Lipson & Wixson, 1991).

Sessions were informal yet partly directed, with incidental instruction often included. Although following a prescribed format with students nominated by me, each adult managed the session herself directing the child in where to sit, where to begin and how much to read. The amount of practical assistance in organising materials varied, but most mothers demonstrated their role as helper by getting out, and putting away the reading books, and the children were happy to let them. There was usually a short preamble initiated by the parent to put the child at ease, and then the reading began. This is congruent with research into teacher practices while hearing children read in classrooms (Campbell, 1983), from which a set of guidelines was formulated to illustrate the effective strategies used by many teachers.

Physical proximity between reader and listener depended upon their relationship. Where it was their own mother the child would sit very close or even on their lap, but when it was not they stayed further apart and there was no physical contact. However, in all adult/child reading sessions in the class the participants sat side by side, confirming Campbell's (1983) recommendation that this positioning establishes a feeling of unity in working together. No awkwardness was noted in any of the interactions between relatives but with the other pairings there was some hesitance and uncertainty, particularly at the start of a session. As the children appeared to relax they seemed to build up trust and this was observable as they talked and looked to parents periodically during reading. These findings are what might be expected with any group of five to six-year-olds, but none of the

research reviewed was found to have included such data and these results therefore contribute new information.

There appears to be a need for teachers and parents to build an agreed procedure for oral reading around a set of principles about listening and prompting (Kemp, 1992). The video observations revealed that there did exist elements of similarity in parental behaviour based on the prior instruction given, but that there was also individual variation. The attention of the adult was focussed exclusively, in all cases observed, on the child and the text. The child's reading was monitored closely by the parent and there was an intermittent exchange of glances as the child looked up for reassurance or help. The strong emphasis on phonic support is consistent with what Rubert (1994) found to be almost instinctive in parent helpers, but which can be modified with additional instruction. Some parents ran their finger under the text to guide and reinforce the reading, or to draw attention to an error. However, when an error was made two of the mothers waited to see if the child would self-correct without help, while the other two indicated that there was a mistake straight away. They did not usually give the correction, but encouraged the child to reconsider the word. If a word had been omitted then they would usually ask directly what it was. These behaviours seem to indicate a natural tendency towards the Pause, Prompt, Praise procedure (O'Connor, Glynn & Tuck, 1987) which has proved successful in raising children's levels of reading accuracy and self-correction. I had not taught this specific procedure but instruction of this type might be of use in the future. None of the parents waited until the end

of the page before pointing out an uncorrected error, but two did usually leave it until the end of the sentence if the child had been happy to continue. It was interesting to note that in the vast majority of instances the children did not read on far after miscuing as they seemed to know when something was wrong. This would indicate that they were aware of the need to make sense of what they were reading.

The practices used by the participants were relaxed, appeared to be non-threatening to the children and all fell within the description of what teachers usually do when listening to children read (Campbell, 1983). The parents remained calm, using quiet, encouraging voices to correct, praise and question, and created a positive atmosphere conducive to the raising of the children's confidence. Reading confidence was cited in the survey as being a priority to the Year 1 parents, and results of a comparative study of parent helper strategies have confirmed the importance of positive feedback in improving self-esteem, enthusiasm and attitudes to reading (Burdett, 1986).

The observed group of parents had maintained that they were harder on their own children, but this was not evident. In fact, in my observations of the videos, the atmosphere between them was quite relaxed. This lead me to question whether all of the parents actually did on roster what they said they did, or whether their beliefs and reality over their behaviour differed, or whether they modified their usual behaviour when they were being filmed. Their comment was, however, an indication of the tension which can be

created when a mother and her child work together (Rubert, 1994). Parents involved in a parental improvement project (Bartlett, Hall & Neale, 1984) had indicted a stressful atmosphere during home reading prior to their participation in the project; it is possible that parents could have been transferring some negative home-reading experiences to their description of their classroom interactions with their children.

Occasionally interactions were a little tense when a child, related or unrelated, would not concentrate, but this did not last for long and had no ongoing effect. The mother would talk quietly to the child and try to refocus him or her onto the reading by asking questions about what was happening in the story or the pictures. Children experiencing difficulties were given constant encouragement and praise to boost their self esteem. One mother used her own set of reminder triggers, associations, to help children with particular problem words: *"I'll tell them, this is a little trick; remember this?"* Another related the problem word to others with similar beginning sounds or graphophonic patterns. A third related letter shapes to features of the word, e.g.: *"h in house has a tall part like the chimney"*. All strategies had a strong emphasis on decoding with which the children were familiar, through whole-class instruction, and to which they could relate the different approaches.

From the interviews and focus group it emerged that the parents became concerned for the progress of each child they listened to, not only their own, and shared in the joy and satisfaction of each child's success.

The type and quantity of feedback was a personal decision for each mother, but it was notable that certain practices and priorities were common to all and reflected the instruction given by me. Decoding of unknown words using letter sounds happened frequently and was an appropriate strategy with the type of text being used (Schonell, 1972; Juel & Roper/Schneider, 1985). The participants related well to giving this kind of assistance, perhaps because it was familiar from their own past experience. Some instruction and explanation was given by some parents about phonic problems encountered by the child, such as silent letters and vowel digraphs, and there was a small amount of text discussion. The fact that discussion and questioning were under-used strategies perhaps reflects a lack of understanding on the part of parents as to their importance in comprehension. It could indicate the parents' perception of what was most needed, or, perhaps that there was insufficient time to develop discussion about the text. However it is consistent with Campbell's (1981) observations of teachers in which discussion and questioning were less used strategies with early readers than phonic and word support. Praise was interjected throughout every reading, sometimes as a recognition and sometimes as a means of encouragement to keep going; again coinciding with the effective practices taught to Pause, Prompt, Praise tutors (O'Connor, Glynn & Tuck, 1987). Parent behaviours indicated that training had been effective to a large extent but that further instruction in the use of discussion and questioning might be necessary. The extended program of parent training used in the Talk To A Literacy Learner project (Cairney & Munsie, 1995), resulted in valuable discussion of strategies and experiences amongst the

participants. It may be a useful model for further training of my Year 1 parents as it would include discussion of what parents found successful and provide an opportunity for the sharing of ideas.

Each mother brought her own personality and particular qualities to the interactions making the experience with each different adult unique for the child. For some this was important and they expressed a preference for a particular helper to hear them, whilst for others it apparently made no difference to their willingness to read.

In summary, the parent/child interactions were relaxed and friendly with the child readily accepting the parent's directions and assistance. The parents followed a pattern of helper behaviours consistent with those suggested by Campbell (1983) as guidelines for teachers, but the skill of knowing when and how to offer assistance varied from one to another (Rubert, 1994).

Question 1.2

How do children perceive the in-class reading practice program?

Oral reading practice to a parent has been shown to have a significant effect on children's reading achievement (Tizard, Schofield & Hewison, 1982; Schuck, Ullsh & Platt, 1983; Burdett, 1986; Cairney & Munsie, 1992a). This is accepted by teachers and researchers, but in this study it has emerged as an understanding held by the children themselves.

This concurs with the findings of Cairney et al. (1995) when interviewing predominantly much older students. All the children interviewed in the current study regarded reading to an adult at school as essential to their reading progress. For example, when I asked the children if they thought it was important for them to read to a parent every day Emily said: Yes, *because you need to learn words*. This shows that she related, at least in part, the development of her reading knowledge directly to the parental involvement. Then I asked what they thought would happen if the parents did not come in to hear reading daily and Francis responded: *You can't read books at home. You can't read books at school. You can't because you don't know the words*.

This would appear to confirm that he also attributed his success in part to his interaction with parent helpers. Even though the children interviewed reported the importance they placed on reading to parents in class, few children in the class apparently talked about the program to their parents at home. This factor was gleaned from the parent survey. Prior research which only surveyed parents may not have revealed the full picture. This research has, therefore, added to existing research knowledge on the benefits of children reading to parents by considering the children's viewpoints.

An example of this is comments made by children about the importance of getting a new book. Moving on to a new book was emphasised as the most significant event of their reading interactions, and

something which could not happen when they read to their parents at home. My observations have shown that the children were aware of the length of each book, how close they were to the end and what the next title would be. There was excitement and anticipation evident as they approached the end of a text, and sharing this with the parent seemed to be part of their enjoyment. Children understood and accepted the progression from one text to the next, using it as a personal challenge. For example Abigail said: *When I was on my last Green book I got on my Blue book.*

This evidence supported the use of a sequential, structured basal scheme for individual reading practice. The Gay Way Reading Series is structured with gradually increasing levels of difficulty as the children progress sequentially through the texts. Students felt secure about what their next goal was no matter who was listening to them. However, the participants' children felt that they made quicker progress when reading to their own mothers which does concur with some of the parents' own perceptions. It also coincides with some of my observations which showed that participants often spent more than the allotted time with their own children thus giving them the opportunity to read more.

Reading to parents was regarded as a happy experience, with no child able to recount any negative incidents or feelings. However three of the mothers interviewed had said that they were harder and less tolerant with their own children. It would appear that any friction which might occur during reading between a parent and her child did not affect the child's

overall positive perception of the program. Parent helpers were described as "*helpful*" and "*kind*" which indicates that the children were being given encouragement to succeed and praise when they did so. The children showed in interview responses that they accepted the authority of the parents to correct reading errors, as illustrated by Francis's comment: *They tell you some words and letters if you don't know them.*

They also showed that they were happy for parents to make decisions about when they were ready to proceed to the next book. Brian and Dominic explained the procedure clearly as follows: *They start you at the page that you're already on, then you read to another page and they put it on your marker, and then you do your wordlist. Then when you've finished your book you go onto a new book and the mums put the number on the list.*

The reading practice program was seen by the children as an opportunity to involve their parents in school, but it was accepted that the adults were in class to help everybody. Children expressed enjoyment at reading to parents in the classroom, whether or not their own mothers were participants. Three of the four participants' children did not state a preference for reading to their own mothers when they were in, and expressed a willingness to read to anyone. This would seem to indicate that they felt comfortable with all of the adults who came in to help, and concurs with the widely held preference expressed by parents in the survey for their children to have a variety of oral reading experiences. However it was

noted in my personal observations that all participants' children did in fact ask if they could read to their own mothers whenever they were in class.

In survey responses some parents reported that their children regarded reading to the teacher as special and different. Although these comments applied to only 36% of the respondents it is a sufficiently high proportion to support the importance for me to hear each child read on a regular basis. The majority of the children interviewed also stated a preference for reading to me, confirming that they valued the experience themselves.

There was general agreement amongst the students interviewed that they liked to be chosen by the parents rather than having the option of choosing for themselves. This might have been influenced by the current procedure of parents being assigned a specific group to work with and there being no opportunity for choice by the child, but it could also indicate that they attached some importance to being selected.

Despite the quantity of research into parent/child reading interactions (Bartlett, Hall & Neale, 1984; Widlake, 1987; Cairney & Munsie, 1992a; Cairney et. al., 1995) no data were found on the perceptions of very young children, whether related or unrelated to the adults. The findings of this aspect of the study, therefore, cannot be related to existing literature and provide information additional to the established body of knowledge.

When asked about any differences they perceived between the parents on roster, children indicated differences between adults in physical terms, with emphasis on their voices being different. This might indicate that, in the course of reading aloud, the parent's verbal feedback is what most impresses the child. Burdett (1986) emphasised the importance of praise as positive reinforcement and as feedback in providing incentive for the child to succeed. It is also possible that the question about what they thought was different when they read to parents in school was too difficult for them, but it is interesting that the same response, "it's like hearing different voices and hearing different words", was given almost word for word in the two separate group interviews.

Overall, the children perceived the in-class parent helper program as an opportunity to progress with their reading and to have parents in the classroom. Through this experience they could read more, get onto new books and receive helpful advice from adults.

Question 1.3

Are there differences for children whose parents participate and those who do not?

Past research has looked closely at the effects of children reading to their own parents at home (Tizard, Schofield & Hewison, 1982; Counsel, Dominic & Portesi, 1985; Hannon, 1986; Rubert, 1994), and also at various forms of parent involvement in schools (Bloom, 1987; Cairney et. Al., 1995) .

However no study reviewed had investigated the differences in perception which might exist for children whose parents participate in classroom reading and those whose parents do not. Investigating this aspect was a particular focus of the current study.

The non-participants' children interviewed did not appear to view themselves as disadvantaged, and seemed to value and enjoy reading to parents in class just as much as their peers. They appeared to accept without complaint their parents' inability to become involved, and did not indicate any resentment. I cannot be sure that their responses reflected their real feelings as they may have been telling me what they thought I wanted to hear, or what they thought their parents wanted them to say. Also these two students' responses may not reflect the possible responses of other children of non-participating parents. This may be the case as there were two respondents to the questionnaire who stated that their children were disappointed by their non-involvement.

Participant parents regarded themselves as more lenient and patient with non-participants' children, and more likely to give them extra help. They stated in the interviews that they also used more praise and encouragement in order to boost the children's confidence. This together with other interview comments seemed to indicate that they felt that these students were missing out on reading feedback and they saw themselves as helping to compensate for this factor. Whether or not this supposition was justified was not investigated in this study. There was also an underlying

feeling expressed by one parent that she was conscious of not upsetting these children and was therefore gentler in her approach. These perceptions could result in a somewhat different experience in terms atmosphere for the non-participants' children.

During my observations I noticed that these children had not always done their home practice, were not very familiar with their texts and stopped frequently for assistance. One of them was the weakest of the six children observed but the other was quite a proficient reader.

The participants' children had the opportunity to share part of their school time with their mothers which they evidently enjoyed. The experience meant that their parents were being tutored in how best to help them at home, in relation to school reading practices, which did seem to be reflected in their reading. They had always done their home practice, were familiar with their reading book and when stopped by difficulties were more likely to draw on experiences of previous reading to assist themselves. This finding coincides with that of Becker & Epstein (1982) who observed that if parents spent time in school "they usually made a greater effort to help their children learn at home"(p.101). It was noticeable how familiar and articulate these students were when discussing the procedures involved in the program. They could detail exactly what their mothers' duties were in setting up and recording progress during reading sessions, and some of the strategies the adults used to help them with difficult words; e.g.: pointing, identifying the initial letter and sounding out the word.

The mothers judged themselves to be harder and stricter with their own children. They felt that they pushed them and became annoyed and frustrated when they made mistakes. Comparing these comments with my own observations this was not apparent, but their behaviour may have been influenced by the fact that they were being video-taped. It would seem possible that during normal circumstances these children might have to work harder and under more pressure to perform than non-participants' children. This would of course be balanced on days when their mothers were not on roster because they would then be regarded as any other child by whoever was listening to them.

The mothers' enthusiasm for their own children to succeed may have occasioned one distinct difference between the two groups. Participants' children were allowed to finish their book, even if it meant taking longer than the average time for the session, more often than non-participants' children. The children themselves mentioned this and I noted it during my observations. It could partially be accounted for by the fact that the mothers knew what had already been read at home, but there was also a degree of pressure to move on exerted by the children on their mothers, as well as by the mothers on their children.

One participant's child was very relaxed with his own mother and markedly tense when reading to another. For children of non-participants this tension is possible at every reading interaction perhaps making it a less pleasurable experience. In contrast, the participants' children shared a

physical closeness with their mothers during reading, climbing onto their knee or having a maternal arm put around them. There was obvious pleasure visible between mother and child during most of the observed sessions.

In summary there would appear to be differences in the experience for participants' and non-participants' children. Participants' children share school time with their mothers, are more frequently permitted to finish their books, are better prepared for their reading in class, but have higher expectations put upon them by their parents and may be involved in occasional negative interactions. Their parents are better trained and motivated to assist them with reading at home that reflects school reading demands.

Non-participants' children do not share this experience with their mothers, but do not appear to resent this fact. They are treated in a deliberately positive and encouraging manner by the parent helpers and are given more positive feedback for their efforts, as stated in the parent interviews. They appear to be less well prepared at home for reading in class, and sometimes come to school without having done their home reading.

Again much of this evidence is not related to the literature as it comes from previously unresearched areas.

Question 1.4

How do parents perceive the in-class Parent Helper Reading Practice Program?

Parent perceptions of the program are inevitably dependent upon whether or not they are active participants. Each of them has formed opinions on the overall effect of the program because it directly affects their child, and the object of the survey was to obtain a global understanding of parent feeling. The interviews, focus group and observations then served to gather detailed information of participants' perceptions.

Ninety two percent of respondents to the survey had indicated support for parent in-class help confirming the findings of previous researchers that parents want to be involved in their children's education (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Hannon, 1986; Bloom, 1987; Cairney & Munsie, 1992a; Cairney et al., 1995). As only 57% of Year One parents had actually participated it indicated a high level of support by non-participants for their children being assisted in reading by other parents. This is another aspect of parent inclusion in class activities about which I had found no data in the literature. Although one respondent made a negative comment about the program and one gave no direct opinion to the question asking whether there was anything that they did not like about the program, both gave answers to later questions which indicated that they were not averse to the program.

One of the chief benefits of the program was seen by parents in the questionnaire to be the opportunity it afforded their children to increase in confidence and self esteem. Further, many considered daily reading practice to be beneficial whilst those interviewed drew a strong parallel between daily reading in school and reading achievement. My having what Widlake (1987) described as an 'open door' policy towards parents, by "inviting them to take an active role in the classroom", would seem to have resulted in these parents regarding reading practice as closely related to reading success and therefore important.

That parents see themselves as educators can have a profound effect on children's learning (Dunn, 1981; Cole, 1996). Those involved in my classroom reading practice program appeared to see themselves as competent, active partners in the reading development of the Year 1 children. With this belief, expressed in survey responses and interviews, they regarded their role as significantly benefiting the students' progress as well as assisting me by freeing up my time to attend to other aspects of teaching. This perception of themselves appears to have influenced their home-reading practices, and they have been equipped with the conventional and procedural knowledge required to effectively assist their children at home (Breen et al., 1994) with school reading practices.

While in the classroom the mothers accepted that they were there to work and be fully involved with whichever child was reading to them. All four of the observation group admitted becoming involved originally to be

with their own children. However their motivation had since altered to incorporate broader factors as they had learned more about the role. They had discovered an unexpected satisfaction in helping other children grow as readers. Almost half the surveyed parents appreciated the insight which participation gave them into school life, and the advantage that this brought in being able to effectively reinforce classroom learning at home. This factor helps to avoid the mismatch between home and school practices which can detrimentally affect children's literacy development (LoBianco & Freebody, 1997).

When describing the procedures and strategies they used whilst listening to reading all participants detailed various elements which had been specified in the instruction sessions. This confirmed that they were aware of the importance of carrying out what I had demonstrated, and observations showed that they were quite comfortable and confident with them. In addition to these they described further strategies which they had developed, some of which indicated a deeper understanding of the reading process: e.g. giving thinking time (Builder, 1982; Campbell, 1983), and the use of prior knowledge gained from the text or through scaffolding (Rubert, 1994). Although some appeared to equate their role with substituting for the teacher in one specific task, they acknowledged that it was essential for me to regularly monitor each child myself. Despite being confident in what they were doing, all the observed helpers stated that they felt comfortable asking for advice when necessary, which I had also observed in other roster parents.

Amongst both participant and non-participant respondents to the survey there was a significant majority who preferred a variety of adult listeners for their children. It is possible that this response could have been influenced by a number of factors:

- i) they support the program
- ii) they value the importance of every child reading every day at school
- iii) they consider that it helps build confidence if children go to different people
- iv) they trust one another
- v) the risk of other parents gaining confidential information through conversations with their children is minimised if they do not read to the same person very often.

It may be that parents have a number of reasons for preferring their child to read to a variety of other parent helpers. However, it was outside the bounds of this study to investigate this aspect further.

Commenting on the choice of texts the observed parents considered that the repetition and gradual development of the restricted vocabulary in the chosen reading scheme contributed to the children's success. That they related well to the format themselves and found that it suited their children could have been influenced by the similarity in structure and approach of these books to what the parents might have experienced in Year One. However four of the five who contributed to the focus group confirmed that

their children preferred these to other supplementary readers (Sunshine, Story Box, Literacy Links and Southern Cross), finding them more challenging and exciting. The sustained storyline which follows from book to book was recognised by two of the sample group as an incentive to their sons' to progress. It may be that the parents' comments have also been influenced by the fact that the Gay Way Readers were the texts chosen for the program, and therefore seen by them as more important and substantial than the supplementary readers. If a different set of readers had been chosen (e.g. Story Box) then these may have been viewed by parents as the best.

Even so, these perceptions by the parents would appear to indicate that they were developing their own understandings about this particular reading process through observation and reflection. None of them was a teacher nor had any formal educational training on which to draw but they were highly motivated by the desire to help their children and had been given confidence through instruction and participation (Bartlett, Hall & Neale, 1984).

Overall, both participant and non-participant parents supported the program and regarded it as beneficial to their children. They felt that reading to a variety of adult listeners improved their children's self-confidence as well as their reading. Participants saw themselves as educators or educator helpers (Dunn, 1981), and were able to recognise elements of the text which were helpful to the young readers.

Question 1.5

What are the teacher's perceptions of the Parent Helper Reading Practice Program?

Research has shown that the more children read the better their reading is likely to become (Allington, 1977; Stanovich, 1986; Samuels, Schermer & Reinking, 1992). This program enables me to realise my goal that every child's reading is listened to every day, but constant monitoring of the helper process is necessary. Without the program it would be impossible for the children to read to me more than once or twice a week, and this could have a significant effect on their success and their motivation to read (Allington, 1977).

Bloom (1987), Toomey (1993), Rubert (1994) and many other researchers have stated that parents can provide effective support to children's reading. These parents have shown that they can develop effective listener skills and provide meaningful feedback to the Year 1 students. The children were observed receiving constant encouragement; far more than I would be able to give to each child each day. Positive reinforcement has been found to be of great importance in building the self-image of young readers (Burdett, 1986), and I feel has contributed to my students' success.

Through the program the parents have been taught how to help their children's reading, and this has resulted in a positive change in home

reading practices in many families. There is a need for on-going parent instruction as the skill level of the children increases. More emphasis needs to be put on questioning and discussion of the text to ensure comprehension. This seems to be consistent with previous findings (Rubert, 1994; Cairney & Munsie, 1995), however it is not part of the Parent Helper Reading Practice Program in its present form. In her Parent Involvement Program Rubert (1994) reported "dramatic changes" in the forms of support offered by parents once they had been taught what to do, even when there was considerable resistance to a particular strategy.

The roster causes minor disruption and disturbance to the classroom but the children have adapted well to this and the benefits outweigh the disadvantages. No incidence of jealousy or failure to leave mothers to get on with their task was observed, although there have been instances in the past of children taking a little time to acclimatise to their mothers being in the room.

Parents were apparently conscientious in following the guidelines laid down, and showed respect for the school's request for confidentiality about classroom matters.

My overall perception is that the program meets a need within my classroom and has been a vehicle for greater parent understanding of the reading process. There is a need on my part to reconsider classroom layout and to provide further parent training.

Question 1.6

What are the positive and negative aspects for parents, students and teacher?

As this section deals with three distinct subjects I have arranged it under three separate headings: Parents, Children and Teacher.

Parents

A broad range of positive repercussions for parents emerged from all data sources. Most significant was the sense of achievement and personal satisfaction expressed by over 80% of survey respondents and all of the interview and focus groups. This corresponds partially with Cairney et al. (1995) although my parents related it to helping and watching the achievements of all the children, not just their own. It appeared that the parents derived enjoyment from the shared experiences they had with any of the students.

Being part of a mutually helpful community working together for the children was mentioned frequently, and supported evidence presented in Successful Intervention (Curriculum Corporation, 1996) and Developing Partnerships (Cairney et al., 1995). Mothers valued the friendships made with the children and the interaction with other parents which had come about because of their taking part in the program. Some had become interested in each other's children and, whilst conscious to observe the confidentiality guidelines set by the school, had felt able to reassure and

support one another when a mother was particularly concerned about her child.

Being involved regularly in the classroom had enabled the mothers to watch and gain an insight into their children's school life, and to see how they fitted into their peer group. It also clarified what the expectations were for their child and how school had changed since they were students. Close contact with a variety of children helped them to develop a better awareness of the ability range within a class, and the developmental stages through which children pass at very different rates. In the case of parents working with their own children my study reflects and builds onto earlier research which has looked at home and school based reading programs (Tizard, Schofield & Hewison, 1982; Cairney & Munsie, 1992b; Rubert, 1994; Cairney et al., 1995). It adds to this body of knowledge by providing detailed information on parent perceptions of their helper role and the impact that this has had on their interactions with their children both at home and at school. With regard to participants listening to other children reading it provides data on the hitherto uninvestigated area of parent and child perceptions in a non-familial reading partnership.

Participation on the roster has enabled parents to develop a range of skills to use in assisting children with oral reading practice and has reinforced the importance of reading. They have become more confident in helping their own children and have transferred what they did at school to their child's home reading situation.

Non-participant parents felt reassured that their children were being given the opportunity for practice by other adults on a daily basis under the supervision of a trained professional.

One negative issue for non-participating parents was having to cope with their children's demands for them to come in on roster, although this only appeared to apply to a small number of cases. The other was the question of confidentiality. These are very reasonable concerns, the first capable of causing anguish to both parent and child on a regular basis. The second is an issue under constant review and any breach of confidential information would be addressed by me with the person concerned.

Some participating mothers found working in the classroom distracting and would have preferred a separate area to take the children for reading. Due to the strictures of duty of care this would be impossible to arrange, but they did have the option of using the verandah outside the classroom although no one chose to use it. Rearrangement of furniture within the room might facilitate more convenient listening areas, where parents and children were screened from the rest of the classroom, and this is a matter for my further consideration.

Children

The children's enjoyment of the program has been evidenced through parent questionnaire responses, child and parent interviews and observations. Because children welcomed parents into their classroom and

valued the individual time which was made available to them, they were open to learning from the roster participants. Reading was perceived by students as important, but also as an activity which they anticipated positively. All evidence collected indicated that the children had a positive image of themselves as readers even if their skills were not particularly advanced. They enjoyed having their own parents involved but interacted well with other mothers, being given plenty of attention, praise and encouragement. Feedback from their reading was consistently positive and designed to build their self-image as readers. My informal observations of the class confirmed the view that 'parental involvement empowers children's learning' (Cole, 1996).

From the small sample studied it appeared that participants' children had developed more advanced understandings of the roster procedures than non-participants' children and possibly felt more comfortable with it. They had regularly completed home practice and had a more comprehensive knowledge of their texts. They were usually given longer reading time by their own mothers who showed a very high level of interest in their daily progress.

All children received more individual time for oral reading than would be possible without the program. On most days they spent approximately 9 minutes alone with a parent helper; this would be impossible for me to give them on my own. The time they spent was also without interruption, with the

adult being totally focussed on helping them. When they read to me my attention is being constantly demanded by other class members.

Disappointment at their mothers' non-involvement was the only specified negative for non-participants' children. Although it did not apparently present as a major problem it cannot be ignored when considering the effects of the program as a whole. Despite the stated benefits for these children there is no substitute for their own relative being there for them.

The possibility of missing out on teacher instruction while reading to a parent did exist, and was an unavoidable occurrence from time to time. Precautions were taken to minimise it by teaching the main part of the lesson before reading began and then sending the most able children, who would most quickly catch up, to read first. These tended to be independent workers who would ask if they needed assistance. Occasionally a less resourceful child may have missed instruction but this was quickly dealt with and the child set to work. Parents had been asked to check with children who had been called out during a lesson whether or not they knew what to do when they returned to their desks, and send them to me if they did not. However this did not always happen.

Teacher

The program has great benefits for me as the teacher. It has enabled me to set up an individualised reading path for each child by which they can

have essential daily practice and feedback to help develop reading skills (Carbo & Cole, 1995). Because the program is structured and directed it is simple for the parents to follow once they have undergone initial training. Together with clear and easy recording procedures this allows me to confidently let parents listen to most of the class each morning, leaving me about six children to hear per day.

With the individual reading taken care of I can then concentrate on other aspects of language teaching. In this way the children are exposed to a range of Whole Language experiences in addition to traditional, phonetically based instruction and practice.

Through the program I have enjoyed a close relationship with the parents, and have established a relaxed classroom atmosphere within which they and I feel comfortable. Sensitivity to the feelings and perceptions of non-participant parents is always important, as they must have regular channels of communication available and should never feel that a judgement of them is being made. The level of parent support for all my teaching programs is very high, which I attribute partially to the fact that they have gained confidence in me through being able to experience my classroom.

My experiences echo the responses of teachers documented by Cairney et al. (1995) who described similar benefits from their involvement of parents in programs for students needing reading support.

Having an established routine can be restricting in the timetabling of specialist teacher subjects. In order to maintain support for the program it needs to take place in the early morning while the mothers are at school. To expect them to return an hour later would be unreasonable. However this can cause inconvenience to colleagues trying to accommodate my class.

An anticipated negative was that not all parents who volunteered would be suited to the role. However this has not been the case and all parent helpers have been able to assist in a competent way. Success of the program is dependent upon sufficient volunteers being consistently available. This can pose problems if parents are suddenly unable to come in at short notice, and there have been times when there have been too few volunteers.

It has been necessary to give a substantial amount of personal time to setting up the program and training parents. Time must also be set aside regularly to check that recording is being correctly carried out.

Confidentiality was a potential problem. I impressed upon the mothers that when in the classroom they assumed the same responsibility that I had, as far as not discussing individual children or classroom issues outside the room. It was not a problem during this study but will always be considered as a potentially negative aspect.

Overall the program provides me with trained listeners to assist with oral reading practice and appears to have led to closer parent/teacher relationships. The minor disruption and the concern over confidentiality are acceptable negatives when compared with the overall benefits of the program.

Question 1.7

Do parents find the information guidelines provided by the teacher sufficient to fulfil their helper role?

Giving instruction and training to parents in how to assist with children's reading has been shown to make oral reading practice more effective (McNaughton, Glynn & Robinson, 1981; Builder, 1982; Topping & Lindsay, 1992; Toomey, 1993). Attendance at a minimum of one of the two parent preparation talks had been a pre-requisite to joining the Parent Helper Reading Practice Program.

Survey responses indicated that all those who had been actively involved in the classroom felt that they had been given sufficient instruction. During the interviews the mothers confirmed that the initial talk and modelling, together with the written guidelines which were always available in the room, had enabled them to proceed with confidence. Being able to approach me for advice or confirmation about anything they were unsure of was stated by several parents as a necessary resource.

Video observations and my field notes had revealed that all parents in the sample carried out the specified procedures in preparing for reading and recording each child's progress. There was widespread use of various strategies which I had demonstrated, confirming that parents had understood their role and become proficient and effective listeners. These findings that parents are reinforcing the teacher model agree with Bloom (1987). The mothers showed familiarity with the reading materials and had no hesitation in knowing what vocabulary or comprehension checks to carry out with each child before proceeding to a new text. The sequential structure and consistent format of the scheme could be seen as facilitating parent independence.

In the focus group situation, however, it emerged that on-going training would be welcomed. Parents recognised that as the children's ability had increased the type of help and feedback they required had changed. They admitted a need for this themselves but also referred to inconsistencies in helper behaviours which they had observed and which they felt could be rectified through further instruction sessions. Builder (1982) stated that "whenever parents are involved with reading, it is imperative that they be trained, but training must be geared to the needs of the parents". Some parent programs have included periodic retraining (Builder, 1982; Cairney & Munsie, 1995) but many have just offered instruction talks at the beginning (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Schuck, Ulsh & Platt, 1983; Bartlett, Hall & Neale, 1984; Counsel, Dominic & Portesi, 1985). There would appear to be no definitive model to follow with regard to the

amount or frequency of parent education. I had not felt a need in previous years to update training, nor had there been a request for it, but it has emerged during the course of this research as an area requiring periodic review.

Question 1

What happens when parents regularly help with reading practice in a Year One classroom?

The objective in setting up the program was to ensure that every child was given the opportunity to read individually to an adult every day. This was based on the finding that practice is essential to the acquisition of reading competency and fluency (Carbo & Cole, 1995). The Parent Helper Reading Practice Program facilitated this enabling students to make progress at their own rate, receiving constant attention and monitoring. While daily reading is important for all children it is even more vital for less able readers. Weaker readers, who particularly need regular practice are often the very ones who do not get the opportunity to read connected text in remediation lessons (Allington, 1977). This program did not differentiate between levels of ability as it allowed each student the same opportunity to progress through the graded texts at his or her own rate. Individual challenge was presented to every student by the graduated levels of difficulty in the books, and the children received constant encouragement and praise from the adult listeners to help build self esteem. Thereby strong readers could make rapid progress and weaker readers could take their time

to repeat and reinforce learning as necessary. Regular feedback given to me by the parents ensured that any difficulties which arose with a child were picked up and addressed quickly.

The fact that parents were not professional educators did not nullify their value as listeners because they followed and reflected a model of listening that I practise and had taught to them (Bloom, 1987). The basal reading scheme texts used for individual reading are written in a progressive and predictable way, using a core sight vocabulary of easily decodable words. These build and extend knowledge gradually, with the children able to utilise their developing phonological skills together with parent help in sounding out to decode words. Use of this type of material is supported by Adams' (1990, p.49) review of a range of research which reported that "approaches in which systematic code instruction is included along with the reading of meaningful connected text result in superior reading achievement overall, for both low-readiness and better prepared students".

Although discussion and questioning are also important factors in comprehension, the texts used do not rely on these more creative helper techniques in order to be understood by young readers. Parents need scaffolding themselves as they learn how to assist their children, and developing effective strategies can turn a potentially frustrating experience into a satisfying one (Rubart, 1994). Using this type of text enabled them to easily identify sounding out as an effective strategy to promote with the

students, and one with which they quickly identified as they gained confidence in their listener role.

Being in the classroom provided an opportunity for participants to observe my teaching and possibly take from that some ideas which they could later use (Bloom, 1987). Some of the parent behaviours which I noted from the video recordings had not been specifically taught but were strategies which I would have demonstrated in my teaching. Incidental questioning by parents about specific problems which arose with a child enabled me to provide instruction and advice quickly, informally and at the point of need.

Sounding out was the principal method of assisting children identify unknown words. However interview and questionnaire responses revealed that parents had reflected on the procedures and strategies which they used, and were able to develop and modify their skills as listeners to extend the students' learning. It is not known what the parents' self concepts were at the start of the program but, after participating in the roster they saw themselves as effective educators of their children under my guidance. This perception of themselves can have a crucial impact on how they equip their children for future learning from themselves and from others (Dunn, 1981; Cole, 1996). After participating in the program parents became more aware of the need for thoroughness in the children's skills development and ability to understand text.

The students enjoyed the daily interaction with parents, treating it as something special and attributing to it some part of their success as readers. Each day's reading was a step closer to their goal - the next book - and as such was itself an achievement. The children were receiving constant positive feedback and praise from parent listeners, with reading errors being corrected in an encouraging rather than a negative way. Thus children who were not listened to regularly at home could experience daily approbation and encouragement of their efforts.

The classroom became quite congested and there was a constant background noise during parent reading time, but despite this the video observations showed that there was complete focus and concentration on the task in hand by the adult/child reading pairs. Children were given the total attention of the listener; allowing them possibly some of the most valuable minutes of their school day. There was movement of children from seatwork and teacher directed lessons to their reading session and this was sometimes momentarily disruptive. However both children and parents were able to continue effectively with their tasks, with few comments being made in any of the data sources about the difficulty of the situation.

In interviews, questionnaire responses and Focus group parents found the in-class experience rewarding and satisfying. Their initial interest in their own child's achievements changed to a genuine concern for the reading development of every student. They moved around the

classroom discreetly and confidently, and left quietly when they had finished.

Parent presence in the classroom was occasionally inhibiting to my teaching, and sometimes it diverted me momentarily from my work. It necessitated an awareness on my part of who was reading during instruction time and some individual reteaching had to be done. At the same time, however, it enabled me to carry out my whole-class whole language program and assist individuals or groups of children in carrying out a range of language tasks, confident that individual reading practice was being done.

Having a substantial proportion of parents actively involved in the program, and the remainder supportive of it, was consistent with the value placed on reading by the children. They attributed their success as readers partially to the help given them by parents in school. The importance of the other key component of success, home practice, was reinforced by the participating parents when they referred to it during their sessions with the children, as seen on the video tapes. In agreement with Becker & Epstein (1982) I found that when parents participated in reading at school they were more rigorous in ensuring that home reading was regularly done by their own children. Their offspring demonstrated greater familiarity with the texts and exhibited a higher level of reading confidence.

Summary

When parents participated regularly in classroom reading practice they were accepted and valued by the children and teacher. Their involvement was seen by all parties as contributing to the personal success of each child. Participant parents saw themselves as educators or educator helpers, they gained listener skills which they used in school and at home, and they demonstrated an ability to reflect on and develop the strategies which they used. Their children exhibited greater knowledge and confidence in reading.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

In a comprehensive review of studies of parents hearing children read Toomey (1993 p.232) concluded that more "observation studies of what goes on during parent/child reading episodes with both high and low-competence readers" are needed to discover why "parental involvement can be so beneficial".

The intention of this study was to observe, describe and report on what took place during an existing reading practice program involving parents in a classroom interacting with Year 1 children of all ability levels. Results showed that the involvement of adults during the daily Language session could be integrated without undue disruption so that they became a normal feature of the classroom environment. Parents carried out a specific function which was recognised and valued by all parties. In-servicing of parents to fulfil this role was viewed as essential by parents, and both feedback and prior research indicate that up-dating of instruction is necessary and desired.

Literacy is socially and culturally constructed (Wells, 1985; Breen et al., 1994; Miller, 1996), and within the context of this Parent Helper Reading Practice Program adults and children who live in and belong to the same community interact in a socially and educationally meaningful way.

According to the information gathered from the parents the program was seen as advantageous to their children's reading achievement and had provided benefits for participant and non-participant adults. Non-participants were reassured that their children were reading regularly at school and felt that their self-esteem and reading confidence were enhanced by reading to other adults. Participant parents gained personal satisfaction as well as knowledge of how to assist children with their reading, which they transferred to their home-reading practices.

Children were able to progress in the development of their reading skills at their own pace. They welcomed parental interaction whether or not their own parents were involved, and their attitudes to reading were positive, with little evidence seen of poor reader self-image. Through the use of parents children experienced daily individual adult attention and abundant encouragement and praise for their reading. Therefore, by setting up the program and gaining parent involvement, reading has been constructed as important, pleasurable and achievable. Although this social construction of reading was a side-product it may prove to be as important as the major goal of the program, which was to give the children daily practice to improve decoding and automaticity.

Some teachers may be concerned that using structured, phonic based texts for the individual reading program may place undue importance on decoding at the expense of meaning, and thereby construct reading as a code cracking exercise. The findings of this study indicated that parents did

not often discuss the meaning of the text and it was shown to be a requirement for future parent training sessions to ensure that they encouraged meaning making.

However, recent research (Adams, 1990, p.49) supports the inclusion of both traditional and modern methods, as each can nurture vital skills development while at the same time providing an interesting literature-based environment. Through the use of a program such as the one described in this study it is possible to achieve the joint objectives of giving each student the opportunity for daily sustained practice using structured and easily decodable texts, along with the provision of a comprehensive Whole Language program.

Consistent with the body of information gathered over the past thirty years, indicating the value of closer home/school relationships, this program encourages parental involvement in everyday classroom activity. This fosters a more natural and relaxed interaction between the teacher and the parents whereby discussion of the children's progress and achievement can occur in an environment of mutual trust. However, if this feeling of trust is to endure once students have left the Year 1 program it may be necessary to explain more clearly to parents that children's needs change, and that the intensive individual oral reading practice in school encouraged in Year 1 may not be necessary for the majority of children once they have achieved a certain level of skill.

Limitations, and Implications for further research

Throughout the course of this study care has been taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the data, but the accuracy of the information was reliant upon the willingness and ability of the participants to answer honestly and accurately. It has also been dependent upon the impartiality of the teacher/researcher which, though striven for, must be open to question. The section on Limitations and the one on Children's Behaviour, under Video Observations, acknowledge the involvement of the teacher in the study and allow for some subjectivity.

This research was conducted in one Year 1 classroom, and was concerned with only one aspect of the literacy program, the parent help element. The results of this research, therefore, are not readily generalisable to wider populations as the data source was so restricted. However, the study has shown the value of, and the need for more extensive research into the perceptions of children and parents involved in school-based reading programs in regular classes. It would be useful to replicate the study in other schools and in other districts in order to gain a wider picture of the impact and effects of this type of program on its participants. Studies conducted by non-participant observers would help reduce subjectivity.

All participants in this study believed that the children's reading improved as a result of the program but no measures were included to verify or evaluate this. It would be interesting to include a control group and a

measure of reading achievement before commencement of a replica study, and at the end of a predetermined period of parental involvement, to ascertain whether perceived benefits could be measured in terms of reading achievement for children of different ability levels. Further, only reading of structured phonic-based texts was considered in this research; it may be interesting to consider parental involvement in other aspects of literacy such as writing, viewing and use of computers.

Since the revolution in methods of teaching reading and the introduction of the Whole Language philosophy, the structured, progressive, phonetically based type of reading text used in this program is less likely to be used as part of a Year 1 literacy program. Since it was found, in this case, to be highly successful for both the parents and the students to use and understand without a great deal of on-going teacher in-put, it may be timely for further research to be carried out into other programs which incorporate some structured phonics as part of their whole literature based classroom program. This is especially pertinent as the latest theory describing the four roles of good readers (Freebody, 1992) includes the role of text decoder, yet this may not be taught in a structured sequential way in Whole Language classrooms. Text decoder is the role emphasised in the program under study; the remaining roles being addressed during other parts of the classroom literacy program. Some children will not 'pick up' grapheme-phoneme correspondences without direct teaching (Adams, 1990).

Implications for Educational Practice

The Review of the Literature and the results obtained from this study indicate that parents can be trained as effective listeners of children's reading. The positive self-image of the children as readers and their confidence in reading appeared to develop from their interaction with parent helpers. In light of this, more teachers might be encouraged to involve parents in a reading practice program.

The data collected showed that valuable information can be gathered from even very young students about learning programs which teachers put in place. Asking children for their perceptions of aspects of their education may help teachers to better evaluate their own work, and help children to value and understand what and how they are learning. It may also be useful to alert teachers to mismatches between home and school understandings and practices around literacy.

In this school, a more extensive program of parent training could be devised, with periodic review and updating as children's skills develop. The instruction might include more specific guidelines for using the Pause, Prompt, Praise strategy (O'Connor, Glynn & Tuck, 1987), and explanation of the importance of discussion and questioning during the reading sessions, in order to increase the focus on making meaning. Teachers setting up in-class reading programs may need to canvass parents regularly to determine

when/if they feel the need for further training in the use of the more advanced texts and techniques as students progress (Builder, 1982).

Where daily oral reading to parents has been the practice in a class, liaison with the following grade-level teacher may be desirable to facilitate the explanation to parents that the regime may not continue in successive years, and the educational reasons for this.

The positive impacts expressed by parents and children in this study may not always occur as the result of setting up an in-class parent help program. There are a number of potentially negative effects such as breaches of confidentiality. Teachers setting up programs need to be aware of the potential negatives and have a plan to address them. In this study perceived benefits far outweighed any possible negatives.

Finally, learning to read is arguably the most important aspect of a child's learning experience during the first year at school. In order to be successful, a child not only needs a certain level of phonemic and syntactic awareness, but also needs to learn how to decode and make meaning from text. Providing opportunities for daily interaction with texts is a necessary part of any Year 1 literacy program. One way to ensure that each child has the opportunity to practise reading daily is through an in-class parent help reading program. This study indicated that such a program can be successful and have benefits not only for a child's reading acquisition but also for the parents and teacher.

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APPENDICES

The following items were integral to the successful implementation of this research:

Appendix 1	Character profiles of the parent helpers observed and interviewed.
Appendix 2	Draft Parent Questionnaire.
Appendix 3	Amended Parent Questionnaire.
Appendix 4	Letter to parents explaining research and requesting completion of the questionnaire.
Appendix 5	Questions for interviews with parents.
Appendix 6	Questions for interviews with children.
Appendix 7	Letter to selected participant parents requesting further assistance with the research.
Appendix 8	Letter to selected non-participant parents requesting permission to observe their children.
Appendix 9	Agreement to participate.
Appendix 10	Letter received by researcher from Focus Group participants.
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APPENDIX 1

PROFILES OF OBSERVED PARENTS

The four parents chosen to be observed whilst participating in the Reading Practice program in the classroom differ from one another in a number of ways, and it was considered pertinent to this study to briefly describe each of them before analysing their actions. Each individual has been shown the description of themselves and they were invited to make adjustments if necessary. However no parents made changes.

Anne appears to be an outgoing and socially confident person who initiates interaction and enjoys a friendly relationship with both parents and students. She is involved in the school Canteen and assists in sporting activities where extra help is needed. She always appears happy and full of enthusiasm for the task in hand. She has a rather loud voice and laughs a great deal, which initially may be a little intimidating to the more timid students, but her caring nature and her use of humour ensure that their fears are quickly dispelled.

She has an older child in Year 3 and this is the second year in which she has been involved in this program. Despite her previous experience in my classroom she frequently asked for reassurance this year that what she was doing was what was required, reflecting her appreciation of the importance of her influence on the students. She is a person of action and

this comes through in her approach and pace during the reading experience with each child.

Her own daughter, Abigail, developed her early reading skills gradually and needed to put in a good deal of effort before she really started to enjoy it. Throughout this time Anne built up Abigail's confidence and belief in herself as a reader; an approach she uses consistently in the classroom.

Bernadette was also involved in this program two years ago with her older son, now in Year 3. She appears to be a very quiet, gentle person with a professional career background, and a personal love of books and literature. She assists with cataloguing stock in the school library on a voluntary basis, and is an active member of the Parents and Friends Association.

She very quickly familiarised herself with the program, asking for clarification as necessary, and now has a good understanding of her role as a parent helper. This was quite a novel concept for her initially as she had never before come in contact with parent involvement in classrooms, and she was somewhat sceptical of it. Her younger son was a reluctant reader who was unwilling to put in the effort needed to develop his understanding of the process. However, Bernadette was very patient, yet insistent, with him and he is now reading enthusiastically for his own enjoyment. She has a firm but gentle approach with the students, ensuring that they work hard during their session with her. She is highly sensitive to difficulties which

they may be having, passing her concerns on to me straight away and seeking advice on ways in which she can help them.

Carole has her elder child in Year 1 so this is her first experience of involvement in a primary grade classroom. She is a thoughtful, perceptive person with a remarkable love of and respect for young children. Whenever she is in the classroom she readily engages in conversation with the students and shows a keen interest in whatever they want to tell her. She is very supportive of her fellow 'mums' and belongs to a small group which meets regularly to talk over concerns they have with their children (both students and pre-schoolers).

She was very keen to become involved with the Reading Roster and thoroughly familiarised herself with it before commencing. She comes in regularly once a week, but will also stay on additional days if there is a particular need. Her attitude to the children is always encouraging, and her verbal interactions lively and positive. Her daughter was very quick to grasp basic reading skills and to develop comprehension and fluency, but Carole is very sensitive to the strugglers and shows remarkable patience.

Dianne is also experiencing her first year as the mother of a primary grade child. Her son is an extremely shy child to whom every new experience is a major hurdle, and for whom being in an environment where his mother had no part was quite traumatic. She was very anxious to become involved in the classroom but at the same time appreciative of the need for her child to develop independence.

She is a keen observer of classroom culture and is quick to notice students who might need particular assistance or attention. She demonstrates the characteristics of a pro-active and thoughtful person, seeking advice on ways to further help her own and other children, and readily sharing ideas and experiences with her peers.

She frequently smiles and always uses a calm, quiet voice when speaking with the children. The way she allows the students plenty of time during their reading sessions with her to assimilate the visual information from both the pictures and the text, seems to indicate an appreciation of some of the many aspects of learning to read.

APPENDIX 2

Please answer as many questions as you can; not all will be applicable to all parents.

DRAFT PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How do you feel about having parents in the classroom to listen to your child read? _____

2. Does your child talk to you about reading to parents at school?

3. Has having parent helpers for reading affected your child? How?

4. Do they seem to prefer reading to certain parents, or do they not mind who listens to them read?

5. Do you think that children should read to the same parents each time or to different parents? Why? _____

6. Does your child tell you when he/she reads to the teacher? Does he/she seem to view this as different from reading to parents? _____

7. Do you participate in class Reading Rosters? _____
8. What is your reason for participating or not doing so? _____

9. Are you aware that mothers, fathers and other adult carers are welcome to join the program? _____
10. Are there any other adult carers from your family who would be interested in participating? Who? _____
11. Did you attend the training sessions for parent helpers? _____
12. If so, please comment on the amount of guidance you were given in how to help children whilst they are reading. _____

13. If you were unable to attend the training sessions, would you like the opportunity to do so at some stage in the future? _____

14. What do you most enjoy/find rewarding about assisting in class? _____

15. Is there anything you do not like about the programme? _____

16. In what ways do you think your involvement affects the children in the class? _____

17. In what ways has your involvement affected you? _____

18. Describe what you do during the session with each child. _____

19. How has your own child reacted to your involvement or your non-involvement? _____

20. Has being involved affected what you do with your own child at home? _____

21. Please make any other comments which you feel are relevant to this questionnaire. _____

If you are prepared to assist further with my research please print your name below, otherwise there is no need to identify yourself unless you wish to do so.

Name: _____

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Sheelagh Tillotson

APPENDIX, 3

Please answer as many questions as you can; not all will be applicable to all parents.

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How do you feel about having parents in the classroom to listen to your child read? _____

2. Does your child talk to you about reading to parents at school? If so, what sorts of things does he/she say? _____

3. Do you think that having parent helpers for reading affected your child? If so how? _____

4. Do you think that children should read to the same parents each time or to different parents? Why? _____

5. Does your child tell you when he/she reads to the teacher? Does he/she seem to view this as different from reading to parents? _____

6. Do you participate in class Reading Rosters? _____
7. Are there any other adult carers from your family who would be interested in participating? If so who? _____
8. Were you given sufficient guidance in how to help children whilst they are reading to you in the classroom? _____

9. What do you most enjoy/find rewarding about assisting in class? _____

10. Is there anything you do not like about the programme? _____

11. In what ways do you think your involvement affects the children in the class? _____

12. In what ways has your involvement affected you? _____

13. Describe what you do during the session with each child. _____

14. How has your own child reacted to your involvement, or your non-involvement?

15. Has being involved affected what you do with your own child at home?

16. Please make any other comments which you feel are relevant to this questionnaire.

If you are prepared to assist further with my research please print your name below, otherwise there is no need to identify yourself unless you wish to do so.

Name: _____

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Sheelagh Tillotson

APPENDIX 4

Dear parents,

I am currently involved in a research project for my Bachelor of Education (Honours) degree at Edith Cowan University. My research focuses on the Parent Helper Reading Practice program which operates in Year One, and the reactions of parents and children to it. Its aim is to observe and describe what actually happens during, and as a result of the Parent Helper Reading Practice Program, and to investigate how it is viewed within our class community. The results of the research will help me to evaluate the current program, and possibly adapt it for the future. I realise that not all parents are able to be actively involved on the Roster for a variety of reasons, but all your opinions are extremely valuable, as the program affects each one of your children daily. The attached questionnaire seeks information about how you and your children feel about the process, and offers the opportunity to reflect the views of all parents.

There is no need to write your name on the form unless you wish to do so, so your comments will be completely confidential. The procedures to be used during this research have been approved by the School, and by the Post Graduate Committee of the School of Education, Edith Cowan University.

During next term I would like to observe and interview a small number of parents who assist on reading rosters. If you would be willing to participate there is an opportunity for you to state this at the end of the questionnaire. I would also like to observe and interview a small number of children. Should I wish to involve your child I will request your permission for their involvement at a later date. All parents who are personally involved, or whose children become subjects of the research will have the right to withdraw at any stage prior to completion of the study, and any information provided will be destroyed unused. The project should be completed by the end of Term 3.

If you have any queries about the questionnaire or the research, I can be reached on [REDACTED] or please make an appointment to see me after school.

Thank you for taking the time to assist.

Sheelagh Tillotson

APPENDIX 5

PARENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What do you see as important in the Parent Reading Roster program?
2. Do you see yourself as a listener only or as a participant in the reading experience of each child?
3. Do you feel you have sufficient knowledge to carry out the role? Are there times when you do not, or have not, known what to do?
4. If you find this happening what do you do? Do you hesitate to interrupt me? Do you feel you should know how to deal with these situations?
5. Do you feel it appropriate or inappropriate to discuss the text with the children?
6. Can you tell me how you feel when hearing your own child read in the classroom, and when you are hearing other children.
7. Have you had any negative experiences connected with the program?
8. Has what you do during reading roster changed since you began being involved?
9. Has what you have learnt on reading roster changed what you do at home?
10. Can you suggest any ways in which the program might be improved?
11. What do you think about the actual texts which the children use to read to parent helpers?
12. Can you tell me what have been the major outcomes of the parent helper program for: 1) yourself, 2) your child, 3) other children whom you hear read?

APPENDIX 6

PARTICIPANTS' CHILDREN'S INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about reading to parents in class.
2. Do you like reading to anyone special, or don't you mind?
3. Do you like having your own Mum on Reading Roster? Why?
4. Is there anything you do not like about reading to your own Mum?
5. What do you like, or not like about reading to the other grown-ups?
6. What do your friends think about reading to your Mums?
7. Who do you like reading to best:
 - * a mum
 - * Mrs. F (teacher assistant)
 - * Mrs. T (teacher)
8. Do you think it's important to read to a grown-up at school? Why?

NON-PARTICIPANTS' CHILDREN'S INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about reading to parents in class on reading roster.
2. When you read to Mummy at home is it different or the same as reading to the mums in class.
3. Has your Mum been on reading roster in Year One?
4. What do you feel about Mum not being able to come in?
5. Are you pleased that some mums do come in, or would you prefer that they didn't?
6. Does Mummy ask you about who reads with you? Do you usually tell her?

7. Who do you like reading to best:
- * a Mum
 - * Mrs. F (teacher assistant)
 - * Mrs. T (teacher)
8. Do you think it's important to read to a grown-up at School? Why?

APPENDIX 7

Dear _____,

Thank you for your offer to assist further with my research project. I should like to observe and video record as you participate in your usual Reading Roster sessions over the next four weeks, and at the end of this period, interview you about your experiences and feelings of being a parent helper in this program. The interview would take no more than an hour and can be arranged as convenient to you.

During your classroom reading sessions you will be listening to your own and other children read, and I request your permission to observe, video and later interview _____ (child's name).

Written records of observations made, and transcripts of tape-recorded interviews will be kept strictly confidential; original audio-tape and video-tape recordings will be wiped as soon as they are transcribed. You may at any time ask to see the data which I have collected from you or your child.

If at any time during the study you wish to withdraw, you will be free to do so and any data collected will be destroyed unused.

Please complete the attached agreement form if you are willing to participate further.

Sheelagh Tillotson

APPENDIX 8

Dear _____

In order to carry out my research I need to observe, video record and interview a small number of children whose parents do not currently participate in the Reading Rosters, and request your permission to include _____ in my study.

This will involve watching and recording what happens whilst he/she is reading to the roster parents over a four week period, and then recording his/her responses to questions which I will discuss with a group of children in the class. The group interview will be tape recorded and once transcribed, the tape will be wiped. Written notes and observations will be kept strictly confidential.

At any time during the process you will be free to ask to see data collected from your child: you are also free to withdraw him/her from the project at any time.

If you are willing to assist, please complete and sign the agreement below.

Sheelagh Tillotson

I _____ have read the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to my son/daughter _____ participating in this activity, realising that I may withdraw him/her at any time.

I understand that the research data gathered for this study may be published provided that my child is not identifiable.

Parent

Date

Investigator

Date

APPENDIX 9

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT

I _____ have read the information in the attached letter, and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, realising that I may withdraw at any time.

I agree that the research data gathered for this study may be published provided I am not identifiable.

Participant

Date

Investigator

Date

I agree that my child _____ may participate in this research, and that any data collected may be published, provided that he/she is not identifiable.

Parent

Date

Investigator

Date

APPENDIX 10

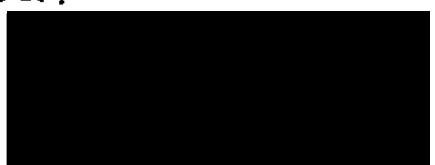
Letter from Focus Group Participants

Dear Mrs Tillotson,

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to comment. Not only are we helping you with your thesis but we felt the opportunity to come together over coffee, more productive for ourselves. It is not often we can meet together, more relaxed free to talk openly, especially about our children's education. We hope our comments help your paper, and we all agreed we are proud and delighted with our children and the full encouragement you give to them. We thank you for your efforts in this area.

The one and only comment we all agreed on was that maybe as a group of parents on roster, we need an update or we need re-training as the children's books and style of reading changes. e.g. from book mark to reading card. How long should we spend with each child? Slow readers longer? How many pages should we listen to? Should there be a cut off point? We understand your time is valuable so maybe this will not happen, but together we all seemed to tune in to the needs we feel we are trying to offer. To help you help our children.

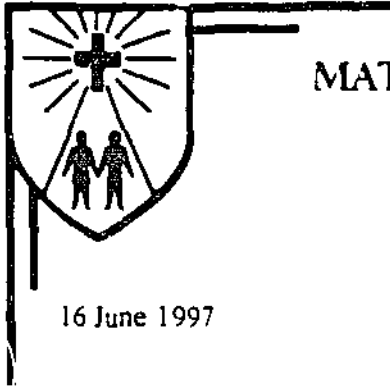
Again, Thank you.



P.S. In case you are wondering, we all offered our names instead of anonymity.

APPENDIX 11

Letter of Permission from School Principal to Carry out Research



MATTHEW GIBNEY CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

16 June 1997

Dr Marion Milton
Edith Cowan University
Churchlands Campus
Pearson Street
Churchlands

Dear Dr Marion Milton

I have read the Research Proposal on '*Parent Involvement in Year One In Class Reading Practice Program*' prepared by Sheelagh Tillotson - in particular the sections on Research Design, Subjects, Data Collection and Analysis, Limitations, Time Frame and Ethical Considerations. I have also viewed the Draft Parent Questionnaire and letter Sheelagh proposes to issue to the parents

I give my permission for Sheelagh to issue the questionnaire and letter and to carry out her research proposal in our school.

Yours sincerely

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the Acting Principal.

MARGARET WILLIAMSON
ACTING PRINCIPAL

APPENDIX 12

Gay Way Readers

The Gay Way Series (Boyce, 1977) is a structured basal scheme based on a phonetic approach to reading. It gives continuous repetition within the readers for the decoding of simple phonetically regular words.

"The scheme is colour coded so that teachers can easily see and chart the progress of their pupils. The colour order is:

Introductory level	Pre-reading stage
Red level	Reading age approx. 5.6 years
Green level	Reading age approx. 5.6-6.0 years
Blue level	Reading age approx. 6.0-6.6 years
Yellow level	Reading age approx. 6.6-7.0 years
Violet level	Reading age approx. 7.0-7.6 years
Orange level	Reading age approx. 7.6-8.0 years"

(Gay Way Teacher's Guide, p5)

The Introductory level builds a small sight vocabulary using first single words, then two and three-word phrases, and finally simple sentences. These are printed as a single line underneath large, clear illustrations in the eight books at this level. The students in this study are introduced to the first few words on cards and are given corresponding picture-matching cards to assist their learning. They then progress to the books and new words are added to each child's collection of cards. The words are also written into a

Wordlist pad for each child. The book, cards and Wordlist are taken home each night for home practice.

When the child progresses to the Red level the first book, 'The Red Book', contains all the words which have already been learnt. These are repeated and juxtaposed within simple sentences throughout the 29 pages of the text. Speech is used extensively, although the convention of inverted commas is not introduced until later. There are a further eight titles at this level which extend both the vocabulary and the storyline, which revolves around a group of animals. Each book has 32 pages with between 20 and 40 words of text on each page, as illustrated in the following extract:

*Who will get the old pot house
up the hill to the tree?*

*I will, said Ben the dog.
I will, said Jip the cat.*

*So Ben the dog and Jip the cat
went to get the old pot house
up the hill to the tree.*

(The New House - third red book - p10)

The print is large and each page has a colour illustration. As the child moves to each new book a printed list of all the new words to be introduced is inserted into their Wordlist. The book and Wordlist are taken home and parents are asked to encourage home practice.

The Green level also consists of nine titles, but the print is slightly smaller and the content broadens. Book 1 contains three separate stories and has a contents page. Books 2-5 feature traditional stories such as 'The three little pigs':

*Little pig Top had no house
to live in.
I have a lot of bricks.
I will make a house
with the bricks.
I will make a window
and a door and a garden
with a gate.*

(The Three Pigs - second green book - p21)

From Book 6 onwards further characters are introduced and humans begin to feature more prominently.

The Blue, Yellow and Violet levels get progressively more complex, but a pattern of short paragraphs and the repetition of words and phrases, particularly 'noise' words is maintained throughout:

*Twitter, twitter, twitter, twitter.
Twitter, twitter, twitter, twitter,
went the birds till Mother Bird
came back again.*

*She had a fly in her beak.
She popped it into the other
baby bird's mouth.*

*Then she said,
Listen, my baby birds.
You are not so very little.
You are getting big.
You are growing up.*

(Pipkin's Ball - second blue book - p12)

Most children in Year 1 reach at least halfway through the Green level by the end of the year, with about half of the students reading the Blue level. Each year approximately 25% of students achieve the Yellow or Violet level. The Violet Book contains 108 pages of text with up to 140 words per page, and by this stage most common conventions of print are in use. The print size in Violet Books 2-5 is considerably reduced.

Throughout the series the stories are imaginative and appealing to the children. As this is an English publication there are occasional features which are unfamiliar to the children and need explanation: e.g. the use of the word *lorry* instead of *truck*.

As the principal characters are animals and most of the action is not in a domestic setting, there are few obvious gender issues involved in using this scheme. Conversation, noises and humour are strongly featured, and all of these can provide excellent triggers for discussion. In my experience of using Gay Way over many years I have never found a child who did not respond positively to it.

APPENDIX 13

Organisation of Parent Helper Reading Practice Program

The roster takes place each morning for approximately one hour. Each parent is assigned a group of six or seven children, giving them about 10 minutes with each reader.

Prior to the commencement of the Roster I hold two parent instruction sessions during which I explain how the process will work each day and what the requirements of parents are in terms of helping with reading, and respecting professional confidentiality. Instruction is given in the main listener strategies to use with the children, including giving wait-time, prompting through phonic and context cues, assisting them to sound out words, re-reading phrases to reinforce comprehension, and using praise and encouragement constantly. The importance of not supplying words immediately, but helping the child to work out what it should be is also stressed. Emphasis is laid on building the child's belief that they can read, no matter what their current level of achievement, and helping them to feel pride in their daily successes.

Parents are told that they will not necessarily be assigned their own child's group to hear but that, before they leave, they may listen to their child. The children know that they must leave their own mother to do her 'job' in the classroom in order to have their turn with her before she goes. I have found this to be an effective method of ensuring that children do not

exhibit silly or disruptive behaviour whilst their mothers are in the room. It also rewards both the mother and the child for their participation in the process.

Parent helpers are encouraged to ask questions about the process both at the meetings and afterwards if they have any queries. My teacher assistant is available at the beginning of each roster session, while I am conducting the lesson with the whole class, to assist them in setting up. To assist with remembering the process, and to avoid unnecessary interruption, I have prepared the following set of guidelines which remains with each group's record file for easy reference:

Guidelines for Parent Helpers on Year One Reading Roster

Your name will appear on the Reading Groups Chart beside the group you will be hearing. There are 6-7 children in each group so your time needs be divided to give each student approximately 10 minutes for reading and word practice.

During Mat-time please check that all reading bags have been brought into the classroom, and that each contains the child's Gay Way reading book, word list and bag of word-cards (if they are reading the Introductory level books). If anything appears to be missing, please check in the child's desk and schoolbag. It is most helpful if this is carried out quietly so as to cause as little distraction as possible to the lesson. During Roster time it is only the Gay Way reader which is used. The other *take-home readers* will be changed by the children during the day, and are for home-reading only.

Reading Procedure

1) Hear each child in the group read individually for approximately 5 minutes on their Gay Way reader, from the last page marked in the Reading Record File. You may either sit with the group at their table or take each child aside to a quieter spot in the room, or onto the verandah. Please sit beside the child rather than opposite them.

- 2) Encourage the child to follow the words exactly with his/her finger.
- 3) If a child has difficulty with a word ask them what **sound**, not letter, it begins with, and try to get them to sound it out. Say the sounds together, gradually getting quicker and quicker until the word can be identified. Go back to that word after a little more reading to reinforce it. Praise and encourage the child frequently during their reading session, so that they finish with a feeling of success.
- 4) Encourage the child to comment on the illustrations or the story as they are reading. Ask them questions to retain their interest and to check on their understanding of what they have read.
- 5) After hearing them read from the book, test them on the current words in their Word List, to check their out-of-context word recognition. Place a tick beside each correctly read word, and a dot (not a cross) beside those with which they struggled. It is most important that they are encouraged to practise these words as well as read their book each day.
- 6) If the child has experienced difficulty with a particular word, mark it, or write it into the Word List if it is not already there.
- 7) Write the number of the last page read in the Reading Record File, and on the child's bookmark. (At the Introductory stage recording is done by marking the record sheet with a coded texta which corresponds to the colour of the book's border. At this stage the children do not have bookmarks).
- 8) If the child has successfully completed their book, and read all of the relevant words correctly (jumbled up, not only in sequence), they may be given the next book. In this case mark the record accordingly, write the new words into the Wordlist pad, or glue in the appropriate printed list. All books and Wordlists are situated on the shelves underneath the blackboard

It is very important that a child is not moved on through the readers too rapidly if they are struggling. An extra day or two with the same book while they become more familiar with the vocabulary avoids progress coming to a standstill at a later stage because there are too many words which they cannot remember or decode.

If you are concerned in any way about a child's performance, or if any child is uncooperative, please let me know straight away.