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EARLY YEARS' EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES ON FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMS AND READINESS FOR SCHOOL

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EARLY YEARS' EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES ON FAMILY LITERACY
PROGRAMS AND READINESS FOR SCHOOL

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Abstract

Using a qualitative lens, this study investigates practitioners' perspectives on family literacy and school readiness. Data collected in the form of semi-structured interviews, using both closed and open questions, provided the information needed to explore participants' perspectives. The findings of this study showed definitions of family literacy spoke of supporting and equipping parents with knowledge in order to educate their children. Programs were created to enhance children's literacy development and prepare them for entry into formal schooling. Understandings of what it means to be ready for school were not consistent among participants; however, understandings of literacy point to an autonomous model of literacy. Emerging from this study is the need to locate a third space of literacy for children to move about in and create a continuous flow of values and norms between home and school.

Keywords: family literacy, family literacy programs, literacy, school readiness, ready to learn, school ready

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"We know what we are, but know not what we may be"

(Hamlet, Act. IV Sc. V)

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Chapter One

Introduction

North American and British literacy education is under the microscope. Ever increasing numbers of curriculum goals address governmental desires to increase reading and writing scores within their respective jurisdictions. It has been suggested that a way to increase literacy levels in students is to engage families in activities that promote literacy in the home (Phillips, Haydon & Norris, 2006). However, in order to optimize literacy achievement within school, the schooling community now sees a need to reach out to the home worlds of the students and better understand students' home literacy practices. By attempting to bridge gaps between home and school, family literacy activities promise to increase levels of school achievement, but my thesis makes another assumption, that the ways in which programs bridge those gaps have consequences for families and for teachers.

It is widely held that literacy achievement is one result of education "that has a compelling impact on both academic and life-course outcomes. Strong literacy skills are requisite to curriculum access and academic achievement from the primary school years, to post-secondary education and training in young adulthood, and to participation in the cultural, economic, and civic life of the community during adult years"(Beswick & Sloat, 2006, p.24). For the Ontario Language Curriculum, "language is the basis for thinking, communicating, and learning. Students need language skills in order to comprehend ideas and information, to interact socially, to inquire into areas of interest and study, and to express themselves clearly and demonstrate their learning" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, p.3-4). As a result, language development is an important component to

the Ontario Curriculum. The document states, "[l]anguage is a fundamental element of identity and culture. As students read and reflect on a rich variety of literary, informational, and media texts, they develop a deeper understanding of themselves and others and the world around them" (p.4).

At the same time, literature in the field of early childhood literacy is clearly advocating that educators draw on students' "funds of knowledge" (Moll, 1992) in planning instruction. Funds of knowledge describe the cultural resources and social relationships occurring in households (Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 2005). However, there is a lack of practical advice for teachers about how to go about doing so. Teachers of young children are expected to support and sometimes initiate family literacy activities, such as providing literacy programs at the Early Years Centres. Programs are constructed with little background knowledge of the theory and run without truly understanding the ideas behind the theory. Therefore they need a sound understanding of a range of family literacy practices as well as insight into literacy events and practices that are actually occurring within their students' out-of-school lives. My study explores community and school-based practitioners' understandings of the kinds of literacy practices promoted and encouraged within family literacy initiatives and their understandings of what it means for a child to be ready for school. For students entering school with specific funds of knowledge predicated on community practices, entering an environment that does not recognize their knowledge as knowledge will create frustration. Moll makes this point when he writes, "funds of knowledge form an essential part of a broader set of activities, social relationships, related to the households' functioning in society. These social relations facilitate reciprocal exchanges among

people" (1992, p.34).

The term "family literacy" can be traced to a study conducted by researcher,

Denny Taylor in which Taylor observed six white, middle-class families and their daily

literacy experiences, for three years beginning in 1977. Each family had at least one child

who was classified as a successful reader and lived in suburban towns within a fifty mile

radius of New York City (Taylor, 1983). The idea behind family literacy programming

developed from the desire to assist families deemed at risk for school failure and help

them move towards better literacy levels for themselves and their children. The belief

holds that higher literacy levels will provide families with greater opportunity and give

children greater success in formal education. Traditional family literacy programs can be

separated into four categories. Kerka (1991) has characterized family literacy programs

as follows: direct adult- direct child, indirect adult- indirect child, direct adult- indirect

child, and indirect adult- direct child. However, family literacy theory has evolved into a

study of how families engage in literacy activities in their home environment, as well as

what types of literacy activities are occurring. The belief now is that understanding how

schools construct and define literacy, as well as how families construct and define

literacy, and bringing those beliefs together in understanding, will create continuities for

children as they work between home and school worlds (Moll, 1992; Moje, 2004;

Prentice et al., 2008).

My interest in family literacy arises out of reflections on my own childhood

literacy experiences. Growing up in a home where many books were shared, I entered

formal education well prepared for the expectations of school and the lessons taught there

and, most importantly, I was excited to learn. Stories were read before bedtime each

night, by either parent, to my brother and me. As a toddler my mother would take me to story time at the library and other playgroups where I would interact with other toddlers. I attended a cooperative nursery school where parents volunteered each day to assist in snack time. At home I was encouraged to practice my reading and writing and both parents were always more than helpful when I needed a hand. At a young age I was provided with a diary for my own personal writing. My father was a university graduate with a Bachelor of Arts in History and English. He taught my brother and me to quote Shakespearean verse. From a young age both my brother and I could quote famous lines from Hamlet, Romeo & Juliet, Macbeth and Henry V. It became a challenge to see who could remember a longer verse. This early introduction to Shakespeare also involved attending the theater to see performances. I experienced my first Shakespearean play at the Stratford Shakespearean Festival when I was nine-years-old. I attended Romeo & Juliet. Every so often, especially on a day of world history significance, my father would regale my brother and me with why this particular date in history was so important. For example, I learned that the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand led to the First World War and learned the names of Canada's Fathers Of Confederation. Without necessarily realizing the valued knowledge foundation they were providing, my parents encouraged literacy activities through reading aloud, story-telling, accessible literacy activities and talking to us everyday about what was important to us. All these activities helped me to acquire knowledge relevant to school-based literacy education. Now, as a teacher, I hold a strong belief that all children deserve to succeed in school. Since families do not enjoy the same access to resources as my family, other measures must be found to ensure all children have access to learning opportunities, especially for literacy education.

I have since learned that the home literacy practices in which I shared reflect middle-class, school-oriented notions of literacy. Because of this up-bringing I was privileged entering into formal school, not because my intelligence was necessarily higher than the average five year old, but because the life I led leading up to school was a good match for formal education expectations. Not only was my family life preparing me for formal education but the environment I was living in did as well. Growing up in Stratford Ontario is not like growing up in a large urban setting. Although there are class divides, the divides are not as glaring as in larger cities. Although my family's income may have been more consistent with a middle- level socioeconomic status upbringing, in Stratford it translated into contact with norms privileged by those living with a higher socioeconomic status. Due to the Stratford Shakespearean Festival running during school months all schools in the district had access to theatrical productions. From the time I was in the eighth grade I attended at least one production a year with my classmates. Not only did we see a play, but also it was always a Shakespearean production. Since the schools were invited to dress rehearsal productions, which operate at a reduced rate, or no cost at all, all students were able to partake in the field trip. This meant that even those individuals who would otherwise be unable to afford the theater were able to enjoy the experience and be a part of what traditionally would be considered an activity for middle or upper class society. As a result I have a biased view of what it means to be ready for school and should take extra measures to listen and understand what is going on in homes unlike the one I grew up in. Not everyone knows what read to your child means, or that the middle class position of education is the dominant view.

There is evidence that socioeconomic status is linked to children's early success in school (Lapointe, Ford, & Zumbo, 2007), however, a project of educational equity demands that all children can have rich early literacy experiences. Schools themselves have a role to play in enabling children to be ready to learn. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)'s working paper, *School accountability, autonomy, choice, and equity of student achievement: International evidence from PISA 2003*, states that "[e]quity goals are particularly salient in education because schooling decisions made on behalf of underage children by their parents have important consequences for their future well-being. School systems can therefore play a leading role in enhancing the equality of opportunity by providing equal starting points in life"(Shutz, West & Wobmann, 2007, p.9). In contrast, advocates of family literacy argue that family literacy initiatives can give students from "disadvantaged" backgrounds the opportunity to enter into their schooling communities excited and ready to further their literacy education, while Piotrkowski (2004) conceptualizes school readiness as the "social, political, organizational, educational, and personal resources that support children's success at school entry" (p.540). An example for the advocates of family literacy is family resource centres, early learning centres and after-school programs aim to provide access to literacy rich environments and have potential to assist parents with questions they may have regarding literacy development. However, as noted earlier, family literacy programs are not all of one kind. My study seeks to shed light on what perspectives inform family literacy practices and programs and how the extent to which they are congruent with the literacy practices promoted in the Ontario curriculum. My study asks the questions:

- How are family literacy programs represented in the descriptions of family literacy professionals and kindergarten teachers?

- How do family literacy professionals and kindergarten teachers describe and define "readiness for school"?

- What similarities and differences exist among participants' perceptions of family literacy programs and among their definitions of "readiness for school"?

- What assumptions underpin respondents' descriptions of programs and practices and their descriptions of "school readiness"?

I found that definitions of family literacy expressed by my participants spoke of supporting and equipping parents with knowledge in order to educate their children. They saw programs as vehicles to enhance children's literacy development and prepare them for entry into formal schooling. Understandings of what it means to be ready for school were not consistent among participants; however, participants' representations of literacy reflected an autonomous model of literacy, a model that Brian Street says "works from the assumption that literacy in itself-autonomously- will have effects on other social and cognitive practices. It is assumed that the acquisition of literacy will itself lead to, for example, higher cognitive skills, improved economic performance, greater equality" (Street, 2005, p.417).

The programs described by my respondents followed prescribed and rationalized curricula (Eisner, 2004) aligned with the kindergarten curriculum standards. My data show the continued favouring of deficit views of families and an autonomous model of

literacy that values Western notions of education at the expense of other literacy values and practices.

In summary, I examine both family literacy practices and school readiness initiatives and ask how these ideas have been defined and understood. The definitions and understandings of family literacy and school readiness are closely aligned with regards to the creation of programming for children in the early years and kindergarten. My research is qualitative in nature. Although small scale in nature, my study provides the area of family literacy and school readiness with rich data obtained from professionals' perspectives, as voiced by them rather than filtered through a prescribed survey. My study also addresses a much needed Canadian perspective. The thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter two will focus on the relevant literature in the area of family literacy. The third chapter of the thesis will discuss the study. It will frame the study theoretically and outline the methods used in conducting the research. Chapter Four will present the data obtained through interviews. Chapter Five will present my analysis. Chapter Six will reflect on the findings and discuss their implications to the field of family literacy.

Before beginning my description of the study itself, I would like to add a short postscript. At the commencement of this study I was an outsider looking in. However, during the course of my research I became employed in a family literacy setting. As an early years literacy specialist I have had the opportunity to observe and engage in literacy practices with young children and their parents. In my current role I have been coached in a number of programs promoting literacy development, such as the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program and ECERS, the environmental child centre rating scale (Cryer,

Harms & Riley, 2003). I work along side early childhood education workers in a program called "Step into K" which prepares four year olds for entry to kindergarten in the fall. Using the kindergarten curriculum we all work with a program using Jolly Phonics (Lloyd, 2005), which is a phonemic alphabet program that provides letter-sound knowledge and hand actions to accompany the visual and auditory learning. As well we allow time for free play to introduce children to a routine similar to junior kindergarten, and we introduce some of the basic academic skills children will need and acquire during their early school years. Also, a parent education component is created to assist parents in preparing their children and giving them ideas to use to facilitate emergent literacy and personal growth prior to kindergarten entry. For many of the children I have noticed a growing process is observed as they settle into the afternoon routine and become more consistent with traditional formal education practices, such as raising their hand to speak. As for the parents, I wonder if, in attempting to solve problems, we can create others. One mother, upon completion of the six week program, said she felt more anxious about her child attending kindergarten. She felt overwhelmed and uncertain that her child was in fact ready for school. She believed her child was not prepared for the junior kindergarten program due to what she perceived as a lack of foundational skills, such as knowing all the sounds letters make. My experiences as a practitioner are therefore raising questions that I was not ready to ask at the beginning of my study.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

In this chapter I review research and professional literature pertaining to my research questions. Just as I asked participants how they would define family literacy programs, so I examine the literature for responses to that question. As my investigation looks at how family literacy professionals and kindergarten teachers describe and define readiness for school I look to published research and professional journals for descriptions of readiness for school and ready to learn. In doing so, I aim to contextualize my respondents' perspectives and understanding in the literature.

I examine the assumptions underpinning both respondents' and literature's programs and practices and how this defines "school readiness" for them. The literature is presented in the following sections: defining literacy and family literacy, program description and content, readiness for school, studies examining practitioners' definitions of readiness and finally critiques of the current practice.

Defining, representing and promoting family literacy

To begin, I will discuss the term "literacy" and how it has been defined in the literature. According to Ghafouri and Wein (2005) "[l]iteracy is now a term applied to many aspects of successful functioning in society" (p.281), such as computer literacy, financial literacy, and numerical literacy. Many scholars now define literacy in terms of how people interact with the symbolic world, not simply as readers and writers of print, but as readers who interact with an increasingly digital and communications oriented society. An example of this literacy is "the wide range of icons and signs, with combinations of symbols, boundaries, pictures, words, texts, images, and the like, that

must be understood to function in contemporary society"(p.281). Another definition, describing itself as syncretic literacy, can be defined as "an intermingling or merging of culturally diverse traditions which informs and organizes literacy activities" (Duranti & Ochs, 1996, p.2). It incorporates "any culturally diverse values, beliefs, emotions, practices, identities, institutions, tools, and other material resources into the organization of literacy activities" (p.2).

As noted in chapter one, the term "family literacy" has two broad meanings, both of which came into usage during the 1980s and both of which continue to evolve. The first meaning refers directly to the literacy practices of families in homes and communities and takes a non-judgmental approach to literacy in homes (Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983; Moll, 1992; Moje, 2004). Families' literacy activities are described at face value, not judged. The second meaning is related to the first, but refers to activities and programs designed to foster certain types of family literacy practices. The practices promoted draw from the literacy practices valued in formal school and curriculum. Programs are created to provide families with help in educating their children and characterize families at a deficit in literacy knowledge.

Hannon (2003) writes, "family literacy research has become indispensable for a full understanding of how young children learn literacy and how they may be taught or helped to acquire it" (p.100). Sanders and Shively (2007) elaborate on Hannon's work by stating "learning takes place in all families, among all generations, in all kinds of unique ways. It happens naturally in the daily process of 'getting things done' and sharing experiences together" (p.1). Hannon refers to two types of basic meanings in the term family literacy. The first refers to "interrelated literacy practices within families"

(p.100). The second meaning refers to "certain kinds of literacy programmes involving families" (p.99-100). Tracey (2000) views family literacy as an "umbrella term under which are gathered numerous issues, ranging from the role of the family in the development of children's literacy to the design of structured programs to support this relationship" (p.47).

There is evidence that many, but not all, family literacy programs are targeted to families whose children are perceived to be "at risk" for reading and writing difficulties at school (Kerka, 1991; Nueman, 1995; Bates, 1998; Nesbitt-Monroe & Barry, 2000). This term, at risk, describes children from families who have less formal education or are children of single parents and have a lower income. These children are perceived to be less prepared to enter formal schooling because they do not possess the necessary skills to thrive academically. It is an unstable term that is often referenced yet not formally defined.

The term family literacy was coined in 1983 in the doctoral work of Denny Taylor (Lemieux, 2007). Taylor studied six families where one child was deemed to be successfully learning to read and write. In her ethnographic research, Taylor "systematically described the ways in which the families engaged in literacy activities that supported young children's reading and writing growth" (as cited in Lemieux, 2007, p.24). Taylor's work provided a number of critical insights into literacy and literacy acquisition. They include:

1. Literacy is implicated in the lives of family members and discussions of literacy included reference to its place in the memories of the past, particularly in relation to schooling and the sharing of key literacy experiences.

2.   The way parents mediated literacy experiences varied across and within families (e.g. in relation to the latter, even different siblings had different experiences).

3.   There were 'shifts' in parents' approaches to the 'transmission of literacy styles and values' which coincided with children beginning to learn to read and write in school.

4.   Older siblings had an influence on shaping their younger siblings' experiences of literacy.

5.   Literacy experiences within families are rich and varied and include reading and writing necessary for the running of the household (eg. keeping financial records, reading junk mail), reading for information and pleasure, communicating with others (eg. letters, notes) and establishing social connections with other people.

6.   Literacy surrounds family members and is part of the fabric of life.

7.   Children's growing awareness of literacy involves experiences that are woven into daily activities and could go 'almost unnoticed as the children's momentary engagement merges with the procession of other interests (as cited in Cairney, 2003, p.91)

Taylor (1983) proposed that researchers need to help teachers know more about learning styles, coping strategies and the social backgrounds of the children they teach if instruction in reading and writing is to be a meaningful complement to the lives of their students.

The work of Dell Hymes and other anthropologists of communication paved the way for ethnographic research in classrooms and communities. Prior to Hymes' (1982) report, *Ethnolinguistic study of classroom discourse: final report*, research was not as concerned with connecting the home life practices of families to the school life practices of the formal education system. Hymes proposed the notion that for education to work effectively educators needed to take it upon themselves to be up-to-date on research regarding student home lives and what they bring to the classroom environment. She

writes, "[I]f what people do, and the meanings of what they do, were entirely determined by demography, budget, administrative organization, and the like, there would be no continuing need for ethnography…one would know what to expect of every other school or situation that fitted the external characteristics" (p.8). Hymes suggests that classrooms are not generalist in nature: "those of us who have come to know a number of schools…know that schools not far apart, and quite alike in general circumstances, can differ in important ways" (p.8) she then goes on to advise educators to educate themselves on the unique characteristics of the students within their classroom and accommodate teaching accordingly.

Heath's (1983) ethnographic and social history study in the Piedmont Carolinas opened the door for studies observing home life and how the home impacts what students bring to the classroom setting. Heath's main research question asked "what were the effects of the preschool home and community environment on the learning of those language structures and uses which were needed in classrooms and job settings?" (p.4). Central to her research was teachers' needs as workers within the community to understand each others' communication. Communication was a central concern of black and white teachers, parents, and mill personnel who felt the need to know more about how others communicated, such as why students and teachers often could not understand each other, why questions were sometimes not answered, and why habitual ways of talking and listening did not always seem to work (Heath, 1983). Heath argued that "the different ways children learned to use language were dependent on the way in which each community structured their families, defined the roles that community members could assume, and played out their concepts of childhood that guided child socialization"

(p.11). Each community had different social legacies that resulted in different ways of behaving in face-to-face interaction (Heath, 1983). Heath's work was instrumental to the theory of family literacy as she observed and commented on the differences between home life and school life, as well as the differences among communities that appeared similar.

Jennifer Rowsell's (2006) recent book, *Family literacy experiences: creating reading and writing opportunities that support classroom learning*, takes a non-judgmental approach to family literacy. Her definition of family literacy includes all practices implemented by the family to raise literate children, in the broad sense of the word literacy described earlier. Family literacy includes story telling, reading aloud, writing anything from stories to grocery lists to the alphabet, and dialogue amongst youngsters and adult. It also includes the use of "multimodal" resources, such as the internet, television, music or comic books, as exemplified by the primary teacher described in Dyson's (2003) article, *"Welcome to the Jam": Popular culture, school literacy, and the making of childhoods*. In Rowsell's view, however, family literacy connotes all meaning-making that involves "intergenerational learning that encompasses siblings, caregivers, guardians, mothers, fathers, grandparents, and extended family" (p.10). As Rowsell states, "there is a danger in viewing the home as an isolated domain or container that we enter and exit. Instead…the relationship between home and school- or, more broadly, out-of-school and in-school, as fluid" (p.10). Rowsell's (2006) rationale stems from the fact that "[t]hese contexts move in and out of each other and bear traces of the other all the time"(p.10).

Family literacy theory draws on emergent literacy theory, which gained

popularity in the 1980s (Tracey & Morrow, 2006). Emergent literacy theory describes

how children develop print literacy before they began formal lessons at school. With

roots in cognitive psychology and psycholinguistics, emergent literacy theory was first

introduced in the 1960s and challenged commonly held assumptions that reading and

literacy activities, in general, were "intrapersonal and linear mental processes" (Razfar &

Gutierrez, 2003, p.36). Rather, emergent literacy was used to describe the non-

conventional ways children behaved and used books and writing materials before they

could actually read and write in the conventional sense (Razfar & Gutierrez, 2003).

Roth, Paul, and Pierotti (2006) describe emergent literacy as a stage, which,

"begins at birth and continues through the preschool years. Children see and interact

with print in everyday situations well before they start elementary school. Parents can

see their child's growing appreciation and enjoyment of print as he or she begins to

recognize words that rhyme, scribble with crayons, point out logos and street signs, and

name some letters of the alphabet. Gradually, children combine what they know about

speaking and listening with what they know about print and become ready to learn to

read and write" (Introduction section, para.1). The skills and knowledge traditionally

identified in emergent literacy include print awareness, a motivation to read and explore

print, shaping and writing skills, alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, and

concepts of print (Neumann & Neumann, 2009).

Emergent literacy acknowledges the importance of oral language and social

symbolic play. "Social play is the mode that allows children to practice various social

moves, such as taking initiative, solving problems, negotiating social relationships, taking

turns, and collaboration" (Ghafouri & Wein, 2005, p.281). Pelligrini and Galda (2000)

define pretend play as a form of play in which "children use one thing to represent something else" (p.59), such as using a banana to represent a telephone.

A central belief in emergent literacy theory is that "literacy learning starts at birth and is continuous and ongoing" (Tracey & Morrow, 2006, p.85). The idea being stressed is that "children's earliest experiences of being talked to and read to are all part of their early literacy development" (p.85). For example, children who have not yet had formal writing instruction use their existing knowledge and perceptions of writing, such as "scribbles that mimic the fast, fluent writing of adults" (Klenk, 2001, p. 154) or rely on well-rehearsed known words, like family names, or use the "letters in their own names, not necessarily in order, to signify words and phrases" (p.154). Researchers began to regard literacy not simply as a "cognitive skill to be learned, but as a complex sociopsycholinguistic activity" (Slegers, 1996, p.5), which lead to studies investigating literacy learning in younger children and areas such as pretend play.

Children also use language experience to create pretend play situations which assists children in metacognitive development and language skills which can be used in school-based settings (Pelligrini & Galda, 2000). From the age of two years, researchers have observed children engaging in pretend play. This initial pretend play is highly dependent on props as children do not possess the linguistic ability to create understandable play themes. When the props are realistic, such as the dramatic play kitchen, the children's cognitive work can be used to weave more elaborate narrative themes (Pelligrini & Galda, 2000). However, as the children learn to read and write they "move away from reliance on context, such as pictures and gestures, to convey meaning and learn to use language as the primary vehicle for meaning conveyance" (p.60). The

importance of pretend play in the emergent literacy of children is highlighted by

Pelligrini and Galda (2000). These researchers focus on two main cognitive areas

associated with pretend play and explain how this translates to formal school knowledge.

The process of negotiation used in social pretend play translates into school because

school children "are expected to use and understand language that conveys meaning

through words and syntax, not through gestures or shared information" (p.60). Also,

pretend play generates narratives consistent with school-based literacy styles, since most

of the "texts they are exposed to are stories" (p. 61) and this play should "allow [children]

to more easily comprehend texts read in class" (p.61).

Since emergent literacy theory holds that literacy learning begins at birth, home

environments are also thought to play a critical role in children developing emergent

literacy skills. For example, research shows that students entering school from home

environments where a large number of books are readily available and adults often read

to them are stronger and more accelerated in school literacy (Tracey & Morrow, 2005).

As well, studies worldwide show that "family influences on student achievement

outweigh the effects of either school or community" (Sanders & Shively, 2007, p.1). For

this reason parents are described as "their [child's] first and most important teacher"

(DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, Duchane, 2007, p. 361). Buchoff (1995) "encourages parents'

telling family stories as a way to enhance children's literacy development" (as cited in

Tracey, 2000, p.52), while schools can assist this desire by providing parents with story-

telling prompts, such as tell your child why they received their name or telling them

about your childhood pet. Closely echoing this sentiment, Nueman, Caperelli, and Kee

(1998) note, "parents come with rich histories and experiences that should be honored

and used in program development. Programs that build on participants' already existing 'funds of knowledge' or cultural capital are far more likely to yield effects than those that approach parents as a tabula rasa- blank slate to be written upon with new knowledge" (p.250). For this reason it can be said that, "not only is the family influenced by the school, but the school is influenced by the family" (Neuman, 1995, p.121). A successful family literacy program sees the children in the "context of their families and the families in the context of their surroundings" (p.121).

Another important facet of emergent literacy is that children's development of listening, speaking, reading and writing are all interrelated (Tracey & Morrow, 2006). Emergent literacy theory implies that a child with strong listening and speaking skills at a young age will develop strong abilities in early reading and writing tasks. Conversely, children whose oral language is relatively less sophisticated are more likely to experience reading and writing difficulties at school. Rather than referring to a chronological moment in time, emergent literacy refers to a "functional level of performance"(Tracey & Morrow, 2006, p.85). However, Cairney (2003) promotes family literacy throughout school by noting, "researchers have come to realize that the influence of family members and caregivers does not cease at age five. Indeed, while the role of the teacher has been shown to be vital in children's school learning, differences in family backgrounds also appear to account for a large share of variance in student school achievement...Some even suggest that the cumulative effect of a range of home-related factors may account for the greatest proportion of variability in student literacy performance" (p.85).

As family literacy theory gained momentum family literacy began to be "touted as a new solution to the problems of schooling" (Morrow, 1995, p.12). However, as early as

1995, Auerbach makes it clear that "there is a danger in jumping on the family literacy bandwagon without having a clear conceptual framework or critical understanding of the implications of this movement" (as cited in Morrow, 1995, p.12). Auerbach quotes a portion of Edelsky's study, saying, "[b]uzzwords and movements not only can promote change; they can prevent it"(p.12).

Family literacy discourses tend to promote two opposing views. One view seeks to understand literacy activities valued in all homes from a non-judgemental perspective, while the other view, a deficit conception, seeks to change literacy environments since the environmental milieu that surrounds the developing child has been shown to influence cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical development (Lapointe, Ford & Zumbo, 2007). For example, Huang and Dolejs (2007) write, "research specifically connects a literacy-enriched home environment to children's acquisition of literacy. Tracey (2000) describes a literacy-rich home environment as one where "books are piled throughout the house and even, if one peeks into the garage, in the family car. Often books are piled throughout the house" (p.48). As well as reading materials, a literacy-rich home environment will have plenty of writing materials at children's disposal. The writing materials will be easily and independently accessed and are given permission to do so frequently (Tracey, 2000).

Family literacy practices, such as shared reading, reading aloud, and making print materials available have been found to have a significant effect on children's literacy learning. Empirical researchers have also pointed to a strong correlation between home experiences and later literacy development (Phillips et al., 2006). A study by Her Majesty's Inspectors (1989) in Britain has suggested too that "children [see] lots of

environmental print, they [want] to read, and that some children [are] already reading" (p.18). If children wish to read, and have this desire at an early age, it is in the best interests of all involved in the development of children to encourage and nurture this budding skill. For this reason it is important to incorporate families into both early years programs and formal education. Gordon (2000) writes, "from inception of the centers, it was our belief that the preschool years spent in the home were crucial to the child's development and set the child on a trajectory of success or failure. We saw parents as the child's first and most influential teachers" (p.45).

Some researchers claim that children's "emergent literacy development is constrained by the ways in which their families use print" (Sample-Gosse & Phillips, 2006, p.16). Moreover, Downer and Pianta (2006) found that children with mothers who had lower levels of education scored lower on reading, math, and phoneme knowledge in first grade. Conversely, children who had a history of more sensitive interactions with their mothers scored higher on tests of phoneme knowledge and math...in addition, children who experienced a rich home learning-environment performed better on reading and math in first grade" (p.10). Data such as this has provided curriculum creators with a rationale for creating highly structured, autonomous literacy programs for families and children deemed at risk.

Senechal, LeFevre, Thomas, and Daley (1998) found that children might be exposed to informal and/or formal literacy experiences at home. In the case of informal literacy experiences, "the goal is the message contained in the print" such as what the story is about. In the formal literacy experiences, the goal is "to focus more on the print per se, such as identification of particular letters" (Senechal et al., 1998, as cited in

Phillips et al., 2006, p.17).

 Family literacy, as defined by Canadian researchers, Phillips, Hayden, and Norris

(2006) also focuses narrowly on conventional print literacy although considers the ways

literacy is used by families in both mainstream and other cultural settings, the nature of

literacy development, the implementation, and evaluation of programs, "the

interconnectedness of literacy use in the home and community and children's future

academic achievement in school" (p.14). As defined by Cairney (2003), family literacy

is "social and cultural practices associated with written text. The research reviewed is

that which relates to how literacy is constructed, developed, valued and defined in

families" (p.85). Another definition describes family literacy as encompassing "the ways

parents, children and extended family members use reading and writing at home and in

their community. Family literacy can occur naturally during the routines of daily life and

helps adults and children 'get things done'...Family literacy can be initiated purposefully

by a parent, or may occur spontaneously as parents and children go about the business of

their daily lives. Family literacy may reflect the ethnic, cultural or racial heritage of the

families involved"(Nesbitt-Munroe & Barry, 2000, p.7). And for Sanders and Shively

(2007), the intention of family literacy programs "is to address the learning needs of all

family members by building on home and community practices and to provide

appropriate supports for parents in their powerful and challenging role as the first and

most important teachers of the next generation" (p.1).

Programs

Family Literacy Programs

As educators broadly accepted emergent literacy perspectives, a variety of family

literacy programs were implemented. American researcher, Patricia Edwards, created the

Partners in Reading program in order to help parents understand school-based literacy

practices and for teachers to understand home-based literacy practices. The program

goals were to "introduce these parents to book reading techniques that could help them

help the teacher build their children's background in reading instruction" (as cited in

Morrow, 1995, p.61). To assist in this endeavour, Edwards (1995) consulted with the

librarian and parents were allowed to check out up to five books a week. The librarian

designed a computer program that listed the names of participating parents and enabled

these parents to check out books under their child's name. For parents the program lasted

for 23 (two hour) sessions and was divided into three phases: coaching, peer modeling

and parent-child interactions. During this program teachers were also involved with a

program of their own. Edwards writes, "I wanted to increase the teachers' knowledge

and understanding of multiple literacy environments and African American children's

learning styles" (as cited in Morrow, 1995, p.63). The teachers met once a week with

Edwards and were provided with reading that "would help teachers begin to think more

critically and reflectively about [parental and professional] issues" (p.63).

Another type of program growing out of the United States is a home-school

program. As cited in Koskinen, Blum, Tennant, Parker, Straub and Curry (1995), *Ms.*

Barker's Home-School Program "reflects her interest in encouraging daily home reading,

expanding book access, and providing additional models of fluent reading. Ms. Barker's first grade class consisted of several second language learners. Ms. Barker, with the assistance of the ESL resource teacher, compiled more than 100 multilevel books used in the first grade curriculum on audiotape. On a daily basis Ms. Barker would read a story from the compilation to the children using a shared reading method: an oral look-through, an oral reading, and a rereading. After this process Ms. Barker put the book in a community basket so all the children had access to it for independent reading (Edwards, 1995). The objective of the program was to allow students the opportunity to participate in home reading but have the comfort of the audiotape for assistance when needed. This method also assists parents who may not feel comfortable in their own English-language literacy skills just yet.

Researcher Sandra Kerka (1991) describes four basic program types. The first type of program involves 'direct adults- direct children'. This type of program is highly structured and offers "the most intensive formal literacy instruction for both adults and children" (p.5). Due to the highly structured environment plenty of parent-child interaction occurs. The second type of program described by Kerka (1991) involves 'indirect adults-indirect children' approach to programming. The attendance of the program is voluntary and offers a short-term commitment. This type of program is characterized with "less formal learning through literacy enrichment" (p.5). Generally, literacy skills, such as reading, are not directly taught although adult literacy tutoring may be received. Program three involves a 'direct adults-indirect children' approach. This means adults are given "literacy instruction, often in seminars or workshops, and they may receive coaching on reading with their children and other activities that influence

children's literacy" (p.5). The final type of family literacy program described by Kerka

(1991) involves an 'indirect adults-direct children' approach to programming. This

program may occur "[i]n school, preschool, or after-school [as] programs [to] develop

children's reading skills. Parents may be involved in workshops, reading rallies, or other

events" (p.5). Hannon (2003) defines family literacy programs as "programmes to teach

literacy that acknowledge and make use of learners' family relationships and engagement

in family literacy practices" (p.100). Hannon also suggests that there is a teaching

spectrum where instruction sits at one end and facilitation at the other. Instruction

"involves deliberate, planned teaching to meet curricular objectives, often carried out

with one instructor teaching many students in settings distanced from real-life

contexts"(p.100). Facilitation, on the other hand, "is support of on-task learning,

embedded in real-life contexts- well captured by the Vygotskian notion of learners doing

in cooperation with others today what tomorrow they will be able to do on their own"

(p.100).

It is worth noting that practices associated with "pure" forms of programming can

occur in a wide variety of other programs providing an array of educational experiences

for families. Kerka (1991) writes,

> [F]amily literacy programs may be offered in adult basic education (ABE)
>
> programs, libraries, preschools and elementary schools, workplaces, voluntary
>
> literacy agencies, and other community agencies. They typically provide adult
>
> literacy instruction, reading instruction for children, information on parenting and
>
> child development, and opportunities for parent-child interaction. Program staff
>
> are often an interdisciplinary team that includes Adult Basic Education

instructors, early childhood experts, English as a Second Language specialists, social workers, volunteers, and community liaison workers. Other components may be survival skills for immigrants, linkage to community services, and computer literacy. (p.3)

In September 2000, Canada's first ministers established early childhood development as a national social priority. The ministers wished to educate Canadians in recognizing the importance of children's early years in shaping long-term outcomes (Health Canada, 2004). The federal government committed $2.2 billion over five years to the provinces and territories to improve and expand early childhood development programs and services. With the funds allotted by the federal government, the Ontario Government established Early Years Centres as an initiative to improve children's readiness for school. Part of the initiative supported the implementation of 'Early literacy specialists' for each provincial government riding. The literacy specialist mainly works with groups and organizations in the community to "monitor, support and promote literacy among children from birth to age six and their families" (Prentice, Carter, Renaud, McCahill, et al., 2008, p.7). The early literacy specialist works in collaboration with the Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYC) to "ensure appropriate linkages between programs are made and maintained" (p.8). The motivation behind this program was to ensure children and parents received quality information regarding literacy learning and to give children a better start before formal schooling. This became another justification in creating family literacy programs. Early Years Centres provided a location for programming and a place to distribute information to parents regarding how to teach their young children literacy. Programs created value an autonomous form of literacy and

generally are based on literacy strands found within the kindergarten curriculum.

Although the Early Years Centres operate in Ontario, all other provinces in Canada have

created and provided family literacy programs for their residents. Below is a snapshot of

the types of programs provided throughout Canada.

In the East Coast, *Families Learning Together: a family literacy program* with

Mi'kmaw communities begun in 2003. The purpose of the program is to "develop to

involve parents in nurturing literacy skills with their children in a way that reflects the

strengths of participating families as well as the indigenous context and history" (Sanders

& Shively, 2007, p.2). The program serves thirty-one families from Prince Edward

Island and Nova Scotia and consists of ten comprehensive, theme-based, culturally

appropriate literacy modules. The facilitators are members of the community and themes

are established with the guidance of community members, elders and Aboriginal

education experts. The concept of the program is to allow for literacy support while

maintaining a connection to the rich family histories and experiences of the parents and

native community. Following the pilot project, significant gains were made in literacy

comprehension and literacy levels of the children of families involved (Sanders &

Shively, 2007).

Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, uses the *Set Time Aside To Read Together*, or

START, program to support literacy learning in their communities. The eight week

program takes place in seven locations, each with different groups of people and provides

activities for adults and children, both separately and together (Sanders & Shively, 2007).

The focus of the program is to improve the literacy skills of adults and children.

Chilliwack, British Columbia piloted a project called, *Families in Motion*, in September of 1992. The program was a community-based, multicultural family literacy program encompassing the rural communities in Fraser Valley, approximately an hour and a half east of Vancouver. The program was designed for adults and their three or four year old children. The program was created by the Chilliwack Family Literacy Council, and met twice a week for three hours in the morning utilizing multiple community facilities (Bates, 1998). The aim of the program was "to build on existing knowledge, skills, and cultural practices of the participating families" (Bate, 1998, p.56) and adopted the name, *Families in Motion*, "because it captured the sense of unity, movement, growth, and challenge of the program" (Bate, 1998, p.57). The program comprised of an adult component, a child component and a parent-child component. The adult program varies from year to year, however examples of the types of skills addressed are: academic, volunteer-tutoring, computer literacy, family reading, communication, life, parenting, and employment readiness (Bates, 1998). Parents are incorporated in the planning process as to ensure their ideas and interests are put in program content. The children's program focuses on opportunities for children's growth in physical, cognitive and social development. The parent-child time is highlighted by crafts, stories or music and is led by the children. The children lead activities and invite their parents to join them, which fosters an appreciation by the parents for their children's interest and knowledge (Bates, 1998). The final key to the success of the *Families in Motion* project is the support system created for the program. A breakfast program is provided and families are transported to and from the program host site. As well, child care is available for younger siblings while parents and other children participate in the program.

In Edmonton, Alberta a *Classroom on Wheels* (C.O.W.) partnership program

between the *Centre for Family Literacy* and *Success by 6* organizations. The principle

role of the program is to travel among ten communities weekly, providing books and

informal programming, as well as literacy support, to families who lack resources and

services (Sanders & Shively, 2007). Edmonton also established the *ABC Head Start*

program which began as a community services project, created by the Northern Alberta

Reading Specialists' Council (NARSC). This program was directed by educators holding

advanced degrees in language arts and donated "time, expertise and financial support"

(Lemieux, 2007, p.22) to fund a literacy backpack project. The "intent of the literacy

backpack initiative was to assist in building a collection of high-quality literature from

which program children could choose two or three books to take home for a one-week

loan period" (p.22). The project was a resounding success and by "June 2006, the

number of backpacks distributed to children in the program over the years had reached

2,272" (p.22). However, the program views family literacy from a deficit position as

"such programs tend to include a parents education component....typically two goals are

addressed in the parent education component. The first goal is to develop the literacy

competencies of parents. The second goal is to help parents recognize literacy practices

that promote children's academic success" (p.25). This view does not take into account

the literacy currently being practiced within the home. It absolves the schools of

responsibility in understanding the home environment participants are living in.

Creative collaborations are "essential to family literacy programs and consist of

sharing costs, resources, space, personnel, participants, information, statistics and

ideas"(Sanders & Shively, 2007, p.3). Ontario's *Get Set Learn!,* offered through Project

READ Literacy Network in the region of Waterloo, highlights this need. The program operates at three sites, twice a year, in Waterloo and surrounding area. A partnership between the resource centre and municipality was established to fund the project, as the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities would not finance the program individually. As the program expanded it partnered further with local welfare agencies and a native resource centre (Sanders & Shively, 2007).

Although many family literacy programs attempt to reach isolated and perceived at risk families, through my experiences in family literacy programs I have observed many families interact with one another and have noticed that, although not the intention of the organization, the general population of those participating in programs is middle class families, who, like my family, are participating in home based activities closely aligned to formal education practices. This, however, is in contrast to the vision set forth by those implementing family literacy centres to reach and educate those families and their children considered at risk for difficulty in formal education. Piotrkowski, Botsko and Matthews (2001) echo this sentiment stating, "ironically, those children who may be most in need of a wide array of [resources] are also least likely to have them" (p. 541)

Family Literacy and School Readiness

Interest in family literacy programming as a way to enhance children's readiness for school has grown in the last two decades, but the topic has appeared in literature for the last 150 years. Adelaide Sophia Hunter Hoodless pioneered the link between the role of family and educational growth in children. She made the bold statement in 1892 that "a Nation cannot raise above the level of its homes" (as cited in Phillips et al., 2006,

p.14). For Hunter Hoodless the importance of educating the family was imperative as education was a means of implementing social reform (Phillips et al., 2006). Huey (1908) wrote, "the secret to it all lies in the parents reading aloud to and with the child" (as cited in Morrow, 1995, p.60).

The work of Hunter Hoodless and others is foundational to the traditional approach to family literacy programming which has focused primarily on reaching out to families from minority backgrounds and families living in poverty. Despite Hunter Hoodless's work the prevailing view of literacy researchers and teachers was one of children entering formal education in varying stages of readiness for literacy learning. Children were essentially seen as blank slates in relation to literacy (Cairney, 2003). Families, as Cairney (2003) writes, were largely seen, at best, "as having a minor role in literacy development, and even then, only as they contributed to support of school literacy learning" (p.86). This belief has shifted dramatically over the last two decades as emergent literacy pushed the view that literacy learning began from birth.

Because of this shift, the main goal behind established family literacy programs is to prepare young children for entry into formal schooling. The buzzword for all education institutions and government organizations is ensuring high levels of school readiness. However, a standard definition of school readiness has yet to be articulated. In 2000, Saluja, Scott-Little, and Clifford wrote *Readiness for school: A survey of state policies and definitions*. They asked two questions of all fifty American states regarding how each state defined school readiness and how they measured it. They found that no state had a formal, statewide definition of readiness, other than age of eligibility requirements. Also, among the fifty states the measurement of school readiness varied.

The article charged that, although evident back in 2000, "the government charged that all children should start school 'ready to learn', no clear picture of how this might be accomplished on a national scale had emerged" (as cited in DiBello & Neuharth-Pritchell, 2008, p.257). And despite the growing concern for school readiness an effective solution of the issue has yet to be addressed. It has been reported that, unfortunately, "many children enter kindergarten with very few foundational literacy skills in place. They identify only a few, if any, of the alphabet letters, are insensitive to rhyming words, and do not pretend to write during their dramatic play" (McGee & Morrow, 2005, p.62). Winter and Kelley (2008) write that "kindergarten teachers have reported that approximately one-third of U.S. children entering school are ill prepared to achieve success" (p.260). In contrast to data and statements like this, researchers, such as Auerbach (1989), Moll (1992), Rogers et al. (2000), Hannon (2003), and Moje (2004) would contend that school readiness is a narrow concept that does not consider different knowledge and skills children currently possess and use to make them ready to learn, not simply ready for school. This criticism will be discussed further later in the chapter.

Recently, a group of seventeen American states gathered to form an organization to invest in the study of school readiness initiatives. These researchers have identified five domains of school readiness in an attempt to define and measure a child's fitness for formal schooling (DiBello & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2008). The five domains that must be measured are:

1. Physical well-being and motor development

2. Social and emotional development

3. Approaches to learning

4. Language development

5. Cognition and general knowledge (p.257).

Kathy Seitzinger Hepburn's 2004 article, *Families as primary partners in their child's development and school readiness*, elaborated on the five domains by including that physical well-being and motor development meant "good health, nutrition, physical capabilities" (p.6), that social and emotional development included a "healthy sense of trust, self and competence, as well, the ability to cooperate, regulate emotions and get along with others" (p.6). Approaches to learning meant a child had "curiosity, persistence and problem solving" (p.6). A child's language development was "receptive and expressive" (p.6) in communication skills. The Ontario Kindergarten curriculum document states that "[e]arly learning experiences are crucial to the future well-being of children, and establish the foundation for the acquisition of knowledge and skills that will affect later learning and behaviour. Before they go to school, children have been learning in a variety of environments- in their homes and in childcare and community settings" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, p.1). The view of readiness presented suggests that particular skills are required prior to school entry and that without these skills children will not reach maximum academic potential.

Rather than solely focusing on what a child needs to be deemed ready for school Piotrkowski places emphasis on communities also. For example, at the neighbourhood level, resources to promote school readiness need to include affordable, high quality child care and preschool for all children; well stocked libraries that are welcoming to children

and parents, as well as safe playgrounds and streets. Also, schools are responsible for

transition programs and parent involvement activities and on-going professional

development and support for teachers (Piotrkowski 2004).There are contrasting views to

what exactly is needed for a kindergartener to be successful in school.

The next section of my thesis identifies the differing beliefs regarding children and

school readiness.

According to McGee and Morrow (2005), what kindergartners need to know in order for

a high degree prediction for successful reading and writing for the first grade is:

1. Alphabet knowledge

2. Phonological and phonemic awareness

3. Understanding of letter-sound relationships and the alphabetic principle

4. Concepts about print and books

5. Oral comprehension and vocabulary (p.44).

McGee and Morrow continue to outline kindergarten requirements stating: "during

kindergarten it is expected that all children will learn to recognize the upper-and lower-

case alphabet letters accurately and quickly. In fact, the most successful readers and

writers are often those children who enter kindergarten already recognizing most alphabet

letters" (p.44-45). They further comment by saying, "kindergarteners are still developing

the motor control to be able to write completely conventional letters, and their sense of

orientation is still evolving. Therefore, alphabet writing in kindergarten includes some

letter reversals and unconventional letter formations. Still, learning the alphabet is a

hallmark of kindergarten instruction" (p.45). As well as knowing and writing the

alphabet, "all kindergarteners are expected to write their first and last names by the end of the school year" (p.46). It is also noteworthy that during kindergarten it is "essential that children move from merely enjoying reciting rhyming poems or nursery rhymes to a conscious awareness of rhyming words" (p.46). Children are expected to learn and use the alphabetic principle to use letter-sound understanding to spell words and to build and read new rhyming words. Young kindergartners are expected to demonstrate book orientation, such as holding the book properly, understanding there is a title and author and that to read a book one must move from front to back, left to right (McGee and Morrow, 2005). Writing is also a "critical activity in kindergarten for accelerating children's literacy growth. Children pretend to write as they play in the home living center or other dramatic play centers, they write in the writing center and they write as part of instructional activities with their teacher" (p.57).

Although Canada creates curriculum specific to each province, curriculum has been influenced by trends developed in the United States of America. For this reason it is important to mention the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act currently focusing American education. In the wake of NCLB "academic achievement, including school readiness, has come to be redefined as children's ability to earn a passing score on required standardized tests. By relying on test results to tell us if children are ready for school, it is easy to explain achievement gaps and low test scores as being caused by poverty, family circumstances, or other outside factors" (Freeman & Brown, 2008, p.267). As a result research has examined the transition from preschool years to formal education. Beswick and Sloat (2006) write, "in comparison with advantaged peers, children living in poverty are more likely to enter school with deficits in language and school readiness

skills and are more likely to present with other limitations that impede school learning. Inequity between advantaged and disadvantaged children is apparent at school entry, remains unchanged throughout the school career and is maximally evident as each cohort exits the school system" (p.23). Although schooling is publicly funded and universally available, "educational results continue to diverge along socio-economic lines" (p.23). This has led to a change in attitude from "is this child ready for school?" to asking, "is this school ready for all children" (Freeman & Brown, 2008, p.267). This approach avoids on-demand tests and focuses on a school's ability to meet research-based criteria, which had been shown to enhance children's growth, development and learning and improve their chances for school success (Freeman & Brown 2008). Karen Liu (2008) wrote *Bridging a successful school transition*, to offer ideas for creating an effective school transition program. In order for a program to be effective, according to Liu, parents, preschools, schools and communities must work together and pursue a common goal.

Liu's suggestions are as follows: At the preschool level, teachers must prepare transition by: Providing high quality and developmentally appropriate curriculum that discusses with children new experiences they will have at school, such as riding a bus to school, eating in a cafeteria, having recess, visiting the school library. She recommends arranging a field trip and taking children to visit a kindergarten classroom and encourages teachers to prepare an assessment portfolio for each child and have the parents present their child's assessment portfolio to the kindergarten teacher upon commencement of formal schooling. Liu also suggests teachers provide a list to parents of activities they can do to enhance a child's readiness skills. Liu recommends that at the home level,

parents also need to play an active role by participating in the kindergarten registration

activity and making sure that their children have completed all immunization shots. An

established daily routine and bedtime schedule will help children prepare for daily

routines in the classroom. She also recommends reading to children and to take children

to the public library and participate in the library's story hours. She also believes parents

can teach their children through daily family activities, such as reading words from a

cereal box or street sign, counting peas during meal time, or sorting kitchen utensils. Liu

does not limit the responsibility for children's smooth transition to formal schooling with

preschool teachers and parents. She offers suggestions for elementary schools and school

districts to help establish a smooth transition. Liu encourages the district to publish a

'kindergarten countdown' calendar as early as possible and to distribute brochures and

promote parents' awareness about kindergarten registration. She encourages

kindergarten teachers to participate in community forums that offer information to

parents about school readiness and for kindergarten teachers to arrange a time to visit

preschool programs and childcare centers and offering opportunities to discuss

kindergarten learning with parents and preschool educators. Liu also suggests offering

summer 'school transition' activities to incoming kindergarteners and to send a welcome

letter and other pertinent information to parents before school starts (Liu, 2008).

According to Health Canada (1997) "readiness to learn is enhanced when children

and youth are well-nourished" (p.3). Being hungry in school can lead to negative results

in school learning as it "impacts on student performance. It can lead to irritability,

disinterest in the learning situation and an inability to concentrate" (p.3). Health Canada

also discusses body image and the importance of focusing on positive body image as a

negative outlook can lead to unsafe weight loss methods, such as "restricted eating, smoking, and use of diet pills, and may even lead to eating disorders. These behaviours put children and youth at increased risk for inadequate dietary intakes necessary for growth, development, activity and learning" (p.3). Beyond proper nutrition Health Canada recommends a pre-school entry assessment of 4 and 5 year old children prior to entry of kindergarten. The purpose of the assessment is to ensure "readiness for school and to identify and correct any health problems that might interfere with the child's performance in school" (Health Canada, 2001, p. 3.7) The assessment would include a review of both the child and family's past health history, as well as the child's current health. A brief exam of the eyes, ears, nose, throat, teeth, respiratory, cardiac, abdomen and muscular-skeletal systems would be completed. Also, a screening of height, weight, vision, hearing and speech would be done and any counseling of the parents necessary would occur. The nurse would counsel parents on items such as nutrition, intellectual stimulation, developmental milestones and direct parents to resources and specialists as needed (Health Canada, 2001).

Critical Perspectives on Family Literacy

Traditional family literacy programs have been criticized for privileging the ways of the school and taking a deficit perspective toward families whose children are believed to arrive at school without the requisite readiness to learn. Illiteracy, in the narrow sense, was considered "the cause of all social problems" (Razfar & Gutierrez, 2003, p.42) and family literacy programs would be a solution to these social issues. Auerbach (1989) voices concerns about a deficit view of families and how family literacy programs have been constructed. Auerbach "finds that research evidence about literacy acquisition and

the practice of program design diverge" (as cited in Morrow, 1995, p.13). In her

research, Auerbach has felt that many programs, particularly those pertaining to

language-minority parents, are focused on "giving parents or other caregivers specific

guidelines, materials, and training to carry out school-like activities in the home" (as

cited in Morrow, p.13), rather than discovering what activities language-minority parents

are currently doing within their homes and implementing some practices into programs

for congruency for the child's learning. By understanding what the home life of the child

is the teacher can assist and construct practices for both home and school that will result

in literacy improvements. An example of how failing to investigate the child's literacy

home life can become a large impediment comes in an article from Edwards (as cited in

Morrow 1995). Edwards writes, "teachers expected and demanded that parents be

involved in their children's education by reading to them at home, which, to the teachers,

was not an unreasonable request. They were indeed "telling" and "giving" parents the

right advice. However, the teachers assumed that the parents knew how to read to their

children and had a clear understanding of what to do while reading" (as cited in Morrow,

1995, p.59).

Like Auerbach, Purcell-Gates (2000) points out that "the term family literacy has

now come to be associated with family literacy programs or interventions usually aimed

at parents and young children. Such programs promote "school literacy" without

recognizing and validating the range of literacy practices engaged in by families in their

homes and communities" (as cited in Anderson et al., 2007, pg.145). Auerbach notes that

often "families" is interpreted to mean certain kinds of families:

[L]ow-income or language-minority parents have inadequate parental skills, practices, and materials. However, a number of studies (ibid.) show that families sometimes considered "illiterate" or "low literate" in mainstream society use literacy for a variety of social and technical purposes and that a form of literacy is practiced in everyday family life. (as cited in Kerka 1991, p.4).

Kerka (1991) again cites Auerbach, suggesting that "this "deficit" perspective underlies some programs that seek to transmit school literacy through the family. The deficit model assumes that:

(1) homes of low-income and immigrant families are "literacy impoverished"; (2) transmission of literacy is from parent to child, ignoring the dynamics of many immigrant families; (3) literacy acquisition in school is either less important than in the home or already adequate; and (4) cultural differences in attitudes toward school or child-rearing practices are obstacles to be overcome in order to meet school-determined expectations. (p.4)

Hannon (2003) echoes this sentiment as he writes, "family literacy programmes may sometimes be based on narrow concepts of family and of who learns from whom" (p.99). Hannon (2003) states, "families may be heavily engaged in literacy practices and have many literacy skills but these may not be the practices and skills valued by schools" (p.104). He has found that many programs are about "taking school literacy into families [and] further, it is probable that there are family literacy programmes that proceed on ignorant, and even offensive, assumptions concerning what certain families do not do or what they are supposed to be incapable of doing" (p.104).

A shift in perception of family literacy has seen research discussing the value of schools being ready for all children, not all children necessarily being ready for school, according to the classic definition. Kagan (1994), advocates that schools and communities work together to not only prepare children for school but also get schools ready for children. Kagan states, "teachers play pivotal roles in creating environments that nurture children's development and learning through positive interactions and age appropriate instruction" (as cited in Lin, Lawrence & Gorrell, 2003, p.233). And for this reason the schools need to prepare for all children entering their doors, not expecting all children to meet a prescribed standard definition of ready. Ensuring early school success requires the cooperation and collaboration of both community and school in providing the resources necessary to assist children in their development. Rather than placing the burden on children to prepare themselves, families and schools must be ready if children are to be ready for education. Part of becoming ready involves "meaningful commitment to the goal of early school success and common vision of children's school readiness at the local level" (Piotrkowski, Botsko & Matthews, 2001, p. 555).

Family literacy programs have also been critiqued on the basis of their representations of family literacy. Anderson, Streelasky, and Anderson (2007) discuss a study conducted by Kendrick, Anderson, Smythe, and MacKay (2003) to investigate how family literacy programs were represented on the World Wide Web. Anderson et al. (2007) concluded that the most dominant view was that of a mother reading to a single child (Kendrick et al., 2003), despite the fact that "research with families clearly portrays a much more complex, elaborate, and nuanced picture of literacy that actually occurs in

homes and communities"(Anderson et al., 2007, pg.145). The follow-up study asked the

questions:

> Who is represented, in what literacy activities are they engaging, and in what
>
> context in images on family literacy Websites in Canada. Who is represented, in
>
> what literacy are they engaging, and in what context in text on family literacy
>
> Websites in Canada. What explicit and/or implicit promises are contained in the
>
> texts on family literacy Websites in Canada. (Anderson et al., 2007, p. 145)

Another critique of family literacy comes indirectly from sociocultural research.

Sociocultural research examines literacy as social practices. For example, Dyson (2003)

examines children's construction of the literary world around them through a Bakhtinian

viewpoint. Dyson suggests, "children re-voice those offered words, "re-accenting" them

with their own intentions. In this way, children form a sense of their own agency, their

own possibilities for action, as they slip into the voices that organize their social worlds,

including their routine practices" (p.331). Dyson contends that "the children

[differentiate] particular material, including sounds and images, from the original sources

and [translate] it across, and [reframe] it within, differing practices. These practices often

[have] strikingly different social or symbolic dynamics" (p.332). For Dyson, literacy is

more than simply reading and writing, it is how people interpret and represent their

worlds.

The most recent innovations in family literacy theory and practice can be found in

the socioculturally based field of New Literacy Studies. The programs and authors who

write about these innovations have drawn on the anthropological traditions established by

Shirley Brice-Heath (1983) and Denny Taylor (1988) to argue that all families engage in

practices that generate funds of knowledge which teachers should view as resources.

Moll (1992) speaks of literacy as a social engagement and a child's ability to become

literate is predicated on the teacher reaching the child's funds of knowledge. For Moll,

funds of knowledge speaks to a community's method of survival and understanding of

the intricacies of how that community operates. He writes:

> The notion of funds of knowledge in relation to households' social networks that
>
> facilitate the exchange of resources…these networks serve as a buffer against
>
> uncertain, difficult, and changing economic circumstances…for families at the
>
> bottom of the social order, these networks are a matter of survival. These
>
> networks also serve important emotional and service functions, providing
>
> assistance of different types, most prominently in finding jobs and with child-care
>
> and rearing that releases mothers to enter the labor market. (p.33)

Rowsell (2006) identifies funds of knowledge by writing, "we know words are

rendered more meaningful when they are taught within context and in relation to context.

We know that students should have a balance of language skills coupled with an

appreciation and understanding of the meaning and message of texts" (p.9). By

understanding the norms of a given student's household, teachers will be able to ease the

transition of that child into the norms of traditional schooling and provide him or her with

another social capital.

Educational researchers in the area of multilingualism and multiliteracies

recognize the changing demographics of North American classrooms. Jim Cummins

writes that for English language learners it is important for schools to recognize the

literacy activities being engaged in by the family and find methods of bringing their native language literacy activities into the classroom. For example, Cummins (2006) advocates the use of dual language texts created by students. Cummins also initiated a multiliteracies project in Mississauga classrooms, the results of which have inspired many similar projects to enhance literacies for immigrant students and to foster pride in their cultures. Rowsell's (2006), *Family Literacy Experiences: creating reading and writing opportunities that support classroom learning*, provides examples of activities utilizing both traditional and multimodal sources, such as books, internet, videogames, music, and writing. For Rowsell, literacy can be derived from all aspects of social, communication and telecommunication networks.

Locating my study within the literature

Several studies have explored the topic of school readiness by seeking out the perspectives of those working within kindergarten programs. Lin, Lawrence, and Gorrell (2003) observe that, "because kindergarten teachers are important to children's successful transition to school it is critical to understand their expectations about what skills, behaviors, and attributes are necessary for school outcomes" (p. 225). They entered their study with the belief that kindergarten teachers' perceptions about readiness would be influenced by the school structure, children's background as well as external attitudes toward early childhood education (Lin, Lawrence & Gorrell, 2003). As well, they rationalize that, embedded in a sociocultural context, "kindergarten teachers' readiness perceptions are shaped by many factors, including their own experiences as learners and teachers, school structure, school teaching conditions, the expectations of schools for

children, social forces, community needs and values, children's backgrounds, and external societal attitudes toward early childhood education" (p.227). The study was conducted by using the ECLS-K multi-site longitudinal study, which focused on children who entered kindergarten in 1998. The kindergarten teacher data were collected in the ECLS-K study using a self-administered questionnaire. 3120 respondents answered the questionnaire and from this data Lin, Lawrence and Gorrell concluded that kindergarten teachers tend to view preparing children socially for school a higher priority than academic skills. This finding focuses on social behaviours, such as telling wants and thoughts, is not disruptive in class, follows direction, and takes turns and shares (Lin, Lawrence & Gorrell, 2003).

It has been said that without a shared vision of children's readiness preschool teachers and parents "may not encourage in children the skills, attitudes, and attributes that kindergarten teachers look for" (Piotrkowski, Botsko & Matthews, 2001, p.538). Like Lin, Lawrence and Gorrell, Piotrkowski, Botsko and Matthews highlight the importance of kindergarten teachers' view on readiness since "when readiness expectations differ substantially, kindergarten teachers might view some children as unready and treat them differently. Teacher's views are particularly important because their early assessments of young children's readiness play an important role in special education placement, ability grouping, grade retention, and in shaping children's subsequent achievement trajectories" (Piotrkowski, Botsko & Matthews, 2001, p.538-539). This study was defined by physical boundaries, a densely populated urban school, covering approximately one square mile. The rationale for selecting this school district was due to the fact that ninety percent of elementary school students were "eligible for

federally funded free lunches" (p. 541). The study distributed parent surveys to twenty-six community based preschool sites during June to August, 1998. Surveys to preschool teachers were distributed to thirty-two preschool sites and surveys to all kindergarten teachers in the twenty-two elementary school programs were sent out. The results of the study concluded that kindergarten teachers placed more emphasis on health and social readiness than general knowledge, however did indicate that interest and engagement, such as curiosity, were important components to children's learning (Piotrkowski, Botsko & Matthews, 2001).

Lara-Cinisomo, Fuligni, Ritchie, Howes and Karoly (2008) aimed to address a gap in the literature by creating a study that investigated the varying belief systems across different childcare settings. The researchers note that "research on belief systems among early childhood educators often examines center-based care alone, and studies that include family-based care lump all caregivers into a single category" (p.344). The study concentrated on focus group interviews with public, private and family based child care program staff operating in low-income communities in Los Angeles Country. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions, using probing guidelines, to elicit a sharing of ideas among participants. Their results indicated that early childcare providers, across the three types of care sampled, believe three levels of readiness need to be attained for a successful transition into formal education. These indicators include: the child needs to be emotionally ready, for example, confident and motivated. The child must be physically ready, such as healthy with good motor skills. And finally, the child must have cognitively appropriate abilities, for example, alphabet, number, and problem-solving skills. As well, children need to possess social skills that will allow the child to

get along with others (Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2008). The results show that early years

educators believe that parents need to provide a "stimulating home environment that

promotes learning" (p.347) and that parents need to prepare their children for the

transition from home to formal school.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed for this chapter shows that family literacy programming

has become a driving force in early education of children. Beginning with infancy, "the

home environment sets the tone for lifelong learning. In terms of children's emerging

literacy, several dimensions of the family literacy environment come together to weave a

complex tapestry of activities, experiences, and opportunities to promote the acquisition

of these skills" (Britto, 2001, p.347).

It is interesting to trace the connections between family literacy, emergent literacy

and school readiness initiatives. Taylor's research was made possible due to an increased

interest in emergent literacy theory and the ethnographic studies conducted by Hymes

(1982) and Brice Heath (1983) which investigated language use within communities and

homes. More recently research has focused on multiliteracies (Cummins, 2006) and

multimodal literacy (Dyson, 2003; Rowsell, 2006).

Chapter Three

The Study

Critical educator, Joan Wink writes, "the spirit of inquiry lends the search for

meaning...the teachers shift from control of knowledge to creation of processes whereby

students take ownership of their learning and take risks to understand and apply their

knowledge" (Wink, 1997, p.123). My study is one such search for meaning. Although

family literacy has more often taken a deficit perspective than a critical one, I believe it is

important to "to name, to critically reflect, to act" (p.120). This study situates itself in the

study of language, specifically focusing on the reflective and constitutive nature of

language and in looking for patterns in the language used among participants (Wetherell,

Taylor & Yates, 2001). The patterns within language allow those engaged in

conversation to fluidly construct and define positions and discuss a particular topic

relevantly. This study critically identifies patterns in language and how these patterns

constitute aspects of society and the people within it. As a "fluid, shifting medium in

which meaning is created and contested" (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001, p.9), the

language user is always located and "immersed in this medium and struggling to take her

or his own social and cultural positioning into account" (p.9). My study addresses the

following questions:

- How are family literacy programs represented in the descriptions of family

  literacy professionals and kindergarten teachers?

- How do family literacy professionals and kindergarten teachers describe

  and define "readiness for school"?

- What similarities and differences exist among participants' perceptions of family literacy programs and among their definitions of "readiness for school"?

- What assumptions underpin respondents' descriptions of programs and practices and their descriptions of "school readiness"?

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the theoretical notions that inform my study and the methodology I employed. In this chapter I first discuss the theoretical framework my study is situated in. I then discuss the methodology guiding the study.

Theoretical Framework

The issues discussed in this study are located within a socio-cultural perspective toward literacy in young children. Sociocultural theory emphasizes the roles of "social, cultural and historical factors in the human experience" (Tracey & Morrow, 2006, p.104). Lev Vygotsky (1978), a Russian psychologist, brought a new perspective to literacy research. Although working and writing in the early twentieth century, the 1962 English-language translation of Vygotsky's *Thought and Language*, brought his work into conversations concerning child development, language and thinking (Gillen & Hall, 2003). And it was not until later translations (1978) that his work began to influence literacy research and pedagogies.

Vygotsky's recognition of culture's role in learning, and his belief that "individuals are inseparably connected to cultural history" (Gillen & Hall, 2003, p.6), had a strong influence on literacy pedagogies. Vygotsky drew educators' attention to the ways children use many "mediational tools to construct meaning" (p.6). He emphasized

the value of social symbolic play as a powerful opportunity for children to "appropriate symbols and tools of their culture" (p.6) contributed to the shaping of sociocultural theory. With respect to language, Vygotsky argued that language is first experienced "around the child and comes to be used by the child; it is the flow of experience of that participation in society that language is internalized and understanding develops" (p.6).

Sociocultural theory asks in detail how literacy practices operate in homes. It does not attempt to correlate literacy levels with crude socio-economic indicators (Gillen & Hall, 2003). Researchers ask how these experiences influence children's attitudes to and knowledge about literacy.

Brian Street's (1984) research in Iran promoted the sociocultural shift in literacy studies by emphasizing the social nature of literacy. Street argued that all literacy practices are ideological. Different cultural and community discourses lead to significantly different ways of valuing and using literacy (as cited in Gillen & Hall, 2003). Street concluded that children from different cultural contexts would bring different conceptions of literacy to the "autonomous practices of school literacy" (p.7). The autonomous model of literacy "works from the assumption that literacy in itself-autonomously- will have effects on other social and cognitive practices. It is assumed that the acquisition of literacy will itself lead to, for example, higher cognitive skills, improved economic performance, greater equality" (Street, 2005, p.417).

The result of earlier research had an impact on sociocultural theory by demonstrating clearly that literacy cannot be divorced from language in use, nor from its wider cultural context and by drawing attention to how young children are learning to mean with a much wider notion of literacy than previously considered by educators.

Sociocultural theory raises powerful questions about the relationship between literacy as a social practice and literacy in school at a time when in many parts of the world the autonomous model of literacy was being increasingly privileged by governments (p.7).

Sociocultural theory defines literacy as "an act of meaning making, whether it be in interpreting a text or generating a text, and it has always been acknowledged that there are many other modes of meaning making, e.g. through art, music and dance" (p.8). A sociocultural view of literacy argues that "literacy learning cannot be abstracted from cultural practices in which it is nested" (Razfar & Gutierrez, 2003, p.34), and is contrasted to previous conceptions of literacy as the "acquisition of a series of discrete skills" (p.34). A sociocultural view espouses a "non-normative, non-integrated dynamic view of culture in which culture is instantiated in the practices and material conditions of everyday life" (p.35). The beliefs guiding sociocultural theory become increasingly important when considering school readiness and what knowledge is valued prior to entry.

A focus concentrated in sociocultural theory helps to bridge an understanding that there are many ways in which community members make sense of valued practices which have been valued by the community. Sociocultural theory attempts to contextualize children's language learning by situating development culturally, historically and ideologically. Sociocultural theory argues that literacy events have a social history that link "the individual to larger sociohistorical practices and processes. Thus, people's literacy practices are necessarily situated in broader social relations and historical contexts" (Razfar & Gutierrez, 2003, p.35). Razfar and Gutierrez (2003) believe that as children are socialized to particular literacy practices, they are

concurrently socialized into discourses that position them ideologically within the larger

social milieu. The implications of shifting literacy perspectives in education are evident

in research conducted (Street, 2005; Rowsell, 2006; Cummins, 2006). Early literacy

studies were conducted by observing and analyzing activity settings as opposed to the

performances of children's literacy skills under controlled experimental conditions

(Razfar & Gutierrez, 2003). These studies focused on children's every day participation

in literacy activities and researchers utilized sustained participant observation to gain a

deeper understanding of the early literacy developing.

Although sociocultural theory and early literacy are related, there are distinct

differences between the two. The main difference results in how each views parental

interaction with children in literacy practices. Sociocultural theory maintains, although

adults are typically the 'expert' members of literacy practices, the "roles of experts and

novices are more fluid as we expect change in the nature of participation over time in

literacy activity; through active participation, children's development is mediated via

available material, ideational and cultural tools. Thus early literacy development is a

multidirectional and mutually engaging process between adults and children" (Razfar &

Gutierrez, 2003, p.38).

These beliefs tie into the fundamental tenets of family literacy theory as they are

guided by the belief that children begin literacy development at an early age and therefore

their parents, or guardians, are highly involved in early literacy development. If literacy

development begins before children enter kindergarten, it is crucial to ensure measures

are put in place to assist all families in their children's literacy development. Also it is

important to address the influence the family has on a child's development and to remain

aware of what types of literacy practices a child may be exposed to in his or her home environment.

The related theories of funds of knowledge and third space are located within sociocultural theory. They acknowledge that literacy is developed prior to school entry and that home life informs how children understand language and construct meaning. Moll writes, "Funds of knowledge form an essential part of a broader set of activities, social relationships, related to the households' functioning in society. These social relations facilitate reciprocal exchanges among people" (1992, p.34).

Moll's theory of funds of knowledge is informed by Coleman's (1987) earlier 'social capital' theory. Coleman asserts, "What I mean by social capital in the raising of children is the norms, the social networks, and the relationships between adults and children that are of value for the child's growing up" (Coleman, 1987, as cited in Moll, 1992, p.34). Coleman (1988) suggests, "social capital comes about through the social relations among persons that facilitate action, social capital inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors. It is not lodged either in the actors themselves or in the physical implements of production" (as cited in Moll, 1990, p.34-35). For both Coleman and Moll the point of their theories comes from the idea that both social capital and funds of knowledge are not found within individuals but among individuals. Why is this important for education? It is important because if schools do not recognize the social capital of all their students, children will be left confused and frustrated by not understanding the inner workings of curriculum, or of social acceptance. When teachers take the time to learn about the social practices in a given student's household, they are better able to ease the child's transition to school and better able to

create authentic learning opportunities. As Jacobson, Degener and Purcell-Gates (2003) points out, children's success in early literacy lessons is correlated with the level of authenticity of the literacy activities in which they participate. For example, Moll (2005) described a study involving young Mexican-American children who typically were rated among the lower-level readers in their English speaking class. Moll noted that the students "were capable of much more advanced work, once provided with the strategic support of Spanish in making sense of text" (p.4). Another example came in a child attending "swap meets" (p.13) or flea markets with his mother. As a result he was able "to negotiate a barter system with a fellow swap-market vendor, which enabled him to purchase some particular clothes he wanted" (p.13). Many of the children Moll (2005) worked with had vast experience in border-crossing and international travel. The teacher recounts, "many of my...students show a great deal of interest in economic issues, because they have seen the difference in the two countries. In immigration law, but also in laws in general; they would ask me why there are so many laws here that they don't have in Mexico. These children had the background experiences to explore in-depth issues that tie in with a sixth grade curriculum, such as the study of other countries, different forms of government, economic systems, and so on" (p.80).

My study is also informed by the idea of family literacy programs as a third space (Moje, 2004). Third space theory aims to "understand the space in between two or more discourses or conceptualizations" (Levy, 2008,p.44). In education it is the way of describing hybrid language and literacy practices rather than practices associated with only the home or only the school. The third space is a metaphor for the area between these locations. Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo, and Collazo (2004) identify

three ways third spaces can be viewed. First, "third space can be viewed as 'a way to build bridges from knowledges and discourses often marginalized in school settings'" (as cited in Levy, 2008, p.45). The second view refers to "third space as being less of a mediator, bridging two discourses, but more of a 'navigational space' providing students with the means to cross and succeed 'in different discourse communities'" (p.45). The third position places third space "as a space of 'cultural, social and epistemological change' through which different funds of knowledge or discourses are brought into 'conversation' with each other to 'challenge and reshape both academic and content literacy practices and the knowledges and discourses of youths' everyday lives" (p.45). In regard to literacy education Levy (2008) contends that it is important for teachers to recognize that "young children draw upon the discourses of home and school in forming their own constructions of reading" (p.45) and therefore need to recognize the practices children engage in at home along with school literacy practices.

Methodology

My study aims to understand the representations constructed by early years professionals and teachers. The method of analysis will come from the field of analytic discourse analysis because I aim to discover patterns within the language used and draw conclusions from it. The interpretive nature of my study indicates that qualitative interviews are appropriate data collection tools. Qualitative inquiry is conducted primarily through observation and interviewing and qualitative researchers use "themselves as the principal and most reliable instrument of observation, selection, coordination and, interpretation" (Firestone & Dawson, 1981, p.3). Qualitative data are

"in the form of words rather than numbers" (p.3). I conducted semi-structured interviews, using both closed and open questions. My study conducted five individual, semi-structured interviews with women employed in the early literacy field in Southwestern Ontario. The method of selecting participants was through the means of a convenience sample. I began by approaching two participants I had met previously, who granted permission to conduct interviews. These participants than contacted professional colleagues they felt would wish to participate in the study. A snowball effect occurred as I approached these colleagues about participation.

For the writing of this paper the names have been changed to protect participants' anonymity. In the interviews I introduced topics regarding family literacy programs and practices; how they represent programs and program participants; and the purposes they envision for programs. I also asked respondents about their understandings of what it means for a child to be "ready-to-learn" at school and how a diagnosis of readiness was created and by whom.

My first two interviews were with employees with the Ontario *Early Years*. Jennifer has worked in her position, educational assistant, for two and a half years. Dana currently works within the Ontario *Early Years* as an early literacy specialist. Both women had experience in junior kindergarten-senior kindergarten classrooms while Jennifer has worked with developmentally challenged adults and Dana was a school librarian.

Shawna works in a library setting as a family literacy coordinator. She completed a Bachelor of Education with a specialization in secondary teaching and TESOL

certification and spent two years teaching English overseas. She also worked in a

community cross-cultural services program for seven years. Melissa has been a family

literacy facilitator since 1998, but since 2000 has worked in coordinating and developing

family literacy programs for parents and children. Melissa worked within the library

system prior to her current role and assisted in the development and creation of national

modules and training in family literacy. As well, Melissa has worked in adult and senior

literacy since the early 1990s. Brenda worked within the Montessori school system for

five years before coming to work with an organization that supports children with

learning disabilities in multi-sensory learning education, which she has now been doing

for six years.

Program participants

Through the descriptions given by participants, the participants attending Early

Years and library programs tended to be of a middle socioeconomic status. The

exception to this trend was Melissa's program targeting families currently on Ontario

Works social assistance. Many of her participants are refugee families from around the

world and may not speak English well or at all.

My study aimed to provide trustworthy (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007)

findings. I digitally audio recorded the interviews of participants and transcribed the

data. The interview process was structured in a way that maintained the purposes of the

research, through specific questioning of participants about their beliefs and views of

family literacy and school readiness, as well as to ask about how family literacy programs

are structured in their areas. The structured questions are as follows:

1. Educator's Background in early years:

    - How long have you taught kindergarten or worked in family literacy programs?
    - What kinds of schools/ or programs have you worked in?
    - Do you have any other early years experience? If so, tell me about it.

2. Family Literacy:

    - What do you think of when you hear the words 'family' and 'literacy'?
    - What do you see as the purpose of family literacy?
    - What kinds of activities occur in family literacy programs?
    - How do they help children and families?
    - What are some challenges that family literacy educators face in their work with families?

3. Readiness for school:

    - What does this term mean to you?
    - If a child is "ready for school", what kinds of things can they do?
    - How do you, in your professional judgment, know if a child is not ready for school?

For Family literacy practitioners only:

- Does your program have a written/printed/web-based/documented philosophy, statement of goals or curriculum?
  *Note: a commercial curriculum counts
- How does curriculum get planned or developed in your organization?

However, interviews allowed the participants to voice their unique positions on family literacy, thus providing rich data as told in participants' voices. The anonymity of participants and the names of the specific schools or centers was achieved through the use of pseudonyms and vague descriptions.

Following Heydon and Wang (2006) I employ a critical literacy strategy to analyze interview transcripts. Lewison, Flint, and Sluys (2002) observe that critical approaches tend to exhibit the following characteristics:

1. Disrupt the commonplace (what is taken for granted in family literacy programs? What are its norms and values?)

2. Interrogate the situation from multiple viewpoints (What are other ways of approaching the education and care of young children?)

3. Focus on socio-political issues (What are the dynamics of power at play in the program? Who benefits and at whose expense?);

4. take action and promote social justice (What now can be done in the name of equity and social justice for young children's education and care and how do we honour the alterity of the children and their families?) (p. 31).

Chapter Four

Anticipated Themes

In this chapter I outline the data collected in my interviews with participants. I

organize the data according to representations of family literacy programs, descriptions of

what it means to be ready for school, and similarities and differences that exist among

participants' perceptions of family literacy programs and among their definitions of

readiness for school. I conclude the chapter by discussing the assumptions underpinning

participants' descriptions of programs and practices, as well as their descriptions of

school readiness.

Representing family literacy

Definitions of family literacy varied among participants. Generally, family

literacy was represented as a program attended by parents and children and as a process

of literacy skill development in both adult and child. For example, one respondent

defined family literacy as "parent support for helping their children develop emergent

literacy skills." Dana elaborated on the idea of parent support by saying

> Improving both the literacy skills of the child but also the interaction between the
> parent and child. So it had more on-going effects because the parent can then
> continue what you've done. In six weeks you cannot give the child everything
> you want. But if you can give it to the parent to continue with the child then you
> have actually done something that's going to ensure on-going literacy strategies
> and so on, or development.

Jennifer defined family literacy as,

> Family literacy. It's important to children. To me it says it involves the parents
> and it, obviously, is family oriented and hopefully can serve a large range of ages
> and not restrict it to a particular age group

Two respondents focused on the evolution of the term family literacy,

commenting on where it came from and where it has gone. For example, Melissa spoke

of previously thinking family literacy was "when you were working with the children and

the parents". However, the term has evolved, for her, to mean that

> If it's family literacy at its base you actually only have to be working with the
> parent. Because any change you make in the parent will have an impact on the
> child. So that really caused me to look at it differently. Because prior to that I
> always thought it had to be children and the parents or children and the
> grandparents and that was where I was coming from, because my background was
> adult literacy. But [at its] most base, for me…is now working with the adults to
> help them with their children.

Despite viewing family literacy evolutionarily, all participants remained seated in

an autonomous representation of literacy. The autonomous model of literacy "works

from the assumption that literacy in itself-autonomously- will have effects on other social

and cognitive practices. It is assumed that the acquisition of literacy will itself lead to,

for example, higher cognitive skills, improved economic performance, greater equality"

(Street, 2005, p.417). The sense is that literacy, on its own, will improve all aspects of

living, "irrespective of the social conditions and cultural interpretations of literacy

associated with programmes and educational sites for its dissemination" (p.417).

With respect to the descriptions of the programs the answers were more specific

to the type of work each participant was doing within her current role. One commonality

in programs was the half an hour circle time allotted at the conclusion of family

programs. The circle time "teaches [children] songs and teaches the parents songs they

can sing with the children as well as involving a lot of books".

The *ESSO Family Math* program was cited by two respondents. This program

runs for six weeks and is "book-ended by picture books on each end of the evening,

connecting people to not only math, but also the idea that literacy and math are

interconnected". The program incorporates the five strands of math from the curriculum.

It is run with parents and children and "empowers [parents] to help their children so that they understand what the five strands of math are and how to introduce it to their children in a way that's fun and also in a way that doesn't really feel like math". Dana referred to this program not only as a math program, but a literacy program too.

> That [the] family literacy program focuses on the five strands of math and the idea that, and it is parent-led, but the parents are doing it with their children, and their perception is almost that their children are getting math in-servicing, if you will, but the intent of the program is to empower them to help their children so they understand what the five strands of math are and how to introduce it to their children in a way that's fun and also in a way that doesn't really feel like math. It's like a part of everyday life, which of course is what you want all the components of literacy to be, something that's not a specific subject area but something that's incorporated in daily life and they see it that way.

In Jennifer's district a program has been put together that brings families together and shows the fun that can be found in literacy. The program was outlined as follows:

> A six week program and we focus on different aspects of literacy each week. And it was for children zero to six years of age, so we taught parents how to look for literacy in everyday things, such as traffic signs and words that they might see as they are walking down the street, just to help parents realize that literacy is everywhere...everywhere you are.

Many programs allow for free time, a time for parents and children to explore centres before commencing concrete program activities. Melissa explained this as:

> The one I am doing right now, it's twice a week for two hours each time. So it's a ten week long program so I see the families twenty times. And so the first hour of the program, when they arrive, I've got puzzles and books out in whatever my theme is. So for example, this week my theme was ABCs. So I had all sorts of puzzles and I sang them the ABC book for the circle. So what I do, when they arrive I have stuff for them to explore with their children. I guide them a little bit but I don't say too much. This is time for them to kinda figure out what's in front of them and see what the children like

After the free play opportunity has concluded in her program, Melissa gathers the group

into a circle where they:

> Do singing, we do some puppet things, finger plays. Then I take up the
> homework. So whatever they had for homework. They always get a number to
> colour or put stickers on in class. And then they have a craft. And the craft is
> kinda whatever they want to do. I really encourage the parents to let the kids do
> the craft and just work with them. And then I read a book and we have a snack.

Since Melissa's program is two hours in length she has the time to allow for free play, a

circle and a parent education component. Part of the routine involves the parents walking

their child or children to the child care provider and returning for the educational

component. Melissa states that "then they come back to me and then we talk about a

series of topics, like the books".

Jennifer, too, referenced a program her centre provides, called *Family Time*, as

one program used to educate parents.

> We have one particular program called *Family Time* where parents are in one
> program room with a guest speaker and we're in another room with their children
> doing child care...every week it's a different speaker and a different topics and it
> all relates to parenting...whether it be, say a car seat information day or learning
> about toilet learning or things like that. It's all child oriented, child based,
> learning for the adults.

Shawna uses an American program, called *Every Child Ready to Read @ Your*

Library, to assist in her programs in the library.

> It's the American Library Association and they provide a lot of resources about
> workshops for parenting to say, hey- you're doing some great stuff already, but
> here are some tips or ideas on what you may want to do further with your child.
> And a lot of libraries have signed on to that. There is going to be some training at
> the [end of the month] to help libraries focus more on literacy and helping to
> support families.

Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library is a joint program developed by the

Public Library Association (PLA) and the Association for Library Services to Children

(ALSC) that incorporates research and created a series of parent and caregiver workshops. The project began in 2000 after the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development published, *Teaching Children to Read: an evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction* (Myers & Henderson, 2004). The PLA and the NIHCD partnered to develop a model so that the information contained in the NICHD's report could be widely distributed among parents and caregivers. In 2001 the PLA held a spring symposium to begin development of a program model incorporating the research. Grover C. Whitehurst and Christopher Lonigan were contracted to create the model program for parents and caregivers. In October, 2001, the project was piloted for the first time (Myers & Henderson, 2004).

As well as mentioning the program, Shawna also describes some of the aspects of *Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library*:

> *Every Child Ready to Read* [@ *Your Library*] focuses on six different language skills and so we try to name those and say to the parents, you know, you're already doing this when you're doing Old MacDonald had a farm, you're practicing playing with sounds and these are some other activities you might want to consider doing with your kids.

The six pre-reading skills, as identified by *Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library*, are: letter knowledge, print awareness, narrative skills, print motivation, phonological awareness and vocabulary.

For Dana working in an Ontario early years centre (OEYC), she felt her programs contained more subtle parent education components, such as in her *Alphabet Literacy* program. Dana described the program as follows:

> Alphabet Literacy, which is based on the family math model, in that it's parent-child, but with the intent that what you are doing is teaching the parent how to

work with the child to facilitate things like singing, letter recognition, all those good things. So it's a four week program...people are less intimidated by alphabet and letter activities than they are by math we noticed. So they don't need quite the same introduction. Like the five strands of math are foreign to a lot of people, people understand the idea of alphabets and those kinds of things. So it seemd to fit into four weeks better and by the time we're done four weeks they seem to feel they've acquired a lot of information and it satisfied them within the four week program. So that's why we did it that way. So we did all sorts of things: songs, rhymes, phonemic awareness. All sorts of things they can do with their child at home for low-cost or no-cost and they seem to really, really like it, as does our frontline staff trained in the program

Getting children ready for kindergarten was the focus of several programs offered

by OEYCs. Jennifer referenced it while speaking about programs geared towards child

independence. She states,

And some of the the early years programs offer a *Getting Ready for K* program, a kindergarten readiness program. And in that case the parents are in one room and the children are in another with two qualified instructors, like ECE or ECE-like people. And...it's a program totally based on getting ready for school.

Another program aspect described by several participants is the need to talk about

teachable moments. The participants viewed this task as a way to enforce positive

parenting and modeling appropriate language interaction between parent and child.

Melissa explained it this way:

We'll discuss why I put that there or why did I do this. And if I see something that is really a teachable moment, like with the kids, I'll say 'mom, or like Anita, if that's mom's name, did you notice how your child, you see how this looks like scribbling, this is pre-writing, we call this pre-literacy or emergent literacy because he is making circles. And you know, the squiggly lines at the start of writing and that makes every letter. So I try to stop them when I catch something that is really a teachable thing".

Working in the library, programming was different for Shawna. Her role as

coordinator, along with programming for parents and children, is to support her staff in

delivering the programs. She addresses this role as follows:

Part of my job is to help support staff as well as say, you know, great work with what you are doing already and here are some more ideas. It's interesting in our system we've had some staff who have been doing programming for thirty years with our library and others we hired last week. So some have ECE backgrounds and have a really solid foundation in literacy and how to deliver kids programming and other really don't have any background at all. We have...branches where there is only one staff person. So that person does everything at the branch- they do adult programming, kids programming, they do everything for that branch. So doing story time can be really intimidating especially if they've never done anything like that before. So it's my job to come in there and provide support and maybe model for the staff what you can do and just give them ideas and stuff.

Looking broadly at the work in family literacy in her area, Shawna spoke of the

differing agencies coming together to network ideas and practices. A new committee that

arose out of a conference in 2007 has begun a network of agencies to focus literacy

practices in her area. She describes the process:

One of the needs identified at that conference [spring 2007] was a need for a networking group...That was the spring of 2007 but nothing really got organized until, I guess it was a few months ago. So we're 2009, so the end of 2008. So it took awhile for us to get organized but now we finally are and we had a meeting yesterday around, our second meeting...so we're finally getting organized and talking about having an annual conference. But we're trying to get all that groundwork done first in terms of reference and goals and stuff like that. So that's pretty exciting because finally we're coming together and I think we'll be really effective once we're all on the same page.

Dana summed up her position nicely, by stating that first and foremost, her role is

to serve parents, caregivers and ECE professionals.

Basically, the people we serve are parents, caregivers, and eces. And those all tend to have different needs. But within that, there are things you can deliver and then tweak for each of them. Be it, they want to know something about books for babies, for example, or infant literacy...They all may want to know about it but a mom with a new baby has a different requirement in terms of what she want to know than someone who works in an infant room, for example, or somebody who is caring for an infant but also care for three other children of different ages. Because what they can do with that child is going to vary slightly, but the core message is going to be the same for all of them. It's just more the activities and strategies you provide may be tweaked for each of those groups.

Representing "readiness for school"

I found no consensus among respondents' definitions of school readiness. The definitions ranged from socialization skills to academic performance. Dana stressed the need to reflect items on the developmental continuum and that the child arrived to a classroom setting ready to thrive:

> School readiness. That would be, basically, all the different, all the things on the developmental continuum that a child needs to be ready to enter a classroom situation, not only to cope effectively, but to thrive. So, social-emotional, it's emergent numeracy and literacy based. It's coordination. There's all sorts of different aspects of what they need so that when they arrive there they are good to go.

Letter recognition and name recognition were expressed as needs for a ready child, as well as vocabulary, phonological awareness, comprehension and an overall interest in books and reading. Dana's definition included understanding of the alphabetic principle:

> Ideally, I guess if I had my little ideal person, they would recognize their name, they would recognize some letters of the alphabet. They would understand that LMNOP is not one letter.

Jennifer also noted emergent literacy skills in her definition, however highlighting social needs too:

> For me, it would be the early printing skills, the early writing skills. Even being able to sit for half an hour at circle or things like that. Also the socialization, being able to interact with other children and take direction from adults, teachers and so on.

Fine motor skills, such as holding a crayon or pencil, were also cited as areas needed for school readiness. Melissa noted "that they [the child] are comfortable holding

a pencil or crayon", as well addressed the need for emergent literacy skills, "that they [the child], you know, they can recognize some letters, like the first letter of their name".

For Brenda the emphasis was on literacy knowledge and commented,

> There's a lot of, if we're just talking about literacy, how does that child express himself just with words. Are they using quite a good vocabulary or did they stick to just using phrases? Are their words clear? I would be looking at if they are interested in letters and sounds and words or are they completely oblivious to that and would much prefer to run around the playground and go on the swings and slide as opposed to looking at books and looking at pictures and talking about [it]. Can they look at a picture and you can ask a simple question, what do you think Franklin is going here? Or if you've read a book to them and they'll give it to you again and [say], 'can you reread this again'. You know it's obviously been joyful and they liked the story and they want to hear the story again"

Another school readiness theme present was the need for children to separate from parents without anxiety and the social interaction among other children. One example of this came in the words of, "they would be able to separate from their parents without anxiety. They would be able to cope in group situations as well as working independently. They would understand that they don't always come first". Socialization, along with "being able to interact with other children and take direction from adults, teachers, and so on", also meant independent skills, such as "toilet learning...and dressing themselves, you know for recess. Even being able to put on their shoe, not necessarily to tie their shoe, but put it on". Dana commented that school readiness was

> The whole kind of social-emotional, sharing and empathy kinds of things. You would at least have the foundation for that in place because, well I think the ratio isn't as bad now, but if you have twenty-five strong personalities nobody has a good time. Those sharing aspects, that kind of thing.

While working in cross-cultural services, Shawna helped to initiate a school readiness program for new Canadians, highlighting a need within Canada's growing multicultural society.

In some of my previous work with new Canadians I'd actually helped to initiate programs for new Canadians because they were going into the school system with absolutely no readiness at all. Like they arrived in June and couldn't register in ESL programs so there was three months of lost time there. So we're providing some school readiness training.

Brenda spoke of how to prepare a child for literacy learning in school by working with a moveable alphabet.

I would encourage them to get a moveable alphabet, where the letters are, something you would put on a fridge and they, you know, to separate upper and lower case, not to jumble them all together. To work just on the lower case. And to talk to the child about reading and how alphabets have names and sounds and that they are two separate things and every letter has a name and a sound. I would encourage the parents to use, what I call, the alphabet rainbow; you know where the M and N are at the top of the mountain so to speak. And to talk to them about the fact that there are only twenty-six letters and these twenty-six letters make up all the words in the English language and to encourage that child to understand that the sounds the letters make when they are put together form what we call words and words are what we use to speak and read....demystify the whole idea of the alphabet. Cause often children don't understand the difference between the name of a letter and sound that the letter makes. And really encourage a lot of phonemic awareness activities and working with those sounds and taking apart words and putting them back together. Simple words, you know three letter words. I would encourage the parents to do activities daily on those types of things.

An interesting theme that arose from conversations around school readiness came from the unknown and inability to truly predict readiness. Dana commented as such:

I don't know how you'd actually know for sure until you saw them in the setting. Because I've had children where it looks like, you kinda think in your head, this could be a little bit of a problem. And yet when they are actually apart from their parent they've done just fine. Like I still remember one little guy who was like a little pinball when they came to my classroom, he couldn't settle on anything and he was all over the place. And on the first day when he came without mom he just went to the train thing, he was very calm, he was fine. I didn't really have any kind of huge difficulty with him at all. So you really can't tell until you've seen in the setting, I would say to be perfectly fair.

However, contrasting Dana's words, Jennifer spoke of just knowing a child was ready:

Some children are just, you know, just ready for school. They're outgoing, they're, you know, pretty independent. And there [are] others who are a little more reluctant to leave mom or dad or a little shy.

Comparing representations of family literacy and school readiness

Among the similarities describing family literacy, all but one participant

described the practice as "parent support" and focusing on the child's literacy

development. Two respondents chose to interpret literacy in a broad definition and

commented that "literacy is anything that involves communication, whether its email,

speaking, listening, writing, reading, you know, any type of communication, math, you

know all that kind of thing"; a "real global view of literacy". With an emphasis on the

parent being "the first and foremost teacher" respondents spoke of a need to support

parents in whatever way possible, such as "giving tips to parents, modeling appropriate or

samples of ways to read and interact with the child". Shawna stated that the,

> Family literacy focus is dual, in that it's for adult literacy skills and children literacy skills. But at the library that's really not necessarily within our mandate or our capacity at this point. So it's more of parent support focusing on the children's literacy skill development

For Jennifer the purpose of family literacy programs was to:

> I think, it's just to educate parents on how they can help their children with literacy and also to involve them one-on-one with their children hands on. And maybe learn several different techniques to teach their children literacy.

With respect to the differences in definitions there were plenty. One such view

was expressed by Brenda. She commented,

> When I think of family literacy I think of, about how parents talk to their children. What type of language do they use. Whether they are talking down to the child or whether they are talking to the child at the same level. What vocabulary they use. What kind of reading materials are in the house. Do the parents read newspapers,

do they read magazines, do they read novels, do they impose reading on their children. Is [it] something they [are] talking to their children about- valuing literacy.

Dana expressed another idea in that family literacy is,

 The best of both worlds because research seems to show that not only does the child benefit more effectively but so does the parent, so you get more from each of them than if you took the child individually or the parent individually you can impart a certain amount of information, but you get the two of them together it's far more effective in terms of time investment and what you do with them.

As well, Dana mentioned the need to equip parents with a "broader view of literacy than simply teaching your kid to read or teaching your child to recognize words...that it's far more than that- it's expressive and receptive" and that sometimes the hardest aspect of family literacy is for parents to "embrace the idea of active listening, as oppose to just trying to impart things all the time".

Like the term family literacy, the term school readiness does not denote a single set of skills. It is a working definition, as observed in the comments made during the course of interviews. It appeared that among all respondents a certain level of emergent literacy and numeracy needs to be reached before a child can be expected to thrive in a classroom. For example, children are "comfortable holding a pencil or crayon...they can recognize some letters, like the first letter of their name. That they are mostly comfortable working with all sorts of things, whether it be story-telling or listening to stories or pre-writing or colouring". This idea was also stated as, "the early printing skills, the early writing skills". Socialization, independent self-help skills and toilet training were other areas of child development listed as needed in order for a child to be deemed ready for school. Shawna explained the types of things she does in program to prepare children for school:

In the survey we did back in 2007 the parents had two goals in bringing their kids to the library program. One was to help get their child ready for school and the other was for social interaction with kids. And in my mind that also, I mean the whole sitting in circle time and not punching the kid next to you, you know behaving well with others, fits into that. So that has always been one of the goals at the library, that whole social interaction, getting kids prepared for a school-setting, is definitely part of what we do. And of course there is the family literacy piece, with the sound awareness, letter knowledge, being interested in books, getting that extra vocabulary from the books, all of that, I think, prepares a child for school and learning how to read as well.

The differences reported among respondents varied mostly in the semantics of how readiness was worded. However, Melissa spoke of not only the child being ready for school but also the parent.

I look at making both the child and the parent school ready. So for the child that they are…comfortable working with all sorts of things, whether it be story-telling or listening to stories or prewriting or colouring. You know, with that comes a little bit of maturity too, just knowing the routines of how a day of school would go. And with parents, school ready means knowing what's going on in that classroom. The jk classroom we're usually talking about. Some of the terms teachers might use, a strand of the curriculum that their child will be learning, stuff like that.

Critique of representations

Using a critical literacy strategy I critically address the assumptions participants showed as they discussed the questions asked during interviews.

1. Disrupt the commonplace (what is taken for granted in family literacy programs? What are its norms and values?)

2. Interrogate the situation from multiple viewpoints (What are other ways of approaching the education and care of young children?)

3. Focus on socio-political issues (What are the dynamics of power at play in the program? Who benefits and at whose expense?);

4. take action and promote social justice (What now can be done in the name of equity and social justice for young children's education and care and how do we

honour the alterity of children and their families?) (Heydon & Wang, 2006, p. 31).

It is important to discuss the ways assumptions, constructed by institutions, agencies and people, play an influential role in the creation and presentation of programs for families and schools. These assumptions influence how people approach a particular group in programming and why they do the jobs they do. The implications of assumptions to the field of education can be seen in the devaluing of certain families and the knowledge those families value. If certain students' valued knowledge is being left out from early year programming or formal schooling they can become isolated and their learning less effective. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Jacobson et al. (2003) talk about authentic learning experiences and suggest that children's success in early literacy lessons is correlated with the level of authenticity of the literacy activities in which they participate. Authentic learning experiences occur when a child's learning relates specifically to what they have experienced prior to the learning (Moll, 2005). Assumptions educators make about families, particularly if the assumptions contain notions of a deficit, can dramatically reduce a child's chance to experience authentic learning. Children will be presented views of literacy completely foreign to them and educators will miss the valuable literacy the children already possess from their home life. However, assumptions are usually tacit and are felt as natural. This is particularly dangerous because it causes educators not to seek change to the status quo and continue to perceive particular students at a deficit. If a teacher assumes a student is at a deficit the way they are taught to can dramatically change.

The most frequently voiced assumption in descriptions of family literacy programs was the need to educate parents. All but one participant explained that programs were developed to impart some form of parent education. One example, "it's just to educate the parents on how they can help their children with literacy and also to involve them one-on-one with their children, hands-on". Participants spoke of "empowering [parents] to help their children". An autonomous notion of literacy was valued as participants spoke of the need to,

> Recognize [their] name, they can recognize some letters...that they are mostly comfortable working with all sorts of things, whether it be story-telling or listening to stories or pre-writing or colouring.

This valuing of autonomous literacy creates a top-down approach to education and does not embrace a community of parent and school. It is, as Street (2005) suggests, "dominant approaches based on the autonomous model are simply imposing Western conceptions of literacy onto other cultures" (p.417). Little was mentioned by participants of families' funds of knowledge and the value of the home practices already occurring within family dynamics. An example of how assumptions can skew what is valued can be found in Moll (2005). He writes,

> CA: Half of the children in my classroom are international travelers, and yet this experience is not recognized or valued because they are Mexican children going to Mexico. Anglo children may spend a summer in France and we make a big deal about it, by asking them to speak to the class about their summer activities! Carlos spends summers in Magdalena, Mexico, yet he's probably rarely been asked to share his experiences with anyone. (p. 79)

The definitions of school readiness were consistent with assessment standards and outcome-based principles used in formal education systems. For example, one participant mentioned the need for

Sounds awareness, letter knowledge, being interested in books, getting that extra vocabulary from books, all of that, I think, prepares a child for school and learning how to read as well.

Little was mentioned about what parents were already doing with their children or what practices parents currently provide that are valued in the programs. All conversations spoke of educating parents to be able to better teach their children to read or be ready for school.

Despite a belief that their views of literacy are broad or global, participants favour an autonomous model of literacy and place the parents they work with at a deficit. There is no mention of syncretic literacy or multimodal literacy practices and one cannot identify interview comments relating to the field of New Literacy Studies, which value all aspects of social, communication, and telecommunication networks (Rowsell, 2006).

Central to the syncretic literacy ideal, is a belief that "when different cultural systems meet, one rarely simply replaces the other" (Duranti & Ochs, 1996, p.2). No participants expressed a belief in bringing all cultural practices together or making space for other literacy values, other than the autonomous model. There is no intermingling of diverse traditions, just a need to "equip the parents" with the skills to educate their children.

Syncretic literacy ties into multiliteracies and the belief that "language is the most important semiotic tool for representing, transmitting, and creating social order and cultural world views" (Duranti & Ochs, 1996, p.1). Melissa works with families of diverse backgrounds. She explains,

> They are coming from all different backgrounds, like they might speak Sudanese first, or whatever. They're not all immigrants but there is a mixture.

However, she makes no reference to facilitating current language skills and infusing those skills into Western definitions of literacy. In multiliteracies, Jim Cummins writes that for English language learners it is important for schools to recognize the literacy activities being engaged in by the family and find methods of bringing their native language literacy activities into the classroom. For example, as discussed in an earlier chapter, Cummins (2006) advocates the use of dual language texts created by students.

Respondents speak of equipping parents with a "broader view of literacy than simply teaching your child to read or teaching your child to recognize words". However, the broad view of literacy defined is still autonomous in nature and privileges Western notions of learning to speak, read and write. There is no social representation of literacy and culture is not viewed as impacting literacy development.

Many respondents discussed the need for the socialization of the child prior to entry of formal schooling. However, this is not the same as taking a sociocultural perspective of child development, which defines literacy as "an act of meaning making, whether it be in interpreting a text or generating a text, and it has always been acknowledged that there are many other modes of meaning making, e.g. through art, music and dance" (Gillen & Hall, 2003, p.8) and argues that "literacy learning cannot be abstracted from cultural practices in which it is nested" (Razfar & Gutierrez, 2003, p.34). The socialization involved following "all the different things on the developmental continuum" or the "whole kind of social-emotional, sharing and empathy kinds of things". Jennifer also mentioned the need to "interact with other children and take direction from adults, teachers", which does not involve understanding the child's cultural practices from the home.

Every respondent interviewed referenced a program which promoted school readiness. Although there was no intended curriculum cited by respondents, other than Brenda who works with a specifically structured program, respondents worked within their own agencies to develop community programs. However, since the autonomous model of literacy was valued, many programs attempted to align their programs with school curriculum. The view is that these organizations are created to prepare children for entry into formal education. In order to construct their programs, these agencies look to the published school curriculum and construct their own manuals, philosophies, and guidelines based on school expectations. Shawna explained that,

> So we're trying to complement what's being done in the school. But I'm lucky because I have kids in jk and grade one so I can see what my kids are doing in school and try to tie that into what we do in library programming.

The language of the respondents does not focus on an idea of getting children ready to learn. The language used discusses the need to provide parents with activities for children to acquire particular skills before beginning formal school. The emphasis is on providing children with the skills needed to complete kindergarten rather than preparing children to be ready to learn. For example, in a recent kindergarten readiness program I modeled the skill of printing my name on a piece of paper for the children attending the program. Although this is a skill used often in kindergarten the problem with this method is that it does not actually prepare children for learning. It is merely a skill they can do. It will not further affect their ability to learn.

Although all programs and respondents are providing services for their communities it is apparent that more work has yet to be done in actively ending the perception of deficit in the language used to describe and construct programs. If literacy

is to be believed as a broad definition, we need to begin defining programs and activities in a social and cultural nature, not simply as skills to develop. Although there is a place for skill development, attention needs to be paid to how we, as educators, prepare and present the skills of literacy and re-examine what a broad definition of literacy truly is.

The next chapter will examine themes that emerged during the course of each interview. I will discuss the conclusions I have drawn based on the data and offer my interpretations of the data. I then suggest recommendations for the field of study.

Chapter Five

Emergent Themes and Discussion

This chapter discusses the emergent themes from the interviews, discussing how

the themes were selected and then discussing the data relevant to the themes. After that I

discuss my conclusions stemming from participants' interview comments.

Emergent themes

As I transcribed and reviewed the participants' answers to my questions I began

to infer some unanticipated patterns in the data. Emergent themes were instantiated in

repeated phrases and the discursive strategies that participants used to position

themselves, for example as qualified or not qualified to speak on a topic. Later in the

chapter I present comments made by Shawna and Melissa in response to my question

regarding school readiness. The emerging themes were as follows: challenges presented

in work, curriculum development, needs not currently being met in agency or

programming, and finally, claiming or disclaiming authority.

Challenges

Many challenges are met on a daily bases for the women interviewed in this

study. Challenges stemmed from a variety of items, such as funding, parent or staff buy-

in, burnout, teacher understanding, and personal judgment or stereotyping.

When I framed the questions of my study program funding was not at the

forefront of my thinking. I had assumed funding was consistent and did not tie into

curriculum development. Having more experience in formal school settings, I assumed

curriculum would be formally prescribed in a material document created by management

or government establishments. However, I was wrong. Programs tended to be of a

prescriptive nature, grouping children "according to type but not individual curricula" (Heydon & Wang, 2006, p.33) and "focusing on what children cannot do or are missing" (p.33), but respondents, particularly those in coordinating positions, discussed funding challenges as major issues in their work. Unlike the public school system, funding for *Early Years* often needs to be sought out on a yearly basis and can conflict with attempts to conduct long-range planning. Melissa commented on this,

> It's really hard to have continual funding...the challenge is to be sustainable because we go year by year. We've been able to keep sustainable funding for six years but at any given time they can say, you know, [its over].

Funding was a primary concern among those coordinating programs outside of schooling as it relates to recruiting and maintaining quality employees. The frustration of coordinators was evident as Melissa said,

> I coordinate so I get paid for coordination plus facilitation, so I get paid more than everyone else. However, I want to have good facilitators. And, you know, they can only get paid what is in the proposal, which is not fulltime, which is not a lot of money per hour. So that's a real challenge.

Staffing issues also became apparent as a theme with respect to staff buying-in to a program or idea. For some staff, this could be because, as Shawna stated,

> People are happy to do what they've been doing and they may not see the value in some of the new ideas that are being introduced.

But another aspect of staff buy-in tied closely to the funding theme. Shawna commented that staff "may perceive it as additional work, which in most settings people are overworked and underpaid and all that kind of thing." When staff are overworked and underpaid it can translate into worker burnout, which was another challenge mentioned

by respondents. For Melissa's staff burnout was a challenge due to the difficult nature of the program provided.

> There's a challenge of burnout. We're dealing with families, every family has many different issues, but you know when you add, you know one of the issues with these families is literacy, so, lack with literacy skills comes a lot of other things, it could be mental health, again there are financial challenges, there might not be two parents, a lot of the time there is not.

Outside of staff and monetary challenges, challenges with program participants posed difficulties within programs. For some programs it is the limited number of participants that can be accessed and served at a given time. Dana expressed concern that,

> One of the problems is that you can only serve a limited number at a time. It isn't like a drop-in play group where you can have a large number of families at a time and things are not structured. Because it's structured, or semi-structured, and you have a far higher ratio of staff to users.

And sometimes when families do participate they do not see the merits in what is being brought to them. Shawna commented that parents did not always buy-in to a program, citing an example,

> I did a family literacy story time this morning and some of the parents...maybe don't buy into what I'm doing. And that's fine. I don't want to force it on anyone. But some of them might be chatting in the background and that's not helpful on numerous levels.

Although Shawna viewed this practice negatively, some parents may be viewing this time to speak with other parents about matters concerning them in the home environment, such as issues of potty training or language development in their toddler. Also, perhaps it is a cultural issue. In Western society manners dictate one listens as

another speaks. In other cultures this may not be the case and what is actually occurring

here is a difference in practices.

Despite lack of parent interest, Shawna attempts to remedy the situation

proactively; she commented that

> So in that case what I try to do is just do more interactive things, like a lap bounce
> if it's a younger group- where the parent has to interact with the child. Or tonight,
> for example, I'm doing a story time on farm animals so one of our activities is to
> do a Bingo or a lotto sort of game, where they actually have to create the game
> together as a family.

Like parents not appreciating the activities provided, staff can also provide

challenges when they too do not find merit in the activity. Shawna commented on this

challenge:

> In terms of staff, sometimes it's getting staff to buy-in as well. Because some
> people are happy to do what they've been doing and they may not see the value in
> some of the new ideas that are being introduced. And they may perceive it as
> additional work...So we had to kind of tweak some things and make it as easy as
> possible for staff to access new resources. And in some cases staff have sent in
> their list of themes for story time and I've said, okay, there are all the new
> resources we have and these are the ones I might suggest. So providing extra
> support that way. Proven effective in some cases, not so effective in others. So
> we're constantly looking for ways we can improve on that.

For Jennifer, programming was the source of challenge, as adequately including a

range of activities for all ages between zero to six years of age can be daunting:

> I think it's just...maybe figuring out activities that work for each different age
> group. Since we are zero to six, sometimes that can get tricky. Just having
> activities that are, the older kids are interested in at the same time activities that
> are...that younger children are able to do and partake in.

Sometimes challenges stemmed from a respondent's judgment of the participants

based on pre-existing beliefs about people coming from a particular social group.

Melissa explains that,

I don't know what's gone on in that family. I know that the people that are coming are all on Ontario Works, so they all have some financial issues and probably some self-esteem, but I'm making a lot of judgments based on the typical OW family. So I'm always trying to take them at face value.

As well with lifestyle factors this program has varying levels of literacy among participants. This presents challenges and Melissa spoke of having,

Various levels of literacy and I don't assess them. Like I don't formally assess them, if I assess them they may not come back. I'm starting with a kind of guesstimate of what I feel. I do ask them their education level in a phone interview but they're coming from all different backgrounds, like they might speak Sudanese first...so I never really know what literacy levels they have in their own language or, if they're Canadian born, what their literacy level is. By the end I pretty much know, but the first few classes I'm just going by something that will work, hopefully, for the whole group".

Brenda had a very different type of challenge stemming from the work with learning disabled children she did. Her challenge came from the lack of understanding by teachers towards the program she was creating for her students and the lack of support she felt her students received in other classrooms. She explained that she is trying to give her students a

...better understanding of themselves and how they learn what things are tricky and why they might be tricky and what we can do, what little things they can use to help them understand that and use that in their daily life in their school. That's my goal. Not for them to just be using it when they're with me for an hour but that they're taking it back into their classrooms and using it.

However, educating the teachers to allow particular practices can become a problem if the teacher does not see or understand the merit to the tool. For example Brenda explained,

Sometimes the teacher will see a child using what's called an s.o.s spelling, simultaneous oral spelling, where they use their fingers. So if they're doing the- they have to write the word cat they would go ku-aa-tt, c-a-t. And then they write

it and they're supposed to say it. So you know these children are trying to do this and I've had a case where a teacher said you can't use that. So the child is trying to do it under the table or doing it without moving their lips...it can be tricky sometimes.

Given her area of work, Brenda also found a challenge in the lack of testing of younger children in the schooling system for learning disabilities. Often children turning to Brenda for assistance have already endured more than one challenging year in the educational system and would have had more success if diagnosed earlier:

> I would love to work with the school board because there are a lot of children in the elementary school system who could really benefit from phonemic awareness activities, right from junior k on. Because often many kindergarten teachers will tell me very early on they can pick out the students for whatever reason who just aren't getting it. And so, you know, I would love for there to be someone like myself within the school who can work one-on-one or in small groups with these children so that as they move up they get that very basic idea of sounds and names of letters and how they come together and how they come apart. And so, I have a private practice, but my dream is that some day there will be people like myself within the elementary system to work with these children right away so that they don't keep on moving through the system without that knowledge and when they get in grade three that same child who was flagged back in junior kindergarten is going through that testing and they don't know the names and sounds of their letters. And if you don't have that knowledge it is very difficult to read and spell properly. You know spelling is almost impossible if you don't know the sounds of the letters...I don't know if I've ever tested an individual who knew all the sounds. So when they come to me it's because they are having difficulty. And in every case they don't have all their sounds there. And that's phonemic awareness. Without that knowledge it's a puzzle....so my dream is that there would be somebody in the school system, even if they traveled around, but somebody in the system who could work on that.

For someone in Brenda's field of work, the earlier intervention takes place the better prepared for further education a child will be. Brenda believes literacy skills are instrumental to academic and life success. Without these skills life can be difficult. For Brenda, early detection of reading difficulties would provide children with the opportunity for intervention and remedy prior to school entry, which she believes, allows more children to thrive as soon as school begins for them.

Another theme identified within the interviews was curriculum development, or how programs come to fruition. As mentioned earlier, funding played a large role in program funding, sustainability and staff recruitment. However, with respect to a concrete curriculum, respondents spoke of a lack of working curriculum and program development and discussed that programming was predicated on internal brainstorming. In the case of Jennifer's work, large team meetings were held to develop programs. She explained,

> Quarterly we meet with other program assistants from our four different early years sites that we own and we sit down and discuss different theme ideas or we would talk about what programs we just ran and just finished and how it worked.

However, from a week- to- week basis, between her coworker and herself, they

> Split up, I cover one theme and she covers the other. A theme lasts for two weeks, so we would just sit down and talk about different songs we would use at circle and we have a planning sheet that we fill out and state out theme and the books we are going to read the science activity might be, what our literacy activities might be.

Dana pointed out that although no formal guidelines were used for programs she delivered, she did utilize participant surveys to ascertain where to improve programming. She explained:

> Basically, after six years, every time we deliver any kind of workshop you ask for feedback; what you'd like to see, what would you like to see done differently. So there's two different aspects: one is, if there were things they would have liked to see done differently you try to respond to that. And based on what they would like to see we try to create a workshop or opportunities, depending on what it is, that would fulfill that need. And since we're fairly narrow, being strictly in literacy, it's not too difficult to respond to them. Basically the people we serve are parents, caregivers, and ECEs. And all those tend to have different needs. But within that there are things you can deliver and then tweak for each of them…so basically we respond to whatever we are asked for.

Two respondents were currently developing guidelines or manuals to be used within their respective organizations. Melissa had completed the tool and described it as such:

> We created it last year, formalized it. I've been testing it and piloting it for years but put it all together. And worked on curriculum outcomes, which was inherited anyways, but worked with facilitators. We developed a mission and a vision which has been expanding every year.

Shawna was currently in the development phase, explaining her process:

> It's a best practices manual. Originally it was going to be a training manual but honestly there was backlash from some staff saying we don't need another manual, just give us practical ideas we can use. That being said we had some new staff come on and they need that structure. Especially if we adhere to *Every Child Ready to Read.* And it's not that we're using absolutely every tenet from that program, but to me it's our guiding principle…the process for us is going to be having me go out to each of the branches and doing a staff consultation.

Brenda adheres to a very systematic program designed to assist struggling readers. She explains her program as follows:

> My program is the multi-sensory reading remedy…When an individual comes to me, first of all I would give them a test to see where their knowledge is. And if they are showing a dyslexic profile, just from my talking to the parents, I would give them a dyslexia determination test, which is a very specific type of test. And so what I'm looking for is what type of reading difficulties are they having. What type of reader they are. Are they a phonetic reader? Are they eidetic reader? What is their graphic ability? Do they reverse letters, do they stay on the line? I do a spelling test. I use the Etral-Schanker book and I have various tests that I use there. I would give them varying grades in reading. I would be looking at their oral reading, both their speed and oral comprehension. And silent reading. They have silent reading tests…The program I work with is very systematic. There are three books and you just starting working…if it's a child who can't break the reading code we start with one letter at a time. And one sight word…once you start the workbook you do a very simple test, it's a pretest. The first book has ten lessons and then once you've gotten past those ten lessons you have a review and then you do ten more lessons and then you redo that test. And so with that review, if there are things in that review you don't have, that you aren't fluent with they just get carried on to the next section of the book…the program is set up so nothing falls in the cracks.

Another theme identified from the interviews was particular needs not currently

being met in programs. For one particular respondent a need within her community was

"a networking group...to make sure we're not duplicating early literacy services and also

to network to find out what other people are doing". A survey for that region had been

sent out and work is now being done to create a committee and to label and identify

current programs being run in the area. Another need addressed was the need for a

program or service to constantly evolve and improve. Dana commented on this need:

> It [the program] could have the same title but it could be very different. Because
> every time you do it, you see a piece you can improve upon or something in there
> you'd like to incorporate that you hadn't addressed the first time. And also you
> always respond to the group you have as well, because you're never really sure
> what they are going to ask you. So as I said, there's this core you work from. It's
> different every time. If you have newcomers to Canada it will be different yet
> again. So it varies that way.

Dana continued to elaborate by suggesting:

> It's continuous quality improvement, [that's] what I like to think of it as. Because
> as things develop or as new research emerges you try to always incorporate that,
> so it's always on-going.

The theme of authority and claiming or disclaiming it, presented itself when asked

to comment on school readiness. Stooke (2005) references McKenzie and Stooke (2001)

and suggests that "authors of texts for parents, like the authors of professional texts for

teachers and librarians, appear to 'carve up' literacy teaching into separate domains of

practice, and then assign to a specific professional group the exclusive right to speak with

authority about one domain" (as cited in Stooke, 2005, p.5).

Those working within the library setting chose to tiptoe around asserting their definition

of readiness because, as Stooke suggested, they do not possess the exclusive right to

speak on the subject. Shawna explained that there was backlash against the term school

readiness from within the community and the library tended to shy away from using the

term. Shawna explained that,

> That's a pretty loaded term. And I know there's some backlash against that in the
> community. At first when I came on it was, 'let's get the kids ready for
> school'…so, I mean we can use that term but I tend to focus more on literacy skill
> development.

She also explained that with kindergarten now extended to four year old children the

direction of the program has changed because children are receiving formal education

sooner. Shawna commented that,

> I think I've tended to shy away from that just because of the changes in our
> library services for patrons and the whole all-day, everyday jk and sk in [the]
> region. So I mean we can use that term, but I tend to focus more on literacy skill
> development because we do have those four and five [year olds] who, in the past,
> weren't in kindergarten at all. So the people who have been doing programming
> for thirty years, there wasn't even kindergarten back when they started. But now
> we have the fours and fives who are in kindergarten and who are receiving that
> school component.

Although Shawna shied away from defining school readiness, she did say that her

programs attempted to align with formal school curriculum, saying, "I've tended to shy

away from that whole term. But we do try to complement what the schools are doing."

Shawna had difficulty aligning herself, as a librarian, along side teachers and who

has the authority to speak on an item like school readiness. She explained that, "as

librarians we're really not suppose to be involved in this, I've been caught on this a few

times." She continued to say,

> I don't think as library staff we are qualified to make that judgment but we can
> provide some input. I think back to a situation where there was one child, a three
> year old, who came to one of our programs, the parents obviously wanted her in
> the programming but she had some behavioural issues and developmental issues,
> where she was physically not able to sit and not able to interact appropriately with

> the others in the group and our hands were tied because we were not able to offer that perspective. The person, the staff person in this case was a trained ECE child-care provider and she wasn't able to say, I think you need some intervention at this point, which was unfortunate. What we did have was pamphlets and we directed parents to that and said there were some great programs in the community...we can't provide that assessment.

Shawna's comments strongly align to Stooke's (2005) observations of who has been given which speaking rights with respect to literacy and children. She writes, "authors assign to teachers the authority to speak about a child's progress on grade-level expectations, whereas they assign to librarians the authority to recommend particular books to children" (p.5). Shawna is a librarian and, according to Stooke, "in parent advice literature, libraries and their book collections rather than librarians are identified as sources of support for children's literacy learning. Librarians are depicted as bastions of literacy and sources of protection against the potentially harmful effects of popular culture" (p.6). This places Shawna in a category not entitled to speak with authority on the topic of school readiness because experts have deemed her position unqualified. Her role is to support literacy learning through the resource collection of the library, not her professional judgement.

Melissa also claimed to not have the authority to comment appropriately on school readiness,

> I wouldn't make that judgment just because I'm probably not around for them to consult. I only have them for ten weeks. So I would say that most kids, if they are not ready by, like if they come to this program and their parents work with them, they'll be school ready.

Melissa works neither in a library setting nor a formal classroom. Her background is in adult literacy and family literacy. However, she disclaims her ability to distinguish

whether a child is ready for school or not. But she does suggest that the program she

offers would give children the skills required to become ready for school.

One item she did note, with respect to school readiness, was that only age is listed

as a governmental indicator for readiness, commenting that,

> There is no way the school can say if your child is ready or not, but maybe there
> should be. Maybe they go to some sort of, like call it remedial or go to some sort
> of family literacy program that would be great.

Despite this observation of governmental age, Dana pointed out that, while working in a

classroom:

> You accommodate. You're not expecting everybody to come in with the same set
> of skills. You're expecting them to come in, you hope, ready to learn. But you
> can't even hope for that sometimes. You just hope you can make them
> comfortable enough that eventually they'll be ready to learn.

Both Shawna and Melissa talk in ways that evoke Potter's (1996) notion of

category entitlement. Potter states that category entitlement "allows speaker and writers

to claim the right to speak with authority on certain topics by virtue of their membership

in a specific group" (as cited in Stooke, 2005, p.5). If one claims category entitlement it

"obviates the need for speakers or writers to explain how they know what they claim to

know" (p.5). Since neither Shawna or Melissa are classified as teaching professionals

they do not feel they are entitled to properly speak on the subject of school readiness. As

a result, they attempt to navigate away from the question and answers to a point they feel

comfortable and believe are allowed to address.

Themes presented as participants spoke freely during the interview about their

beliefs and programs. The nature of semi-structured interviews allowed participants to

answer openly and with no restriction, which created new themes for investigation. During the course of transcription the ideas valued, spoken of and the language used by respondents made the themes evident to the researcher and allowed for presentation among the set data questions.

One discipline used by Brenda was a discursive jousting strategy (Stooke, 2005). Brenda works independently from the school board but, since she works with children who are situated in the school board, is closely tied to the board and its practices. She spoke of a dislike for the assuming authority teachers give themselves within their classroom. Brenda expressed her frustration with attempting to empower her students and the push back the students sometimes felt from teachers who did not understand or support Brenda's practices. For example, she cited the teacher who would not allow a particular tool to be used in her classroom. Brenda tells the story, "I've had a case where a teacher said you can't use that. So the child is trying to do it under the table or doing it without moving [his or her] lips. So, it can be tricky".

Brenda saw this as a teacher's failing to see the larger picture of education, failing to understand not all children learn in the same manner and that some may require alternate strategies to accomplish the same task as other students in the classroom. Brenda states "educating their teachers to allow them to do that. It's also a part of the problem....I've had a case where a teacher said you can't use that".

Brenda's rationale for her work, or her vocational clarity, was directly related to her being outside of school institutions and stemmed from a personal motivation for teaching and learning. She became involved in her work because of her son.

I became involved [in] working with children and reading as a result of my son having a dyslexic profile. And so I went off and did some education in multi-sensory learning.

When defining school readiness all participants reflected on the importance of print literacy, understanding the alphabetic principle and the sounds each letter makes. Little emphasis was placed on oral literacy traditions or bringing home-cultural practices into the classroom. All programs cited by participants focused on the need to prepare children for 'reading' or to get 'ready for school', and referenced the Western model of education, with an exception of Shawna saying "hey- you're doing some great stuff already, but here are some tips or ideas on what you may want to do further with your child". However, although she cites parents' abilities, she states that more still needs to be done to "further the child".

All participants spoke of family literacy as a "preventative sort of measure" or in terms of "parent support" or "facilitating parents" in promoting emergent literacy in their children. The comments by participants believe they are focusing literacy in a broad definition by commenting on the forms literacy takes; however none make reference to the practices already being done in the homes. As well, no specific value of those practices is being vocalized among participants. The view steers towards a need to educate and support parents in methods to improve literacy within the home and prepare children for reading and entry into the formal education system. Comments are based on an autonomous view of literacy and privilege a Western method of education, focused on goals, outcomes and assessment, such as "the early printing skills, the early writing skills…being able to interact with other children and take direction from adults, teachers". The programs cited fail to discuss or distinguish a third space of knowledge,

or even the funds of knowledge being brought into schools from home. Rather, the programs seek to infuse school-like literacy in the home. For example, Jennifer spoke of a program that sought to teach "parents how to look for literacy in everyday things, such as traffic signs and words that they might see as they are walking down the street, just to help parents realize that literacy is everywhere…everywhere you are", suggesting that parents were not previously aware of this.

The word choices of the participants reflected a deficit view of the parent. The deficit model regards adult learners as "lacking knowledge and skills decided by others, or other literal paradigms such as the autonomous view" (King & Heuer, 2008, p.14). The belief, as shown through participants' comments in interview, is that families lack the skills needed to further educate their children in preparation of formal schooling. For example, Melissa spoke of family literacy being about only working with the parents. She says,

> At its base, you only have to be working with the parent because any change you make in the parent will have an impact on the child.

Words like "equip", "impart" or "educate" position the parents in a deficit with respect to educating their children. A sense that knowledge must be imparted on the parents before their child can benefit is conveyed. Fairclough (1992), warns of the "imposition of a discourse from one social institution on another" (as cited in Bloome, 2007, p.150). Expecting families to take the knowledge of formal schooling, or from an institution outside their home, into their homes, can "supplant and erode family relationships" (Bloome, 2007, p.150). Bloome (2007) explains this as "the discourse of each social institution has its own vocabulary and rationality. The power underlying

interdiscoursity is not in the crossover of words per se from one social institution to another, but rather in the rationality that accompanies the words and how that rationality influences people's actions" (p.150). More simply put, it imposes a foreign belief into a family structure unaccustomed to it. It disrupts the natural balance of the home and the funds of knowledge parents already possess.

Little is mentioned, during the interviews, about whether practitioners are attempting to find out what is currently done or privileged in the home. Programs are simply developed and delivered with the intent of educating parents to improve their ability to teach their children, despite stating that the "parent is the child's first and foremost teacher". Although parents are labeled the first teacher, there is still the vocalization of needing to "model positive parenting and interaction with the child". Melissa explained:

> I'm always saying to the parents that you are role models for everyone of these children because are all in the class, right, so your behaviour is being picked up by every child that's in this room, whether you like it or not.

By using curriculum and assessments that limit literacy to "a few simple and mechanistic skills fails to do justice to the richness and complexity of actual literacy practices in people's lives" (Street, 2005, p.420). Changing the focus of programs to understand what families are already doing and build on that knowledge, rather than void it and replace it with an autonomous view of literacy, families will feel further empowered in knowing that their practices are valued and respected, and would confirm their status as child's "first and foremost teacher".

The first step in changing professional approaches to literacy instruction is to admit ingrain biases and stereotypes placed on some families, as one respondent has

shown in her acknowledgement of the judgment she carries. She explains that "I'm making a lot of judgments based on the typical OW family. So I'm always, I try to take them at face value. I find that's a challenge". Acknowledging this judgment is the first step towards changing the view of parents in general when it comes to their ability to educate their children. Once biases are acknowledged and addressed, educators can begin to identify their students from within the funds of knowledge and sociocultural theory.

Chapter Six

Implications and Recommendations

My study was qualitative in nature as it interviewed five women working in the

area of family literacy. Each woman was interviewed individually in order to learn and

understand her perspectives on the topics of family literacy and school readiness. Over

the course of the previous five chapters I focused my attention to how respondents

defined and described family literacy programs in their areas. As well, I discussed the

definitions and skills associated with a child being ready for school. In this chapter I will

discuss the implications of my findings and make recommendations for action, in

following Lewison et al.'s (2002) critical literacy criteria. The call for action is stated as

follows:

> 4. take action and promote social justice (What now can be done in the name of
>
> equity and social justice for young children's education and care and how do we
>
> honour the alterity of children and their families?) (as cited in Heydon & Wang,
>
> 2006, p.31).

I critically address my findings and present recommendations through the theory

of Third Space (Moje, 2004) and finally consider the current Ontario curriculum model

and how it affects Early Years Centres and library programming.

Continued deficit thinking

Fourteen years ago Auerbach voiced concern that many programs, especially

those pertaining to language-minority parents, were focused on "giving parents or other

caregivers specific guidelines, materials, and training to carry out school-like activities in

the home"(as cited in Morrow, p.13). Despite the number of intervening years, little has

changed in the perceptions of what family literacy programs are and what they are for.

The most striking theme to emerge is the continued heavy presence of deficit

thinking when talking about families. As defined by King and Heuer (2008), the deficit

model regards "adult learners as lacking knowledge and skill decided by others" (p.14).

Although professionals are not specifically dismissing parents' academic skills, they are

often approaching programming as 'educating' or attempting to 'equip' parents with the

needed skills to teach their children effectively. These words and justifications for

programs continue to echo Auerbach's earlier concerns, when she wrote,

> "[t]his "deficit" perspective underlies some programs that seek to transmit school
> literacy through the family. The deficit model assumes that:
>
> homes of low-income and immigrant families are "literacy impoverished"; (2)
> transmission of literacy is from parent to child, ignoring the dynamics of many
> immigrant families; (3) literacy acquisition in school is either less important than
> in the home or already adequate; and (4) cultural differences in attitudes toward
> school or child-rearing practices are obstacles to be overcome in order to meet
> school-determined expectations. (as cited in Kerka, 1991, p.4)

To counter this trend, Street (2005) writes, "in order to build upon the richness

and complexity of learners' prior knowledge, we need to treat 'home background' not as

a deficit but as affecting deep levels of identity and epistemology, and thereby the stance

that learners take with respect to the 'new' literacy practices of the educational setting"

(p.420). Moll (2005) also discusses this issue when he cites Tozer (2000). Tozer is cited,

"low-income children do poorly in school because their cultural backgrounds ill-prepare

them to succeed, and the source of the problem lies therefore in the home, an

environment deficient in the language and practices necessary to support school success"

(as cited in Moll, 2005, p.278) and that "the knowledge, language, and practices of one

class are dominant and valued; those of the other classes are subordinate and devalued"

(p. 278). This being the traditional viewpoint, Moll (2005) seeks to challenge this deficit

notion and promotes teachers to "develop ways of teaching that mediate between the

schools' class-based norms and the students' values, knowledge and practices" (p.278).

Literacy as a social construction

As a general grouping, we educational professionals, including ECEs, teachers,

librarians and others working with children, need to move away from privileging

autonomous models of literacy. This model ignores the social nature of literacy and

focuses on a narrow and limited view of alphabetic and numeric literacy (King & Heuer,

2008). By focusing on the social nature of literacy we can begin to privilege all families'

definitions of literacy and respect and understand what practices are currently being

drawn upon in the home. Street (2005) seeks to move literacy away from autonomous

definitions and proposes an ideological view of literacy as a practice. He writes, "literacy

is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill, that it is always embedded in

socially constructed epistemological principles. It is about knowledge: The ways in

which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of

knowledge, identity, being" (p.418). He believes that literacy in this sense "is always

contested, both in its meanings and practices, hence particular versions of it are always

'ideological'; that is, they are always rooted in a particular world-view and a desire for

that view of literacy to dominate and to marginalize others"(p.418). By thinking about

literacy ideologically we cease positioning the parent in a deficit model and begin to view

the parent as a source of education for us. This will assist educators in teaching, as they

will understand where their students are coming from and how literacy is defined within that home.

Like Street, Moll (2005) has stated that "through [funds of knowledge's] emphasis on teachers engaging households as learners and thus forming what we call relationships of confianza with parents, may help create new options for parents...to shape their relationship to the school and the schooling process" (p.280). Moll (2005) argues that this will build a bridge for parents to enter into the school comfortably as the teacher enters into the household comfortably. A reciprocal relationship may be created allowing families to perceive school as a social system.

Maybe, as professionals, we need to stop expecting parents to only come into the school, and rather, we need to seek out families. As Moll (2005) suggests, the goal is to "facilitate new ways of perceiving and discussing students, not only as individuals but also as situated or embedded within a broader educational ecology that includes their households' funds of knowledge, and the realization that these funds of knowledge can be accessed strategically through the formation of social ties or networks" (p. 283). Continuing this belief, Rowsell (2006) writes, "there is a danger in viewing the home as an isolated domain or container that we enter and exit. Instead...the relationship between home and school- or, more broadly, out-of-school and in-school- as fluid" (p.10). Her rationale stems from the fact that "[t]hese contexts move in and out of each other and bear traces of the other all the time" (p.10).

This understanding can translate into methods of teaching that are continuous between home and school and create a smooth flow of information and learning between

home and school. Rather than being separate entities, school and home mimic each other in many ways and will create a third space for children to operate in.

Creating a third space

Using Moje's (2004) third space framework and applying the data collected, I recommend working from the three identified views of third space.

First Moje defines third space as "a way to build bridges from knowledges and discourses often marginalized in school settings'" (as cited in Levy, 2008, p.45). The autonomous view of literacy places literacy in a hierarchy and those practices not meeting this standard are marginalized and disregarded. Building a bridge between home and school and creating a new space for knowledge to exist places a value on knowledge previously considered below standard. This practice will allow children a congruent flow between home and school learning, or as Moje explained, refers to third space as "a 'navigational space' providing students with the means to cross and succeed 'in different discourse communities'" (as cited in Levy, 2008, p.45). Students can become more comfortable moving and working in and between both the home and school since the practices understand and acknowledge each other's value.

Finally, using Moje's third definition, home and school institutions begin a conversation with each other and work to "challenge and reshape both academic and content literacy practices and the knowledges and discourses of youths everyday lives" (as cited in Levy, 2008, p.45). If we interpret literacy ideologically, as Street suggested, and treat it as always being contested, we give ourselves tools to better understand our students' everyday lives and will continue to reshape and privilege both academic and

content literacy practices. We begin to see the value and literacy in all children, not focusing solely on what is missing. Street (2005) hypothesizes this practice by writing, "researchers, instead of privileging the particular literacy practices familiar in their own cultures, now suspend judgement as to what constitutes literacy among the people they are working with until they are able to understand what it means to the people themselves, and from which social contexts reading and writing derive their meaning" (p.419).

So how do we make this happen? First, we must be adaptable. Hall (2003) writes, "outstanding literacy teachers do not adhere to one particular method of teaching" (p.318), and that they are experts at "seizing the 'teachable moment' and they are not tightly bound by the planned lesson" (p.317).

We begin to ask questions. In programs, rather than imparting knowledge all the time, take a moment to ask the participating parents what they do in their homes to promote literacy, in any form. Do not define literacy first, ask the participants to do so for you. From this it will become apparent what constitutes literacy among your participants and from this knowledge you can build a program that promotes your participants' values as well as your own. However, attention needs to be paid to the fact that the programs are run to encourage and assist parents in their abilities to teach their children. Refrain from practices completely foreign and out of synchronization with their definitions. Programs and their objectives influence families and education and as a result, educators must decide what the programs are attempting to accomplish. There have been attempts to standardize the construct school readiness, for example through standardized testing. Although it is important to prepare children for their future role as

student, it is important to remember that some children will possess more skills than others upon entrance and that no matter how few skills a child presents when beginning, education's role is to teach and inform all children and encourage them towards their potential, no matter what that potential may be.

As professionals, we can work towards a reconceptualized view of schooling to support "new and broader possibilities than is now the case" (Moll, 2005, p. 284). We can operate in areas of practice aligned with notions of funds of knowledge and third space theory.

In school classrooms, students should be "active in the production of knowledge, not solely recipients of knowledge from teachers and curricula" (Moll, 2005, 283-284). During my study at Deakin University a phrase often repeated by professors proclaimed we would teach many children who were in fact smarter than us. Children will bring to school the literacy practices valued in their homes which would allow for a flow of literacy practices between home and school creating a third space. By embracing that belief we can teach to our students while they teach us. Harste and Leland (2007) remind us that "it's easy to get lost when we try to shape students to fit our school rather than trying to shape school to fit our students" (p.7). Allowing children to impart knowledge on us will give them a strong sense of accomplishment and responsibility in their own learning. It takes an attitude of embracing inquiry as a responsibility, by embracing the dual beliefs that "every question can be researched and that you have a right as well as a responsibility to collaborate in the construction of new knowledge" (Harste & Leland, 2007, p.8).

We can move away from a reductionist school curricula and embrace an inquiry approach to instruction. This will position children to be active learners, "displaying competence, within the expanded possibilities for action made available by exceeding the limits of tightly prescribed lessons" (Moll, 2005, p.248). Moll (2005) cites an example in theme cycles, where "students have a say on the topics of inquiry, and which may involve prolonged exploration of that theme or topic through various oral and literate means" (p.248). He suggests these theme cycles present both the teacher and student with many opportunities to "transcend the classroom and tap the social life and funds of knowledge of the surrounding communities, including classroom visits in which parents (and others) contribute their living knowledge and experience to the academic task of the students" (p.248).

And finally, we can hold high expectations of all children and families. Hall (2003) writes, "the most accomplished teachers hold consistently high expectations for all their pupils. They define all their pupils as capable of becoming successful" (p.322). If we avoid placing children and families in a deficit position from the beginning, we will educate without judgment and create a space where all children reach their full potential, regardless of current life position.

Although much can be said for library and Early Years Centres to incorporate a funds of knowledge perspective or third space perspective, part of the reason focus is on preparing children with particular skills derives from the use of curriculum in Ontario. Since many programs are bound to the government for funding and sustainability, many feel the need to create programs that align to the government-schooling curriculum in order to be viable. The current curriculum of Ontario is constructed to fulfill learning

expectations, both in general terms and specific terms (Heydon & Wang, 2006). The Ontario kindergarten curriculum prescribes to a "cult of efficiency" (p.40) as it "centres on the idea of preparing children for the Ontario curriculum for grades one to eight, and therefore, takes a linear view of curriculum that treats kindergarten as a step in an assembly line" (p.40). If the kindergarten curriculum is preparing children for the curriculum of higher grades, it is only natural for librarians, literacy specialists and early childhood educators to feel the need to complement this trend by preparing children for school in a way that fixates on outcomes and skills.

Although the data obtained in my study were rich, there are still limitations present. The sample size was not large enough to more fully gauge perspectives of all educational professionals. As well, each interview was relatively short in duration as the questions asked, although open-ended and allowing for personal interpretation and analysis, were somewhat specific. Each participant was only interviewed once, while it would be beneficial to the study to interview participants again and gauge the changes in beliefs that may or may not occur over time.

Another limitation of my research comes in how to present the data to colleagues and other education professionals. I have already experienced in my work the tendency to privilege skills over a more holistic approach to education. During a staff conversation, listening to my colleagues discuss entrance to junior kindergarten and why some parents select not to enroll their child until senior kindergarten, I wondered how I could present my data to staff without feeling direct resistance to the literacy values and beliefs I promote in this paper. Staff in this particular conversation believed it was necessary for all children to enter kindergarten at the age of four years so that

interventions and skill development are available earlier. However, no mention was made to how parents were currently caring for their children and preparing their children to learn in school. It was assumed that parents, although often touted as the child's first teacher, was incapable of best preparing children for learning. Rather, it is formal education with a curriculum of skills and outcomes that best serves children for learning.

This study could lead to a future direction of interviewing more participants or incorporating these conducted interviews with a questionnaire or survey to better represent the population. The question of how do you define literacy was not asked of my participants and in future studies that would be how I would begin my conversation on family literacy. I would do so because a professional's definition of literacy directly affects how literacy is taught to young children. How a person defines literacy correlates to how they will perceive family literacy, whether it is viewed as practices within the home or whether it is programs provided to instill particular literacy skills within the family environment.

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Appendix A- Letter of Information

Early Years' Educators Perspectives on Family Literacy and Readiness for School