EMERGENT LITERACY:
THE CHILD, THE FAMILY, AND THE COMMUNITY

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by

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Abstract

In this paper folio the emergent literacy of young children is examined from three perspectives: the child, the family, and the community. In the first paper, the contribution of everyday experiences in children's literacy development are discussed. These include oral language interaction, storybook reading, writing experiences, environmental print and play. In the second paper the influence of the family on children's literacy development is considered. Family characteristics, which include both status and process variables are identified and their impact on children's literacy is considered with respect to the research literature. In the third paper the development of family literacy programs, as a response to support families in the literacy development of their children, is discussed. The roles of the school and community in supporting family literacy programs are considered.

I would like to thank Dr. William Fagan and Dr. Roberta Hammett

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"What seems to matter most for the success of a child's literacy development is the presence of at least one adult who acts as a literacy mentor."

(W. Fagan, personal communication, July 16, 2002)

In loving memory

of

my mother,

Iris J. Harding

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Introduction to the Paper Folio

In this paper folio, the emergent literacy development of young children is considered from three perspectives: the child, the family, and the community. It considers how young children construct meaning from literacy events, and how the roles of the family, school, and larger community may influence this development.

Paper One, discusses the "ordinary" daily-life experiences of young children that shape their emerging literacy knowledge. Specifically, the roles of oral language, storybook reading, exposure to environmental print, writing experiences, and play, are considered within the context of the preschool child's most significant social environment, the family. It considers how the family may contribute to the optimal development of the children by interacting with them in the home environment, and in other social contexts.

Paper Two considers more closely, the family factors which influence children's literacy development. Status variables (including family income, parent education, family constellation, and parenting structures) and process variables (including parent beliefs and teaching style, parent aspirations and expectations, and the quality of the home environment) are discussed. It examines commonly held beliefs regarding family characteristics attributed to children's success or failure, in light of the research evidence.

Paper Three considers the larger context of school and the community in supporting families, by helping them to enhance their young children's literacy development, through educational supports. It traces the social and theoretical influences on the development of intervention programs, as a response to the recognition that many children were not succeeding

in school. Consideration is given to the ethics of intervention, and the program designs and approaches that may best meet the needs of children, while respecting their families. The roles of the school and community in supporting family literacy, particularly with respect to outcomes for young children, are discussed.

PAPER ONE

CHILDREN'S EMERGING LITERACY IN THE PRESCHOOL YEARS: HOW LITERACY DEVELOPS IN THE EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES OF THE CHILD

Introduction

This paper considers the evolution of the concept of "emergent literacy" as an alternative to the "readiness" perspective. It examines the dimensions of children's everyday experiences as they potentially contribute to literacy development. In particular, the roles of oral language, storybook reading, experiences with writing, environmental print, and play in shaping children's literacy, are discussed in the context of children's interactions within the family.

The Concept of Readiness

It had traditionally been considered that children begin to learn about reading and writing when they enter formal education at about the age of five. Children would then begin to learn to develop what were considered prerequisite skills for reading and writing. These included letter name knowledge, and visual and auditory discrimination (Hiebert, 1981). After these skills had been taught, the formal business of teaching reading and writing was begun. Such school practices were based on the belief that children must be ready to begin to learn literacy concepts at an appropriate stage of development. These ideas were influenced by historical views about children's knowledge and were "confirmed" by research initiated in the 1920s and continuing into the 1940s by Gesell, Morphet and Washburne, and others, who concluded that children were not ready to grasp the complexities of reading and writing until they had mastered the "readiness" skills and reached an adequate maturational stage at approximately six and a half years of age

(Teale and Sulzby,1986).

Belief in the necessity of prerequisite skills led to the development of readiness tests. The concept of getting children ready for reading success by teaching them these skills, especially in the Kindergarten year, also resulted in a proliferation of readiness workbooks that dominated the Kindergarten curriculum, dictating how teachers would teach reading, and how children would experience the process of learning to read. Little acknowledgment was given to children's learning experiences in the preschool years, or the role of families in shaping their literacy development.

Challenging the Readiness Concept

The validity of the readiness concept began to be challenged on a wide-scale basis as a result of new directions in research. In the 1950s, the field of cognitive psychology began to focus on young children's language and learning development. Researchers explored the relationship between children's oral language knowledge and their knowledge about printed language. Also at this time, the phenomena of "the early reader" led researchers to consider how children learned to read before formal instruction in school. These children were a challenge to the accepted beliefs about reading, since they defied what was accepted about when and how children learn to read. In discussing the inconsistency between the accomplishments of these young readers and the logic of the times, Durkin (1966) states, "The incongruity provoked questions about the whole matter of readiness for learning to read" (p. 3).

From her studies of these children, Durkin concluded that there were a number of factors that the children had in common that might contribute to their early reading success. Among the most important of these factors was that the parents of these children not only read frequently to their child, but also answered the child's questions about reading and responded to requests for

help. These parents also tended to believe that reading did not have to be taught only in school, and through their own engagement in literacy activities at home, gave their child opportunities to observe the purpose and value of literacy. Durkin's work was one of the earliest sources to recognize the importance of the family context for literacy development, and reject the commercialization of readiness materials. "The everyday world of the preschool child is replete with opportunities to begin to read without the aid of teaching kits" (Durkin, 1966, p. 136). Other researchers at this time also suggested that children's experiences in the preschool years were deeply meaningful for their literacy development. Marie Clay's work is also cited in shaping the new direction in thinking about children's literacy. It is believed that it was Clay who coined the term "emergent literacy" to describe a new perspective for understanding how children's literacy knowledge develops (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). In describing the differences between the readiness and emergent perspectives, Whitehurst and Lonigan (2001) state:

> Emergent literacy refers to the developmental precursors of formal reading that have their origins early in the life of a child. This conceptualization departs from an older perspective on reading acquisition that sees the process of learning to read as beginning with formal school based instruction or with reading readiness skills....This reading readiness approach creates a boundary between the "real" reading that children are taught in educational settings and everything that comes before. In contrast, an emergent literacy perspective views literacy-related behavior occurring in the preschool period, as legitimate and important aspects of the developmental continuum of literacy. (p. 12)

Since the 1960s ushered in this new direction in thought, research has focused on understanding how literacy emerges in the early years. It was recognized that it was critical to

begin to focus on the long-neglected issues of young children's understandings of print, and how these concepts are developed. Clay (2002) states, "A concept of 'readiness' or a preparatory period of confusion before 'real' literacy learning, masked the need to look closely at certain foundational literacy behaviors in their earliest stages" (p. 115).

Within the new research focus, there were two issues of particular interest. Researchers began to consider if there were identifiable stages of reading and writing development, and the nature of the relationship between the two. These two issues are not completely separable. The relationship between reading and writing is important in understanding how each of these develop, and influence each other's particular development.

The Reading - Writing Relationship

The readiness view suggested that some reading skill should be acquired before children began to receive instruction in writing. This view assumed that children did not develop prior knowledge about writing in ways that reflect Piagetian perspectives of constructing knowledge through exploratory experiences, or the Vygotskian proposal of the child's learning through social interaction with knowledgeable others. In the emergent literacy perspective, however, two positions have developed. One perspective suggests that writing develops and should be encouraged before reading; the other, argues that reading and writing develop concurrently and are inseparable.

The view that writing development precedes reading stems from Charles Read's work on the invented spellings observed in young children's writing (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Carol Chomsky (1971) proposed that based on Read's work:

Children ought to learn how to read by creating their own spellings for familiar words

> a beginning....This composing of words according to their sounds (using letter sets or writing by hand if the child can form letters) is the first step toward reading. (p. 296)

Other researchers also suggest that writing is the foundation of literacy development. Holdaway (1979) suggests that research by Chomsky, Read, and Clark, provides evidence that writing may emerge and be necessary before reading. Others, including Clay, have taken a less emphatic view of the pre-eminence of writing. Clay (2001) has suggested that although we do not fully understand how writing and reading development are related, the research indicates a reciprocal relationship between them that must be acknowledged. She does not, however, support the view that writing should be taught first. "The advocacy of writing first and reading later is as limited as the reading first and writing later approach" (p. 12). Other researchers also support instructional approaches that engage children in both reading and writing concurrently. Teale and Sulzby (1986) state:

> Reading is integrally involved in becoming a writer. When children write, they read their own text and thereby monitor their production. In fact we now have substantial evidence to indicate that there exists a dynamic relationship between writing and reading, because each influences the other in the course of development. (p. xiv)

Research focusing on the development of children's literacy construction cannot entirely separate the development of reading and writing in a truly isolated manner. Researchers have, however, attempted to look at each individually, to determine if there are, in fact, developmental stages in reading and writing or if children's emerging literacy defies such constructs as *stages* or *phases* of development.

Developmental Stages of Reading and Writing

In the area of children's writing, most researchers report a sequential development of skills that progress toward conventional writing and spelling (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001). Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982) describe five successive stages of children's writing that progress from scribble-like writing, toward conventional letter formation and spelling. Saracho (1990) also reports five progressive stages that emerge in a similar fashion. Sulzby (1986) indicates six stages, similar to other models but including drawing as the first stage. Clay (1975) has suggested four principles that influence children's writing development, however, she does not consider these to be stages in a discrete, sequential sense.

In describing reading development, some researchers propose stages and describe reading behaviors believed to be consistent in these stages. Chall (1979) proposes a model of reading stages from zero to five. She considers children at stage zero to be at a prereading stage, learning many of the features about print and displaying reading and writing-like behaviors. She states that they, "Accumulate a fund of knowledge about letters, words, and books. They also develop visual, visual-motor, and auditory perceptual skills needed for tasks in beginning reading" (p. 38). She differentiates these children from "readers" at stage one and beyond who engage in decoding for word recognition and comprehension.

Holdaway (1979) has categorized children's reading development into three stages. He also distinguishes the earliest reading behaviors – emergent reading, from early reading, when attention to print becomes the focus, and finally "true reading". Other researchers have also supported a stage-like model of development (Mason and Allen,1986).

Clay, however, suggests a pattern of progression in children's attention to print, rather

than defined stages of reading. She suggests that four sources of information: language, concepts about print, visual motor skills, and sound sequences in words, are used by children to differing extents over time, as children attempt to make meaning from print. As children's literacy knowledge develops, the child's attentions in reading progresses from a focus on language toward a focus on sound sequences. She does not suggest this is a rigid sequence, but rather, that children integrate different sources of information over time (Mason & Allen, 1986).

The issue of decoding is a major point of diversion between researchers. Mason and Allen (1986) state that the terminology used to describe children at different points of development is problematic:

> Children's movement into reading is not clearly marked by boundaries between readers and non-readers....Which are we to consider readers and which are non-readers? The term 'beginning reader' has the same problem because there is no clear beginning point....Reading acquisition is better conceptualized as a developmental continuum, rather than an all or none phenomenon.... (p. 18)

An alternative view to the categorization of reading and writing development, considers a unified or holistic emergence of literacy knowledge. Hiebert (1983) states that such a perspective is supported by Goodman and Goodman, and Harste and Smith. Yetta Goodman (1983) suggests that young children begin to learn to read and write through their interactions with environmental print, not by applying the alphabetic principle, but by viewing print as a symbol of meaning. Later when decontextualized print is encountered, children begin to form generalizations about rules for print, refining or discarding these over time, and with experience. Goodman suggests that children develop principles concerning the functions, linguistic features, and relationship of written

language to the meaning of a text. She states that these principles develop idiosyncratically in children when they interact in the literate environment and ask questions about print. She suggests:

> Some principles may be considered together from the beginning and others may not. Children may reject one principle for another, depending on the text, the item, the significance of the reading or writing experience to the child, or the function of any particular literacy event. Also, children may decide that certain principles have certain qualities in reading but are different for writing and still different for spelling or talking about writing. (p. 74)

This perspective lies within Goodman's (1986) framework for understanding how children become literate by developing multiple "roots". She states that as children explore their literate environment, they develop these roots which include print awareness in situational contexts, print awareness in connected discourse, functions and forms of writing, oral language about written language, and metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness about written language.

In considering the two models of development, the linear sequential development model contrasted with a unified, simultaneous emergence of knowledge model, Hiebert (1981) suggests some common ground:

> A unified approach does not, of course, preclude the existence of some general stages in the progression of children's learning about print. Tracing the child's development over an extended range would surely produce at least a gross sequence in describing the acquisition of reading abilities. (p. 243)

Cultural Influence on Literacy Development

In recent years researchers have increasingly focused attention on the cultural context in which children's literacy develops. Schieffelin and Cochrane-Smith, in examining family literacy practices in families of different cultures, noted that the collective cultural beliefs about the purposes for literacy were highly significant in shaping literacy behaviors. "One theme that emerges from all three of our study samples is that, for an individual to become literate, literacy must be functional, relevant and meaningful for individuals and the society in which they live" (Schieffelin & Cochrane-Smith, 1982, p. 22). Teale (1987) cites numerous research studies that also suggests that literacy is "deeply embedded" in the culture of the family and community and functions primarily as an aspect of human activity, rather than existing as a set of isolated skills.

Mason & Allen (1986) also support the significance of culture in literacy development. They note that definitions of literacy change over time, and that the arbitrary nature of such definitions are meaningless out of the context of the individual's daily life. Fagan (1998) extensively discusses the multi-dimensional nature of literacy in context. In addressing the issue of defining a literate person, he draws attention to the abstract conceptualizations of literacy that are pervasive in surveys assessing literacy, rather than questioning people about how frequently they engage in particular literacy behaviors. He states, "People make decisions, whether about literacy or other matters, in terms of their environmental context, their roles or positions within that context, their present or future goals, and their relationships with others" (p. 74).

This larger panorama of the individual within the context of family and community, provides insight into the journey of the young child in becoming literate and the enormous impact of family and community in shaping this process. Schickedanz and Sullivan (1984) discuss the

ways in which families teach children about literacy, as they use literacy skills in everyday living. They suggest that although deliberate teaching may not be the parent's intended goal for initiating an activity, by sharing experiences with children, allowing them to participate, and answering questions about literacy forms and functions in these daily contexts, they do teach their children a great deal about meaningful literacy. They support Teale's rejection of the term "natural literacy", because of its implication that such literacy knowledge would develop even without the support of knowledgeable others.

Literacy Development Variables

How then do young children utilize their own capabilities with the support of family and others to become literate? Children become literate in their everyday lives by engaging in activities with other children and adults, through oral language interactions in family conversation, story reading, experiences with writing, environmental print, and play.

Oral Language

Oral language is a means, or as Bruner (1982) stated, a tool, through which children explore their learning and engage in social development. The development of oral language is the foundation upon which literacy is built. Masterful users of oral language have a basis on which to build understandings about written language. This is achieved when adults provide opportunities for children to explore the relationship between oral and written language that extend the children's developing knowledge.

Perhaps the most obvious dimension of family life that contributes to children's oral language development is verbal interaction among family members. Through interaction with family members, children learn to understand language and use it to participate in other social

interactions. Although most young children become proficient in oral language in the context of their home and community environments, the kinds of language interactions across families and communities, vary greatly. This variance among young children's oral language experiences has been identified as a significant factor in children's later success with written language.

Heath (1986) determined from her study of three neighboring communities in the southeastern United States that families across these communities hold different beliefs about their roles in their children's oral language development. One working class community's shared beliefs were that children were not suitable conversational partners for adults and that children learned to talk by "figuring it out for themselves." The adults did not see themselves as teachers of their children, by encouraging children to verbalize the names of things, or questioning their children's understanding of language structure or functions.

In another working class community, parents did engage children in conversation. The children were encouraged to verbally label objects and recall events for others family members, but were discouraged from departing from a factual retelling of events. Children were not encouraged to interject their own responses, but to "stay on topic." Language forms and functions were viewed to be prescribed models of correctness from which diversion or adaptation was not supported.

In the third community, described as middle class, parents not only engaged in conversation and elicited language from the children, but encouraged children to draw connections across their own life experiences, allowing imagination to have a place in oral discourse. These families also extensively questioned their children and answered their children's questions. Of four types of narrative forms that Heath identified, the middle-class children more extensively engaged in all of

these than the children from the other communities.

Heath's work focused attention on the oral language experiences of children in the preschool years. Her correlation between these young children's home language experiences and their later success at school strongly suggested that oral language is inextricably bound to future reading and writing success. Such a view supports Durkin's (1966) observations of the characteristics of the home environment of early readers. The connection between oral language and reading success has been widely supported in the research literature (Davidson & Snow, 1995; Olson, 1982; Snow, 1993; Tough,1983; Wells, 1985). As Dickenson and Tabors (1991) suggest, early literacy development "draws nourishment" from oral language experiences.

Many researchers have considered why varied experiences with oral language are essential for literacy development. Snow (1993) suggests that the more family conversation varies in the topics discussed, the more children have opportunity to hear and participate in conversation using different language forms and vocabulary. She states that having children engage in retellings that make connections to feelings and experiences moves the child beyond simple talk by encouraging the child to think, to plan language to use, and to formulate opinions to be expressed. She also reports that experiences with orally formulating definitions, support reading ability in middle elementary school children. Beals, DeTemple and Dickenson (1994) have also supported the view that children who are encouraged to participate in varied levels of family conversation including narratives, explanatory talk, and questioning-answering, increase their oral language mastery:

> Once we understand that literacy is not a single activity but a conglomeration of interconnected skills and abilities, it follows that the skills and abilities a child needs can be

(and may need to be) learned in a wide variety of interactive settings. (p. 38)

Tough (1983) suggests that children must rely on their oral language knowledge in comprehending text–a form of language whose relationship to spoken language is not clear to the beginning reader. She states that the value of the adult-child interaction is in helping children to project beyond their own point of view and *escape their own egocentricity.*

> "As children learn skills of dialogue, they are being involved in the ways in which adults think. Dialogue provides children with a model of thinking which may serve them when adults are no longer there to help" (p. 63).

The concept of "decontextualized language" as an essential component for the successful transition from using oral language to using written language, is found in the research (Donaldson, 1978). The success of oral language use by young children is supported by the immediate physical and social context in which conversation is situated. Written language, however, is decontextualized–the writer is removed from the reader, there may be no shared understandings about background knowledge between writer and reader, and the ideas in the text to be read are remotely located in relation to the readers's immediate environment. Snow (1983) suggests that home environments that help children to develop understandings of oral language that is less contextualized form a basis for success with print language that is highly decontextualized. She identifies three characteristics of family conversation that enhance children's understanding of decontextualized language which she attributes to children's later reading success: semantic contingency (continuation of topics introduced by the child by adults in conversation with the child), scaffolding (reducing the degrees of freedom in carrying out a task so that a child may focus on the difficult skill that he or she is in the process of acquiring), and accountability

procedures (responses by the adult interacting with the child that require the most sophisticated behavior that the child is capable of giving). In comparing contextualized and decontextualized language to later literacy achievement, Snow (1991) reports that skill in using decontextualized oral language was related to reading success. In a study of the home language environments of early readers, Davidson and Snow (1995) concluded that a greater use of such language occurred in homes of early readers, than in homes of children who did not read early. Cazden (1983) also describes three types of adult assistance that strengthen oral language development of children: scaffolding, modeling, and direct instruction. She suggests that such support at home by parents helps prepare the child for the discursive structure that they will encounter when they enter school. Olson (1982) argues that the key to understanding how oral language is essential for success with written language is the orientation that children develop toward understanding how language is structured and how it functions. He states that across sectors of society there is varying knowledge about these aspects of language. Olson suggests that some parents approach language as an "artifact", that is, they talk about, and teach children about aspects of language. Language as a subject itself can be discussed and children thereby develop metalinguistic concepts around which to organize their understandings of language's functions and forms. He links this metalanguage awareness to later success with print:

> Children who are taught to talk, learn not only the language, but also the metalanguage, and the metalanguage is relevant to learning to read word-based script....Children from more literate homes learn an explicit set of concepts, represented in the metalanguage, for referring to and thinking about language and its structure, the very structure they will use in learning to read and write. (pp. 190-191)

Story Reading

In addition to the oral language foundation that the family context can provide, family experiences with picture books and storybooks are effective influences on the child's developing literacy. This dimension of the preschool child's experience has received a great deal of attention in research. While it has long been known that children who are regularly read to make an easier transition into becoming readers themselves, the reasons for this had not been well understood. Current research suggests a number of explanations for this phenomenon. The major recurrent findings indicate that reading aloud and sharing texts with children bridge the oral language-print text gap, making the decontextualized language of print understandable to children, developing concepts about story structure and story language, linking text to children's lived experiences, and enhancing concepts about books and print. Teale and Sulzby (1999) suggest that the extent to which these benefits are realized is directly attributable to the quality of the interaction that occurs between the child and the adult:

> Access to storybook reading is a vitally important step. Children who are not read to are less likely to learn to read easily and fluently than are children who are read to. But mediation – what actually goes on, what actually gets talked about in the interaction between parent and child–holds the key to the effects of storybook reading on children's acquisition of literacy. (p. 147)

This concept of mediation is pervasive in the literature around storybook reading. Juliebo (1985) suggests a definition of mediation that is characterized by a sharing of feelings or interests, an expressed intent by the mediator and a response by the recipient, transcendence beyond the child's experience for the purpose of developing his or her ability, selection of meaningful learning

experiences by the mediator, careful monitoring to ensure the success of the learner, and conveying a feeling of competence to the learner. Such a model is applicable to the family reading experience. What transpires between children and parents during storybook reading determines the extent to which children realize the benefits reported in the literature.

Sulzby (1985) suggests that storybook reading interaction helps children make the connections between oral and written language:

> Young children who are read to before formal schooling are ushered into an understanding of the relationships between oral and written language within a social context in which written language is used in hybridized fashion at first and gradually takes on its more conventional nature. This hybridized form is evident particularly in parent-child storybook interactions in which characteristics of oral language enter into the parents' rendering of the 'written text'. (p. 460)

Wells (1985) also draws attention to the differences in oral and written language and suggests that helping children understand these differences is essential for their later success in school literacy. "Success in school depends on the acquisition of literacy....[specifically regarding] the development of familiarity with ways language is used in characteristically written as opposed to spoken communication" (p. 249). He states that through storybook reading interaction, the differences between oral and written language become evident to children.

The child's developing sense of story structure or schema, and story language, are also developed through reading aloud and sharing storybooks. Teale (1982) states that being read to is a crucial facet for developing story schema. Such a schema provides the child with a fundamental strategy for comprehending text. Heath (1986) suggests that good readers and writers approach

text with:

> ...a learned frame, script, or schema which acts as a monitor as they progress through a piece of written text. Readers and writers thus use a previously established framing system to guide them through the text and to organize and link incoming information to previously known information. (pp. 157-158)

Such a system is not innate in children, but must be developed. Morrow (2001) concludes from her research that, through hearing many well written stories, children develop understandings about story structure such as setting, theme, plot, and resolution. She states that when children have had the opportunity to hear many stories, they have more success in constructing their own oral and later written stories. Through interaction with stories read at home, young children develop understandings not only of how individual stories are structured, but may also make intertextual links across stories (Cairney, 1992; Hartman & Hartman, 1993; Oyler & Barry, 1996; Sipe, 2000; Sipe, 2001).

Sulzby's (1985) research on children's emerging sense of story schema over time, through repeated readings of stories, indicates progressive development of control over story language and structure from re-enactments of story to attending to the text. Brown and Briggs (1991) have reported similar gains as children are increasingly exposed to familiar stories.

The value of repeated storybook reading for internalizing story language is closely related to story schema. Wells (1985) suggests that by listening to stories read aloud, children strengthen their knowledge and imagination:

> Through listening to a story read aloud...the child has experience of the sustained organization of written language and of its characteristic rhythms and structures. He is also

> introduced to a form of language functioning in which the language alone is used to create experiences. (p. 251)

Snow and Ninio (1986) also emphasize the value of rereadings, for the opportunity they provide the child to examine the language of story:

> Reading a book for the sixth or tenth or twentieth time provides a child with exposure to more complex, more elaborate and more decontextualized language than almost any other kind of interaction, and the ability to understand and to produce decontextualized language may be the most difficult and most crucial prerequisite to literacy. (pp. 118-119)

Beals, DeTemple, and Dickenson (1994) have suggested that repeated readings of stories, especially when accompanied by talk that moves away from the immediate text to make cross - textual links or connections to the child's lived experiences, improves story comprehension and story production.

One benefit of storybook interaction that is most effectively accomplished in the family context is the linking of children's experience to story. Rosenblatt's work on the transaction between the reader and the text is of particular relevance. Rosenblatt (1983) argues that a transaction between the two is necessary for reading to occur. That is, the reader goes beyond the text and draws upon her or his own world experiences in generating or constructing meaning. "A person becomes a reader by virtue of a relationship with a text. A text is merely ink on paper, until some reader (if only the author) evokes meaning from it" (pp. 120-121).

In the context of family, Strickland and Taylor (1989) state that parents and children bring their "intimate knowledge" of each other and their shared experiences to the act of reading. With his knowledge parents can expand on the content of the text, helping the child make connections to

his/her lived experiences. Taylor (1986) suggests that the value of such connection to text is that it "...enables children to integrate their experiences of everyday life in readiness for their negotiations of tomorrow" (pp. 152-153). Heath (1982) describes "ways of taking meaning from books" that link the child's life experiences to the texts being read. In comparing family interaction around text, she concluded that such a practice in young children's storybook experiences contributed to later success in reading. Similarly, Teale (1982) suggests that connecting stories to life helps the child develop her or his own literary heritage, which is necessary for the child to learn to read aesthetically.

Development of children's knowledge of concepts about print and books is another benefit attributed to storybook reading. Numerous research studies suggest that children's understandings about concepts of print are enhanced when they are exposed to printed text during storybook reading. Snow and Ninio (1986) state that many of these skills are "subsumed" under literacy behaviors and develop through storybook interaction with adults. Teale (1987) agrees that children do not need to be taught these skills in isolation, but that learning occurs within the context of sharing books. Important knowledge about book handling, authorship, and concepts about the organization of books, develops when children are provided with frequent storybook experiences (Morrow, 2001).

Bruner (1982) argues that in order for children to become successful readers, they must have a clear sense about the forms and purposes of text. "For many young readers, the communicative functions of text are not perceived. Rather, for them, the reading of text amounts to a decoding game"(pp. 199-200). Snow and Ninio (1986) propose that this "sense" is learned through experiences with books. They state that very few rules of literacy are explicit or can be

explicitly taught. "Reading and comprehending depends on many tacit *contracts* and *metacontracts* between literate persons concerning the use of books and the meaning of texts – contracts that have very little to do with the ability to decipher a written word" (p. 121). They suggest that knowledge about the characteristics of books' forms and functions, and the relationship between the reader and book, become internalized as children gain experience with books.

Environmental Print

The role of environmental print in shaping the young child's literacy knowledge has been considered in the context of the larger emergent literacy perspective. Hiebert (1981) states that children's earliest experiences with print occur in settings where print is presented in meaningful contextualized ways, and that young children attempt to give meaning to this print using cues from the environment to assist them. Hall (1987) agrees that the world of environmental print provides a vast resource for children to look at and to think about. He suggests that even very young children begin to learn that print carries a message. "From the day a child asks 'What does that say?' that child is aware that print in the environment carries a message, and it becomes possible for the child to observe other language users responding to that message" (p. 29). He cites numerous research studies by Harste, Woodward, and Burke, Goodman and Altwerger, and Kastler, that report that young children can read environmental print in its contextualized form. Hall (1987) reports that while Harste, Goodman and others have concluded that such reading is not different from other types of reading, Snow, Dickenson, and others, view conventional reading as the culmination of the transition from reading environmental print.

A key issue, then, becomes the relationship of environmental print to the child's future success with conventional reading. While Yetta Goodman (1986) views environmental print

knowledge as a "root" of literacy development inseparable from more conventional reading, Teale (1987), in reviewing the research conclusions about environmental print, suggests that the results are equivocal. He concludes that results indicate that although environmental print enhances general literacy awareness, there is, at best, an indirect link between environmental print and later reading success. "Our current state of understanding might be best characterized by saying that environmental print clearly plays a role in the beginnings of literacy. The nature of that role remains unclear, however" (p. 53).

Writing Development Experiences

Although a great deal of attention has been focused on how children become readers, less attention has been directed toward understanding how children construct knowledge for the production of writing. As earlier discussed, attention to children's writing development has focused on determining if there is a developmental sequence of writing beliefs and behaviors, and the relationship between writing and reading development. That reading and writing are developed concurrently in literacy activities is widely reported in the literature (Brown & Briggs, 1991; Clay, 2001; Goodman, 1983; Teale & Sulzby, 1989). Many researchers also report a sequential development for writing, although there is some debate regarding the rigidity of these stages (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Saracho, 1990; Sulzby, 1985). Others, including Clay (2001) and Yetta Goodman (1983), report emerging principles that shape writing production over time, but operate concurrently, thus, defying a stage-like model of writing development.

Less research has been conducted regarding how home events shape the writing development of preschool-aged children. Yetta Goodman (1983) has suggested that as children begin to encounter print, they start to construct principles about the nature and meaning of written

language, which they refine or discard through further experiences that confirm or conflict with these principles. From this perspective, rather than viewing unconventional writing as "mistakes", they should be viewed as evidence of the child's application of the rules she or he has constructed around writing production. Teale (1987) also has stressed that adults should consider children's writing attempts from the child's point of view, since children construct their own logic to apply to the task. A number of studies have examined writing production from the young child's perspective that confirm that children apply logic to produce writing (Bissex, 1980; Paley, 1981).

Sulzby, Teale, and Kamberelis (1989) describe how children write in literacy-rich homes. They state that attempts at writing are a sign of the child's developing sense of power. "In our culture, writing is an important means by which we make our thoughts and words permanent enough to be seen by ourselves and others. The trace becomes a symbol of self and the power of agency" (p. 65). They also suggest that children's writing is transient, and takes many forms. Such writing may involve multi-media productions that may continue over several days, and that children use writing for aesthetic creation. Morrow (2001) emphasizes the social context in which children's writing develops. In homes where children see evidence of the meanings and functions of writing in adult literacy behaviors, and where children are invited to participate in these events, children's own knowledge about the forms and functions of writing are enhanced.

Research also stresses the necessity for young children to have many opportunities to experiment with print, and interact with knowledgeable others to discuss their understandings, in the home setting. When parents provide for such experiences over time, the development of writing reported by Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982), Saracho (1990), and Sulzby (1985) can be supported. This development follows the progression of children's ability to distinguish drawing

from writing, to their own writing productions that progress from continuous scribbles, to discrete scribble productions that resemble words as individual units, to the production of letter-like symbols and eventually conventional letter production. Children also begin to incorporate concepts about phonics, syllabication, and the meaning of the message into the code of writing. When children have the opportunity to produce their own writing, and read and reflect on it with others, particularly adults, their writing development is enhanced (Copeland & Edwards, 1990).

Holdaway (1979) has described the child's approach to print as a fascinating mystery to be solved. He suggests that preschool children who have the opportunity to explore writing beginning with scribbling, later create letter-like and eventually conventional letters in writing their names and other meaningful, familiar words. He also suggests that children who regularly have the opportunity to explore with various types of materials enter school with a great deal of knowledge about both reading and writing.

It has been suggested that one feature that distinguishes literacy-rich homes from those less literacy-oriented is the availability and accessibility of writing materials (Teale, 1986). For children to engage in the types of experiences that lead to the development of writing, materials must be regularly available and easily accessible to children. Paper, pencils, markers, chalk, paint, magnetic letters and other materials are tools children may use for the work of writing. While family resources may limit the range of commercially produced materials available for writing in the home, the consistent accessibility to some basic tools for writing, including paper and pencil, is essential. In homes where children see the meanings and functions of writing as they are used by others, and where children have the opportunity to develop their writing through regular exploration with writing experiences and materials, writing development is enhanced.

Play

A final component of childhood experience to be addressed in this paper is the role of play in children's emergent literacy development. Play, considered a natural part of childhood, has been viewed as beneficial for children's overall development, but reasons for such a view have been ill-defined. Like the belief that reading to children somehow helped them become readers themselves, the unquestioned belief of the value of play in children's general development, play ethos, was widely accepted. Research has increasingly focused on the role of play, especially dramatic play, in children's literacy development. Bruner (1986) proposes that:

> Play for the child and for the adult alike, is a way of using the mind, or better yet, an attitude toward the use of mind. It is a test frame, a hot house for trying out ways of combining thought and language and fantasy. (p.83)

Jacob (1982) has suggested several reasons why play is a productive context for learning. "There is a voluntary elaboration and complication of activities, the consequences of failure are reduced, it affords a temporary moratorium on frustration, and it is voluntary" (p. 73). Within this context, literacy development can specifically be considered. Hall (1991) suggests that play is a form of preparation for literacy, because of its symbolic nature. He suggests that the abstraction of symbolic play is related to understanding a representational system such as writing, because the "disembedded" language of play is related to "literate language". Pellegrini and Galda (1993) concur, stating that the decontextualized language of dramatic play is not unlike written language. They add that symbolic play, characterized by narrative structures, is typical of many school-based literacy events.

Several researchers have examined the relationship between dramatic play and knowledge

of literacy concepts. These studies have often included a "play training" component in which an adult models play behavior for a particular play context, participates directly in dramatic play with children by taking a role, or directs children in their roles as they play. Williamson and Silvern (1991) reported that children's "re-enactments" of stories they had heard contributed not only to comprehension of those stories, but also improved comprehension of new stories that they did not act out in dramatic play. They suggest that "metaplay"– the language used to talk about play was an important factor in these results:

> In metaplay, children must coordinate points of view and attend to external story events such as plot, characters, and directing. Therefore metaplay, is related to comprehension. This finding supports the theory that it is the play episode, and not play itself, serving an accommodative function. (p. 86)

Pellegrini and Galda (1991, p. 48) also examined children's language during play – particularly, the frequency of use of metalinguistic verbs by children to talk about play that they were engaged in. They suggest that unless children talk about play during play, then the play episode itself will not be sustained, and that this talk is evidence of children's reflecting upon language use. Such reflection, they suggest, parallels the processes used in reading written language. They compared the level of abstraction of children's talk during play defined by the frequency of metalinguistic verb usage, to measures predicting reading and writing success. They report that children who engaged in higher levels of abstract talk during play performed better on tasks that were predictive of later reading and writing success.

Hall (1991) and Christie (1991) report that the diminished status that play was relegated to, when "readiness" began to dominate early childhood education, is now changing, due to the

research support for play as an avenue for developing literacy. Pellegrini and Galda (1993) comment that because dramatic play as a construction by children peaks at about age six, the opportunity to maximize the benefits of this form of engagement are time-specific. Taken together, these remarks suggest that children should be encouraged to engage in dramatic play in early childhood while the opportunities to participate, and the resulting benefits, are optimal.

When children are together in unstructured settings, they often initiate dramatic play. In the home or child-care setting, parents or caregivers encourage and support sociodrama and thematic play in numerous ways. When they provide some materials as props to establish a setting, parents enhance the experience, making play more inviting. Adult participation in, or monitoring of, children's play, also helps to support play when they encourage children to step into a role and adopt that character's point of view. Christie (1991) cautions however that play should not be imposed on children, or be too "adult-directed", for it then becomes work. The act of reading to children itself supports dramatic play, because it provides children with story structures and language upon which to base their dramatizations.

Other types of play also afford opportunities to engage in language about particular concepts and processes. Children playing board-game activities, for example, use language patterns and vocabulary different from dramatic- play situations. When adults participate in these games to explain rules or participate as a player, such language is enhanced. In one such opportunity, Fagan and Cronin (1998) describe a simply- made board game "Slippery Worm" in which rich language interaction can occur. By involving children in discussing the processes of game-playing (including rules, turn-taking, action) and the vocabulary-specific content of games, (including: beginning, end, the concepts of luck, chances, etc.), children are exposed to another dimension of language

and thought outside of the other avenues of literacy discussed.

Home environments that encourage dramatic play and other types of cooperative play, provide an effective means of literacy development for children by their different but equally stimulating opportunities for language interaction. These activities provide unique opportunities for children to engage in language that is play-specific and, therefore, not usually heard or used in other daily experiences (McCallister, 1996).

Conclusion

This paper has examined theoretical perspectives on the emergent literacy of young children and the experiences of childhood that shape this development. It supports the view that children, from birth, begin to make meaning from their environment through oral and written language. Although there are divergent opinions about exactly how literacy emerges, there is agreement that children take an active role in the meaning-making process.

Long before they come to school, children have experienced innumerable events that shape their understandings about literacy. It is in this social context that the role of the family is recognized in the child's literacy development. The literacy values of the family within their cultural community, and the resulting literacy events that adults engage in themselves or with their children, profoundly influence the child's later success.

This paper has discussed the daily experiences of young children, including oral language in social interaction, story reading, writing, interaction with environmental print, and play. While all of these dimensions contribute to children's literacy development, research continues to examine the nature of these relationships, to understand more fully how and why they impact upon

emergent literacy. The conclusions that current and future research will yield may provide us with a greater understanding of children's emerging literacy.

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PAPER TWO

FAMILY INFLUENCES ON CHILDREN'S LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

In this paper, the influences of the family in shaping children's literacy development are discussed. The family as a social and cultural context for learning is considered. Family factors, which include both status and process variables, often cited as reasons why children succeed or fail, are examined in relation to the research findings.

The Family as a Context for Learning

How well children were judged to be "ready" for school, particularly for reading and writing, was often determined by how similar children's demonstrated skills and behaviors were to those deemed desirable by educators. Children who did not demonstrate such school-like skills were often considered to be unprepared, lacking the necessary literacy for successful learning. What skills and abilities these children did possess, through learning in the family and other social environments, were not always valued in the school context.

Hannon (2000), in discussing what counts as literacy, cites Taylor's view that, "...what is sometimes seen as people's lack of literacy is actually them having the 'wrong' literacy, i.e., a literacy different from the dominant ones" (p. 34). Hannon suggests that the concept of 'literacy' as a simple, universally understood construct is meaningless, given the multitude of forms, purposes and meanings people assign to literacy, across and within cultures. Not only are there different meanings and uses for literacy, but there are also different kinds of literacies used in

homes, schools, communities and work places. He questions, then, the dominance of the concept that school-like literacy is the most important kind of literacy to cultivate.

What happens within families influences the extent to which children possess the literacy behaviors favored by schools. Family life, however, is a complex context within a larger social context–the community–in which many kinds of learning take place and many 'literacies' are developed. Leichter (1982, p. 38) states that education within families, needs to be understood on family terms, not on how similar it is to school. She suggests that families' efforts to educate their children are often compared to school models. Leichter considers such comparisons to be inappropriate, as education within families takes place not only in deliberate ways, but also in "fleeting moments of marginal awareness". According to Leichter, an educational agenda exists within families; however it is not structurally similar to school. In discussing how children develop literacy knowledge about print, Teale and Sulzby (1999) state, "Rather than being the product of 'lessons in literacy', this literacy learning takes place in the real- life settings for real-life activities" (p. 132).

What families choose to pass on is a function of family values within the cultural context. Fagan (1998) argues that while knowledge of a particular set of literacy skills may be considered evidence of being literate by some arbitrary definition, what is actually meaningful is if and how that particular knowledge is used in a person's daily life, ie., the practice of literacy in context. The ways in which individuals attribute meaning to literacy are shaped by the larger context of the community. Fagan states, "...within context, literacy takes on a collaborative stance" citing Reder's view that such collaboration takes many forms (p.40). "It means that several individuals jointly construct meaning by weighing information conveyed through reading and writing against

the contextual backdrop of their existence" (p. 40). New (2001) has also discussed the importance of viewing literacy practices from a sociocultural perspective and suggests that this explains differences observed in children in school:

> ...children are guided to participate in practices that vary according to cultural values and developmental aims and that support them in the acquisition of culturally distinct intellectual tools. This theoretical premise goes a long way toward explaining the successes of some children (e.g., those in U.S. middle-class homes) to easily acquire the literacy skills, attitudes, and understandings associated with school achievement. (p. 250)

The development of literacy then, is not a natural and spontaneous occurrence. As Schieffelin (1982) suggests, it emerges from a *cultural orientation*; that is, children are socialized in the literacy practices of their culture. The extent to which children adopt an orientation toward print is determined by the authority accorded to print materials. In her cross-cultural study of literacy practices, she illustrates that the value attributed to print practices was directly related to their usefulness in the everyday lives of the community members. Regardless of the forms it takes, literacy is a "cultural achievement" (Teale & Sulzby, 1999).

Several researchers suggest that many family literacy practices, regardless of culture, do not receive the attention they deserve and are undervalued in their contributions to the literacy development of children. Taylor and Strickland (1986) state, "...we continually underestimate the literate language environments in which children participate in their daily lives" (p. 30). They argue that family is "the primary interpretive language community of the child" and that many family activities, including storybook reading, contribute significantly to the child's literacy learning. Others have suggested that story reading has overshadowed the contributions of other family

practices that contribute to children's literacy development. Yetta Goodman (1997) suggests that being read to is not the only aspect of what counts in becoming literate:

> There is no single road to becoming literate....There is a tendency in the popular press, in schools, and in family literacy programs to consider that all people become literate in the same way. In much of the literature about how children learn to read and write there is an undue emphasis on the idea that the major or only road to literacy learning occurs when children are read to by their parents. (p. 56)

She suggests that the daily living activities of the family in which children are immersed, that involve reading and writing, are equally important learning experiences. Fagan (2001) also argues for a comprehensive understanding of early literacy development and has shown that parents who believe that many ordinary daily-life experiences are opportunities to develop literacy skills (whether through reading, oral language, play, environmental print, or writing) provide the best literacy support for children entering school.

Anderson and Stokes (1982) also suggest that while book reading is considered the main source of literacy experiences for children, there are many other valid sources for children's learning. In discussing the experiences of children in low-income homes, they report that these children had many different kinds of experiences with print other than book reading alone. Similarly, Auerbach (1989) also stresses that the practices that families outside of the mainstream engage in, regarding literacy or daily living, should be viewed as strengths to be valued, rather than as deficits simply because they may not always mirror mainstream practices. It is these discrepancies among the kinds of experiences and skills that children bring to school, however, that is the source of controversy in determining who has the "right kind of literacy" to succeed in the

educational setting.

Having the literacy skills of the mainstream group in a society is often considered to be essential for one's individual success, and the success of the cultural group to which the individual belongs. Numerous reports from institutional agencies and research literature, describe the problems associated with low literacy levels. The ABC Canada Literacy Foundation (1996) suggests that low literacy leads to difficulties with daily living activities, fewer years of successfully completed education, higher levels of unemployment, and lower income. *Words To Live By* (2000), a publication of The Department of Education of The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, suggests that low literacy is the cause for the unemployment of working-aged people and negatively affects the health, safety and community involvement of senior citizens. It states, "The link between low literacy and unemployment, poor health, poverty and crime is also well understood" (p. 10). In light of such statements, the virtues of literacy seem undeniable. However, although the "link" described between low literacy and social problems may be correlated to lesser or greater extents, there is much debate about whether there are causal connections between low literacy and the various conditions described. In the research literature, both views are represented.

Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, and Hemphill (1991), in discussing high school graduates, argue that many have only a reading level of late elementary, making many daily living activities difficult including job related reading, reading newspapers and magazines, and understanding the meanings of words used on newscasts. They state that students entering highschool with low reading skills are at risk of dropping out because of the difficulty of the highschool work. "Even if they manage to graduate, they are, while not technically illiterate, insufficiently literate to participate fully in American economic and political life" (p. 1).

Baydar, Brooks-Gunn, and Furstenberg (1993) state that literacy is essential for functioning in industrialized societies because literate people have the skills to engage in lifelong learning, necessary in the workplace where job requirements change continuously and increasing value is given to print. "...literacy enables active participation in a society where many of the political and economic transactions are based on written documents" (p. 815). They link low levels of literacy to low productivity, high unemployment, low earnings, and high rates of welfare dependency and teenage pregnancy. "Therefore preventing illiteracy in all subgroups of the population, especially among minorities, are important educational policies" (p. 816). Similarly, O'Sullivan and Howe (1999) report a cyclical pattern associated with low literacy:

> Children living in poverty...who have reading problems are at a high risk for school failure, dropping out of school early, and for low literacy and chronic unemployment in adulthood....This cycle, that begins with reading problems in childhood, virtually guarantees that most of these children will live close to or in poverty when they reach adulthood. (p. 9)

The correlation between reading failure and low-income is widely reported in the research (Baydar, et al. 1993; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994; Smith & Dixon, 1995), however, causal attributions have proven more difficult to establish because of the complex interrelationships among various family factors and school achievement. Many researchers have questioned the validity of the concept of "socioeconomic status" and have suggested that research should carefully examine individual aspects of the term, including family income, occupation, parental education, and parental aspirations and expectations for both themselves and their children, in order to improve knowledge about how these individual factors affect children's achievement

(Blackledge, 2000; Dubrow & Ippolito, 1994; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Henderson, 1981; Huston, McLoyd & Coll, 1994; Scott-Jones, 1984; Teale, 1986; White, 1982).

Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines' (1988) ethnographic work with poor and minority families counters the popular view of the "environmentally deprived" poor child. They report that, in spite of sometimes extreme difficulties, the parents in poor, minority families that they studied provided meaningful literacy experiences for the children and were, in fact, more similar to mainstream families than dissimilar in that regard. In providing many examples of ways that literacy was used by these families in daily life, they highlight the view that prescribed definitions of literacy imposed upon other cultures are meaningless. "Literacy is not a discrete event, nor is it a package of predetermined skills. The complex, yet oversimplified boundaries that we have established so that we can count, weigh, and measure literacy do not exist" (p. 291). New (2001) has suggested that by comparing educational perspectives and practices across various countries and cultures, it becomes evident that expectations of children's performance widely vary, illuminating awareness of how much the concept of the *at-risk child* is a *social construction.*

The apparent incongruity in the research literature regarding which kind of literacy is valuable, implies that one type of literacy, either mainstream or contextual literacy, may have greater significance for children entering school. Some researchers have suggested, however, that it is not a matter of one kind of literacy that is most desirable, but the ability to use different kinds of literacy in all of the contexts that are meaningful to an individual. Laosa (cited in Henderson, 1981) contends, "Each environment has its own specific characteristics, and a child's success or failure may depend on the degree of overlap in the skills and social behaviors required in the various environments the learner must negotiate" (p. 24).

Morrow (1995) cautions that although it is important to recognize the varying literacy contributions of families across cultures, these do not equally ensure school success. "Despite the fact that literacy activity is present in one form or another in most homes, the particular kinds of events that most parents share with their children, may have little influence on school success" (p. 7). Heath (1982a, 1982b, 1986) concludes from her cross-cultural work, that while all families socialize their children to literacy practices meaningful within the social context in which they live, not all of these literacy practices prepare children for the kinds of educational demands they will encounter in school. Heath (1982a) states that both the language interaction patterns between children and adults, and children's experiences with print, particularly story books, influence how successful the child will be in school. "The ways of taking [meaning from literacy events] employed in the school, may in turn build directly on the preschool development, may require substantial adaptation on the part of the children, or may even run directly counter to aspects of the community" (p. 70).

Some researchers suggest that schools and society also must adapt, recognizing and valuing the literacies that children bring to school. Yetta Goodman (1997) warns that by failing to recognize the "multiple roads to literacy" and the multitude of ways that people use literacy in their lives that differ from school-like reading and writing, the skills that people do have are devalued, which suggests that these skills are not legitimate forms of literacy. Similarly, Taylor and Strickland (1986) state that schools need to capitalize on what children have learned at home, and allow them to use it in the classroom as legitimate forms of knowledge and expression.

Edwards (1994), however, contends that the controversy regarding whether groups outside the mainstream should be encouraged to participate in mainstream literacy practices, leaves

children at risk, while researchers debate issues of cultural sensitivity. While acknowledging that literacy exists in many forms and in most homes, regardless of income, race, or culture, she strongly advocates that the benefits of mainstream practices, such as storybook reading, should be provided for all children, regardless of these factors:

> As an African-American researcher, I am amazed that there has been such a heated debate over the issue of whether parents, and especially low-income African-American parents, should receive assistance in how to participate in one-to-one interactions with their children. (p. 178).

A review of the literature suggests then, that on the one hand, a place needs to be made in school for the multiple forms of literacy that recognize the kinds of experiences that children have had. On the other hand, the kinds of literacy experiences determined by research to enhance reading and writing development in young children, are applicable to all children, regardless of family background. This suggests that it is necessary to validate the forms of literacy that families engage in and include them in classroom practices, while encouraging all families to practice the types of literacy activities that will increase the likelihood of children's school success.

Family Variables

Research has actively pursued investigation of various family factors that are associated with achievement. These variables may be considered within two large domains–status variables that describe or label conditions that affect family life, and process variables that describe beliefs and behaviors attributed to family members. These two variables are sometimes distinguished as the difference between what people *are* – in terms of labels applied to them, and what people *do* in their daily lives.

Status Variables

Pervasive in the literature and in popular usage, is the term "socioeconomic status" or SES. Within the field of education, this concept has been considered to be not only associated with achievement, but widely accepted as the cause for academic success or failure. Numerous researchers question the use of the term SES, and also challenge the contention that, taken as a broadly-encompassing description of families, SES can be meaningfully applied to understanding children's school achievement.

White (1982) concludes from his meta-analysis of the research that the term SES has been applied as if it is a clearly defined and universally accepted construct; however, in SES-related research the factors included have varied greatly in both number and type of indicators included:

> Reading the literature leaves one impressed and concerned by the range of variables used as measures of SES. Traditional indicators of occupation, education, and income are frequently represented. Nevertheless, frequent references are found to such factors as size of family, educational aspirations, ethnicity, mobility, presence of reading material in the home, and amount of travel as well as school level variables.... (pp .46 - 47)

White concluded that when taken together, these variables show weak to moderate correlations with school achievement; however some individual indicators, such as family income, show stronger correlations.

Numerous researchers identify problems with the use of the concept of SES. Teale (1986) states that the term SES must be "unpackaged" in order to understand the extent to which individual indicators affect achievement. Snow et al. (1991) suggest however, that social class *is* a package variable, therefore it is difficult to isolate single factors that contribute to achievement.

Dubow and Ippolito (1994) state that, although SES measures may be correlated with achievement, these do not explain why this correlation exists. They cite Greeney's view that, "Conventional measures of home background, such as SES, underestimate the effects of home on the child's mental and scholastic development. These measures tend to focus on what people are and not on what they do" (pp. 402-403). Reginald Clark (1983) rejects the view that SES and other status variables are responsible for achievement. "It is the overall quality of the family's lifestyle, not the composition, or status, or some subset of family process dynamics, that determines whether children are prepared for academically competent performance in the classroom" (p. 1). Similarly, Henderson (1981) argues that SES conceals the considerable range of variation among the characteristics within a given SES status level.

Scott-Jones (1984) cautions about making generalizations about people "within" a particular SES level:

> In studying and comparing families or family members that differ in obvious ways, a danger is that conclusions regarding differences in groups become relatively rigid characterizations of the groups. When similarities between groups are found, they are not emphasized nearly as much as are differences, and variability within groups tends not to be described. (p. 293)

It is more meaningful to look at individual indicators that define SES, to the extent that they can be extricated from each other, than to attribute achievement to the "packaged" status level to which families belong. These indicators include family income, parental education, family constellation, and family culture and ethnicity. As Scott-Jones (1984) points out, however it is difficult to measure the effects of co-existing conditions since these occur in the real-life setting, and not in controlled experimental environments.

Family Income

Family income is one measure that has been clearly and strongly correlated with achievement (White, 1982). Although it is one of the most strongly associated of the status variables to children's achievement, its influence on the family is complex. Teale (1986) explains that the level of income a family has, affects literacy development in many ways, not only in the literacy materials that can be purchased. Income level also affects family activities:

> More income generally means more purchasing of goods, services, and entertainment. The fact that one family can afford to buy or travel more than another can actually increase the literacy level in the home because of the literacy associated with buying or traveling .... Thus, as well as directly affecting the literacy environment in the home, income has 'indirect' effects because of the constraints it places on, or opportunities it affords for, interaction with various facets of society. (p. 193)

Teale does note, however, that in many low-income homes, families do provide rich literacy-enhancing experiences for their children. Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, and Klebanov (1994) also report strong correlations between family income and achievement. They stress that income and social class are not synonymous. "Since family incomes are surprisingly volatile, there are only modest correlations between economic deprivation and typical measures of socioeconomic background" (p. 297). They suggest that family income is more amenable to policy manipulation, by adjustments to welfare benefits, tax credits or minimum wage levels, than are other correlates of poverty, such as low levels of parental education, lone parent family structure, and unemployment. They report that, in addition to income itself, other factors controlled by income also influence children's development.

One factor, the quality of the neighborhood, is significantly correlated with achievement scores of children, whereby increases in the affluence of neighbors were associated with increases in achievement. Duncan et al. (1994) attribute this effect to social influences of children's peer groups that may support values and behaviors that contribute to school success. They also report that the various influences of income on the family are not only visible by the physical literacy materials and events that can be observed, but also operate in hidden ways. They consider the effects of poverty on the stress level of families, children's behavior and development:

> The association between income and developmental outcomes appears to be mediated by maternal characteristics and behaviors. The learning environment of the home mediates the relation between income and IQ, whereas maternal depression and coping mediate children's behavior problems. Thus, economic disadvantage not only has a tangible effect on children through the provision of educational resources available to them, but through the detrimental psychological effect it exerts on their parents. (p. 315)

Dubow and Ippolito (1994) agree with such conclusions. "Impoverishment, no doubt, results in parental focus on economic concerns. Perhaps this emphasis on economic matters interferes with the parents' ability to provide adequate emotional and environmental support for their children's academic and social development" (p. 409). Most studies concur that above all other factors, home environment, in which warmth, security and nurturance is central, is considered to be the greatest influence on children's achievement (Baydar, Brooks-Gunn, & Furstenberg, 1993; Garmezy, 1991; Norman-Jackson, 1982). It is evident that low income can have insidious effects on the quality of family life, far beyond a simple accounting of what the family's income can buy.

Parental Education Level

Parental education, particularly maternal education, is also strongly correlated with children's achievement (Baydar, Brooks-Gunn, Furstenberg, 1993; Clark,1983; Dubow & Ippolito, 1994; Teale, 1986). Henderson (1981) states, "Of all the socioeconomic subvariables associated with IQ, the education level of the parents shows the highest relationship" (p. 23). He considers the issue often raised in the literature regarding the extent to which heredity may contribute to intellectual ability. Whether bright parents pass on their abilities to their children or create a stimulating environment in which their children thrive remains unresolved. Most researchers agree that both heredity and environment play a role in children's development; they differ, however, regarding the extent to which of the two factors exerts a greater influence.

Snow et al.(1991) suggest that the correlation between maternal education and children's achievement exists because the mother's education is related to the way she behaves toward her children, which may affect school achievement. "More educated mothers may provide their children with more materials and activities that promote literacy; in addition, educated mothers may become more directly involved in their children's education" (p. 64). Similarly, Laosa (1982) suggests that the mother's socioeducational values, of which maternal education is one factor, is significant because of its effect in influencing the extent to which she provides educational experiences for her child.

Paternal education has not been as widely studied. In the research that does report this, weaker correlations have been found between paternal education and children's achievement than between maternal education and children's achievement. It is suggested that even in families where fathers reside, mothers assume a greater role in the care and education of children; however, future

studies may reflect a greater father-child correlation, as fathers increasingly assume greater responsibility for child care and education.

Family Constellation

Another dimension of family life that research has examined in relation to achievement is family constellation. This includes family size, birth order, the spacing of children's births, and the number of parents in the home. Family configuration has intrigued researchers and resulted in numerous studies that attempt to uncover links between configuration factors and achievement. A recurring theme in the literature, however, is the difficulty in separating the various aspects of configuration from each other, and from other status and process variables in order to determine the strength of effect that each factor yields (Henderson, 1981; Scott-Jones, 1984).

Birth order studies frequently report that the greater proportion of college students are first-born children, suggesting that intelligence may be greater in first-born children (Bradley cited in Henderson, 1981) . Henderson suggests that Schooler's explanation, that socioeconomic rather than intellectual reasons may be most significant, is reasonable. That more affluent families tend to have fewer children, and that income is strongly related to achievement, may explain the higher proportion of first-born children in college.

It is suggested that other birth order theories are equally confounded by other factors. Scott-Jones (1984) rejects the contention within the confluence model, proposed by Zajonc and Markus, that the "only child" suffers intellectually from lack of opportunity to learn from and teach other siblings. She suggests that the tendency is greater that an "only child" will have a single parent than live with two parents. Because the likelihood is greater that family income will be lower, socioeconomic, rather than "only child" status, may explain a reduction in achievement.

"If income is very low, the parent's time may be completely consumed by work and worry about financial concerns so that little time is left for positive interactions with the child" (p. 273). Steelman (1985) also suggests that other factors confound research on birth order effects. "The recent large-scale studies generally convey this message: Birth order effects that seem to exist are actually artifacts of sibship size or socioeconomic status" (p. 379).

Family size has also been examined in relation to achievement. Numerous reports indicate a relationship between the two, such that increases in the number of children are correlated with decreases in achievement (Badar, Brooks-Gunn, & Furstenberg, 1993; Dubow & Ippolito, 1994; Laosa, 1982; Steelman, 1985). Laosa suggests that socioeconomic status interacts with the relationship between family size and achievement:

> Several studies have reported an inverse relationship between the number of siblings and the child's intellectual achievement. There is evidence, however, of an interaction with social class, so that the correlation of family size and ability is higher in samples of low socioeconomic status. (p. 6)

Steelman (1985) agrees that socioeconomic status has some interaction in the relationship between family size and achievement, but suggests that even when controlling for SES, family size is related to achievement. "Although there may be cultural, subcultural, or economic circumstances under which sibship size has no bearing on educational outcomes, the inverse pattern generally holds up across varying conditions" (p. 379). Henderson (1981) also reported that even in societies where large families were viewed as desirable across all socioeconomic levels, the inverse relationship between family size and achievement was stable. Steelman (1985) cites numerous explanations suggested by researchers for this phenomenon. These vary and include theories of genetic

heritability factors, dilution of family resources that result in increased competition among siblings, and social contact hypotheses concerning the type of social interactions of family members. Steelman (1985) suggests that social contact may indeed be affected by family size, resulting in effects on achievement:

> Sibling structure places constraints on the types of activities in which children engage, as well as the time investment that can be channeled into such activity....the following types of activities are pursued at the expense of intellectual development: less time spent reading, more time spent with peers, and less likelihood of kindergarten or nursery school attendance" (p. 382).

Further investigation is necessary in order to establish evidence to support theories proposed to explain the effects of family size on achievement.

Sibling spacing is another factor of family configuration investigated in the research. Within this area of inquiry, reported findings are mediated by age and sex differences in children. Henderson (1981) suggests that the complexity of the interrelation of birth order, sex, and spacing make the identification of the effects of single factors more difficult, illustrated by the finding that greater spacing has beneficial effects for boys, while closer spacing results in greater cognitive development for girls.

Baydar et al. (1993) state that numerous births of closely spaced children has negative effects upon achievement. They report that this effect is greater on younger children than on the older ones. "Birth of two or more siblings in the first five years of life results in significantly lower literacy scores. Birth of siblings in middle childhood or adolescence, however, is not a predictor of subsequent level of literacy" (p. 821).

Laosa (1982) suggests that spacing may benefit younger children where older siblings read to them and involve them in other stimulating activities. Steelman (1985) concludes from a review of the research that:

> Large scale studies also challenge whether space interval separating children make a difference in academic consequences. While in some studies a modest impact of spacing is observed, in the bulk of current works either no statistical significance or inconsistent patterns are found. (p. 380)

Overall, the literature indicates that of the three child variables: birth order, number of siblings and spacing, only the number of siblings is widely reported to have significant effects on achievement, although there is divergence in theory regarding the reasons for this effect. With regard to birth order and spacing there is considerable disagreement regarding the significance of these factors on achievement.

Parenting Structures

The effects of parenting structures on children's achievement is another dynamic of family configuration. The literature reports detrimental effects on children's achievement from a lack of the father's presence in the home. (Baydar, et al., 1993; Dubow & Ippolito, 1994; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994; Scott-Jones, 1984). Duncan et al. (1984) suggest that one direct explanation of this relationship are the effects of reduced family income usually associated with one parent families. Scott-Jones (1984) agrees with this conclusion, but suggests that a number of factors mediate the effects of one parent families. She states that the reason for one parent status influences the size of the effect:

> One parent status due to separation, desertion, or divorce is said to have the most

> negative influence on cognitive development when it occurs in the first two years of life, whereas one parent status due to death has its most negative effects when it occurs for boys from six to nine years of age. Single-parent status appears to have more negative effects on cognitive development for boys than for girls. (p. 274)

She reports that support systems within family and communities that provide stimulating experiences for children, and the involvement of the father or a father- figure, help to reduce the negative effects of one parent families on achievement.

Research by Fagan (2001) with parents of 80 preschool children who participated in a family literacy program, showed that single-parent status was not a factor in children's literacy development. On tests of literacy knowledge, children scored equally well, regardless of whether they were part of a single parent family, a two parent family with one parent involved, or a two parent family with two parents involved. What seemed to matter was that there was one adult in the child's life who was a "literacy mentor" and who consistently adopted this role. Further research is needed to further clarify the effects of single-parent status on specific populations.

Ethnicity and Culture

Ethnicity and culture are status variables also associated with achievement. Although often discussed as synonymous concepts, they are not. Teale (1986) reports that in his study of home factors across ethnic and socioeconomic levels, no significant differences were found among different ethnic groups. He explains that this does not mean, however, that cultural differences were not significant:

> How is our finding of no ethnic differences to be interpreted, then? First it indicates that ethnicity is not identical with culture. Ethnicity certainly relates in important ways to

culture, but cultural practices are not merely the product of one's race. (pp. 194-195)

This distinction is an important one, and reflects the findings of Heath (1982a, 1992b), in her studies of three cultural groups in the southern United States, that indicate that parent-child interaction behaviors reflected community beliefs, regardless of race.

Scott-Jones (1984) suggests that ethnic and cultural effects are confounded by other variables, of which income is highly significant. Similarly, Duncan, et al. (1994), in discussing the high number of academic failures associated with minority groups, argue that it is the detrimental effects of low income, which minorities disproportionately experience, not ethnicity, that is the explanatory factor.

Summary

In reviewing the literature about the status variables, it becomes evident that many of these variables function as labels that imply causation for the low achievement of children. Such an assessment does not consider that the conditions associated with these labels do not function in isolation, but interact with all other human conditions. Income, for example, not only determines outcomes that are visible, such as the amount of literacy materials in the home, but also has far-reaching effects that are less visible but equally or ever more influential, such as the stress of poverty and its effects on parents' interactions with their children. Numerous researchers, in investigating families and achievement, have examined these relationships from a broader perspective. In considering the family's influence on achievement, they remind us that family nutrition, physical health, and emotional well-being are intimately connected to children's outcomes (Duncan et al., 1994; Garmezy, 1991; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Although the isolation of factors is helpful for research purposes, such isolation does not exist in family life.

In spite of sometimes overwhelming obstacles, however, many families do provide environments in which their children succeed. It is because of what they *do*, not what they *are* that is the reason for their success. Family beliefs and behaviors, or process variables, also shape the outcomes of the children in families. Successful families, regardless of status differences, share these beliefs and behaviors.

Process Variables

Looking beyond descriptors of the conditions of families' circumstances, the research examining process variables attempts to clarify the impact of beliefs and behaviors on achievement, to determine the meaningful ways families can exert control in order to accomplish their goals. Dickenson (1994) attributes the interest in this area of inquiry to the resurgence in reading theory in the 1970s. He argues that the advancement of constructivist theory underscored the importance of the preschool years, and turned attention anew to the disparities in the literacy-specific experiences of children coming to school, that often reflected social class divisions. "Such findings naturally led to a search for ingredients of home and school environments that translate into emergent literacy" (p. 3).

While status factors were actively investigated, it became apparent that these did not by themselves explain the variability among children's achievement across or within social groups. White (1982) concluded from his meta-analysis of family factors that home environment factors accounted for four to eleven times the variability in achievement than traditional SES measures. Heath, Levin, and Tibbits' (1993) study of home environment measures also concluded that it was important to look beyond surface characteristics to understand what families do differently from other families that distinguish them in terms of the achievement of their children:

> Intelligence test scores and status measures, such as socioeconomic status and birth order, are for the most part educational dead ends. This is not true of behavioral and attitudinal measures. Knowledge of which home behaviors and parental attitudes are associated with educational success provides some guidance to program developers, researchers, administrators, and teachers....and enriches communication between parents and educators. (p. 130)

Clark (1983) contends that the quality of the home environment is the family's main contribution to the child's success in school, and is created through parents' disposition and relationship with the child. "Children receive essential 'survival knowledge' for competent classroom role enactment from their exposure to positive home attitudes and communication encounters" (p. 1). He suggests that the parents' ability to do this, depends on their own upbringing, past relationships and experiences with community institutions, current support networks and social relationships outside the home and most importantly, relationships in the home.

Various researchers describe criteria for evaluation of home environments (Bradley & Caldwell, 1978; Heath, Levin, & Tibbits, 1993; Snow, et al., 1991). Such criteria have been included in formal evaluative measures of the overall quality of the home environment. Although each of these home profile measures vary, they generally assess interpersonal interactions in the home with respect to communication, parents' warmth and nurturance of their children, teaching and learning interactions, and the provision of materials and experiences that encourage cognitive stimulation. A number of specific factors are important in the outcomes that children achieve: parents' beliefs and teaching style, parents' aspirations and expectations, and the quality of the

home environment.

Parents' Beliefs and Teaching Style

Parental views about their role as educators, and the abilities of their children as learners, are powerful influences on shaping parent teaching behaviors. Both Durkin's (1966) and Margaret Clark's (1982) studies of early readers report that regardless of socioeconomic factors, parents of successful early readers were sensitive to their children's interest in literacy activities, specifically regarding print. These parents valued their child's interest in literacy and validated it by answering questions and giving help when requested by the child. These parents believed that children did not have to wait until school entry to learn how to read, and that they were capable of teaching their children at home. Although they did not engage in direct teaching of reading, they did give help to their children when requested. These parents believed that any competent adult, not just teachers, could serve in the role of educator. Both studies report that siblings of these early readers learned to read with little difficulty upon school entry suggesting that parents' views of themselves as teachers, and of children as competent learners, resulted in learning interactions in the home that resulted in successful achievement.

Reginald Clark's (1983) ethnographic study comparing successful and unsuccessful poor Black children also concludes that parents who consider themselves competent educators, and view their children as capable learners, instill a powerful sense of competence in their children, that has positive effects for children's achievement in school.

Early research investigating parent teaching behavior across various socioeconomic groups focused on mother-child language interactions during these events. Social group differences were observed in the mother's length and specificity of explanations of procedures during teaching

tasks, and these differences were correlated with their child's task mastery (Scott -Jones, 1994). In earlier mother-child interaction studies, lower income parents' tendency to "show how to " rather than explain task procedures, were considered inferior to the tendency of middle-class parents to give lengthier explanations and use questioning techniques. Laosa (1982) and Scott-Jones (1984) report, however, that more recent studies tend to concur that modeling as a teaching method is actually more effective for young preschool children for performance tasks. For many other kinds of learning, however, the quality of the oral language interaction between adults and children in the preschool years has been reported to significantly affect reading performance when children enter school. Heath (1986) reports that differential language experiences in the homes of preschool children have far reaching effects, and that the ability to process a wide variety of questions and generate responses affect children's ability to understand what is being asked of them in school and in reading comprehension. Numerous other researchers report that children's levels of sophistication for manipulating oral language, especially "decontextualized" language, are related to their ability to respond to school demands (Davidson & Snow, 1995; Olson, 1982; Tough, 1983; Wells, 1985).

Hess, Holloway, Price and Dickson's (1982) work concludes that, when children are encouraged to verbalize what they have learned, they increase their ability to improve comprehension and retain new knowledge. They suggest that parents who are sensitive to their child's ability to process language, and modify their language to match the child's processing skills, are more effective teachers of their children. Such findings reflect Vygotsky's proposal that adults who work within the child's level of proximal development, using appropriate language and techniques to extend children's knowledge and encourage them to verbally formulate their new

understandings, maximize the benefits of these learning opportunities.

Parents' Aspirations and Expectations

Parent aspirations and expectations for their children are important influences on children's achievement. There are distinctions however, between aspirations and expectations, and their effect on achievement is not equal. Snow et al. (1991) state, "Researchers have distinguished between aspirations, which are goal choices without consideration of real-life constraints, and expectations, which reflect financial or other constraints" (p. 65) . They conclude from recent research, that parents' aspirations for their children are high, regardless of socioeconomic grouping, however, expectations vary by social group. In considering the discrepancy between parents' aspirations and expectations in American studies, compared with European studies that report closer association between the two, they suggest:

> On the one hand, in the United States, the cultural model of democracy, equal opportunity, and classlessness is reflected in the aspirations expressed by poor and minority parents; on the other hand, unequal access to educational opportunities and more limited employment possibilities are reflected in their expectations. (p. 65)

In spite of income limitations and other social class factors, many parents do provide learning environments in which children thrive (Clark, 1983; Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). The educational expectations parents have for their children, significantly influence the quality of the learning environment in the home. O'Sullivan and Howe (1996) report that in studies of low-income families, parents' expectations had a greater influence than the child's past performance, on children's perceptions of competence. They state, "Parents socialize achievement beliefs in their children....beliefs about their children's competence in reading

and mathematics not only influence children's beliefs about themselves, but are often more influential than the child's past achievement performance" (p. 366). O'Sullivan and Howe (1999) also report that in low-income families with successful readers, parents had very high expectations for their children's success, and that these expectation not only shaped children's sense of competence, but also positively affected their children's approach to task challenges:

> There is abundant evidence that children who see themselves as good readers set high standards for themselves, expect to achieve them, and persist when they encounter problems. In other words, these beliefs are associated with positive reading behaviors and do not represent mere wishful thinking. (pp. 33-34)

Seginer (1983) describes three antecedents of parents' expectations: school feedback (for school age children), parents' own aspirations, and parents' knowledge. She suggests that before their children enter school, parents make judgements about their children's ability based on day-to-day interactions. When children enter school, the accuracy of such judgements vary by social group. She suggests that middle class parents' expectations more closely match school reports than do the expectations of low-income parents, whose children tend to achieve at a lower level than expected by parents. Seginer indicates that such reports change parent expectations at an early stage in their children's education. "This decline in parents' expectations happens at a very early stage of the child's school career, that is, between first and second grade" (p. 9). She also suggests that parents' own aspirations, especially failed aspirations, are reflected in their desire that their children's futures will be more successful than what they themselves were. They hope that their children will "do better than *they* have". A third influence, parental knowledge, involves how parents judge the competence of their children based on their beliefs about child development.

Seginer suggests that the expectations parents have formed influence what parents do and say, which ultimately determines the educational environment of the home. " Parents' educational expectations affect academic performance both directly through the desirable goals they define for their children, and indirectly through the achievement supporting behaviors associated with parents' educational expectations" (p. 16). The role of parent expectations, then, is central to the quality of the learning environment created in the home. While more frequently associated with middle-class homes, quality learning environments are not entirely dependent on income. Where parents' educational expectations for children are high, success has been observed across all income levels (Harste, Woodward, Burke, 1984; Clark, 1983; Durkin, 1962).

The Quality of the Home Environment

Many factors contribute to "the literate environment" of the home. The most important of these factors are: parents as models of literacy users, opportunities for children to participate in literacy events, provision of literacy materials to children, parental involvement in community institutions, and the emotional atmosphere of the family.

Parents as models of literacy users. One of the foundational principles of the concept of the family as a social-cultural context for learning, is that children learn literacy practices through observing literacy use as a function of family life (Auerbach, 1989, Fagan, 1998; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Taylor 1997). Parents, by providing their children with examples of meaningful uses of literacy in daily life, give value to literacy knowledge. Harste, Woodward and Burke (1984) suggest that inclusion of children in the mundane events of family life, provides a wealth of opportunities for children to connect literacy skills to meaningful usage:

A home factor which seems significantly related to some early literacy advantage...has to be

> called 'inclusion'. Whether by design or default, children who were reported as always being 'dragged around' on shopping trips, trips to the courthouse, trips to the doctors office, trips anywhere...seemed to have an advantage. (pp. 43-44)

They suggest that through these life experiences, children see literacy use in a wide range of settings and purposes. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) also suggest that "deprived" environments are filled with opportunities for children to observe literacy in use, and describe numerous ways that families used literacy not only for daily life tasks, but also for self-expression and entertainment. Many researchers conclude that parents as role models of literacy users have powerful and positive effects on children's own literacy development (Auerbach, 1989; Fagan, 1998; Hess, Holloway, Price & Dickson, 1982; Snow et al., 1991; Teale, 1986). Such influences are even more effective when children are not only observers of adult literacy behaviors, but when they are included in discussing, understanding and participating in them.

Opportunities to participate in literacy events. The opportunity to engage in literacy events as an active participant is considered by many researchers to be essential for literacy development. Such events encompass a wide range of forms and include both deliberate and incidental opportunities. These events, detailed in the previous paper, *Children's Emerging Literacy in the Preschool Years: How Literacy Develops in the Everyday Experiences of the Child*, include oral language stimulation, storybook reading, opportunities for exploration with writing, environmental print, and play. Although these dynamics of childhood experience are sometimes thought to occur naturally, they often do not. As Teale (1986) argues, these avenues for learning are explored only by the deliberate efforts of parents who recognize the value of these activities.

There is much debate about the value of story book reading compared with other forms of

literacy learning, in the creation of successful readers and writers. Although the literature is increasingly recognizing other "ways of knowing" that are often identified with minority groups, there is considerable agreement that for children to be successful with print literacy, opportunities to interact with written print materials, especially stories, provide children with a background for making sense from print (Purcell-Gates, 2001; Snow & Ninio, 1986; Teale & Sulzby, 1999). In homes where children are provided with both book experiences and adult mediation that bridges the oral and print forms of language, the literate environment is enhanced (Juliebo, 1985; Teale & Sulzby, 1999).

Provision of literacy materials. Provision of literacy materials, a feature of literate environments includes not only books, but also writing materials for children's writing exploration. Harste, Woodward and Burke (1984) report:

> The most salient factor relating to literacy learning is one we have termed 'availability and opportunity to engage in written language events'. Homes where books were out and readily available, where paper, pencils, crayons, magic markers, and other instruments were handy, where children seemed quite naturally to be included and involved, seemed to provide the key conditions for children to go exploring and for parents to involve themselves in using and encouraging reading and writing.... (pp. 42 - 43)

In contrast, research studies report that in homes where books were "put away" so that they would not be damaged by children, and where writing materials were difficult to locate and inaccessible to children, achievement scores for children tended to be lower (Feitelson, 1986).

Community involvement in family life. The involvement of the family in community institutions has also been identified as a factor that influences the literacy environment of the home.

The types of institutions that families interact with outside of the home, influence the kinds of literacy practices within the home. Teale (1986) suggests from his study of home environments, that:

> The literacy environment of these homes was greatly influenced by relations which members of the family had with other institutions of society beyond the family itself. Government, church, school, work, any of these can have profound influence upon the literacy home background.... (p. 190)

Anderson and Stokes (1982) report that in research observations of home-literacy practices, families of a particular religious denomination were encouraged through their church practices, to read and discuss Bible interpretations at home with members of their faith community. In another home, a mother who had difficulty with reading, was tutored by a fellow church member in order to become more capable of helping her young son who was learning to read in school. In these two families, the church had influenced the literacy practices of their communities to meet different individual needs.

Other community organizations that families may become involved with are family educational programs. Intervention programs that became popular in the1960s, often focused on giving direct intervention to children identified as "at risk". It became evident, however, that in order for children to realize their maximum potential, their parents should also be included. Fagan and Cronin (1998) state, "The value of empowering parents with an understanding of early literacy development and ways to foster it means that they can make the most of all the experiences they have with their children" (p. 3).

The emotional environment. A final consideration of the quality of the home environment is

the emotional atmosphere of the home. The underlying emotional millieu of the home, mediates the effects of all of the "ingredients" that contribute to the establishment of a literate environment. The optimal benefits of these "ingredients" can be realized to the extent that children perceive a sense of security and protection in their homes from their family members. The quality of the relationships between family members, the ease of communication, the disciplinary approach of parents, and the sense of stability and consistency of routines and behaviors, contribute to the sense of security that children perceive. Such factors are regularly identified as the features that distinguish between homes of successful and unsuccessful children (Dubow & Ippolito, 1994).

In studies of low income families, the concept of "resilient families" is frequently discussed (Clark, 1983; Garmezy, 1991; Snow et al., 1991). The qualities identified that are attributed to success in these families, are applicable to the enhancement of children at any socioeconomic level. Garmezy (1991) identifies recurrent characteristics of these families, emphasizing that well-defined parent and child roles are essential. Parents in these families were identified as setting clear and consistent expectations for children (rather than acting as "pseudo-siblings"), while demonstrating respect for the children's individuality and interests. Such a balance is described as providing a sense of warmth and security for the children, while allowing the child autonomy to learn through her or his own experiences.

Clark (1983) also reports from his study of poor Black families that the main determinant of whether children in these families were successful or unsuccessful was the quality of the family relationships. He emphasizes that in successful families, parents nurtured the children's sense of competence, while establishing consistent family roles and responsibilities that provide children with a sense of security and stability necessary for success in school and in later life.

Summary

Process variables significantly influence the success of children's educational achievement. Parents' beliefs and teaching style, aspirations and expectations, and the quality of the home environment they provide affect children's academic success, regardless of family social status. Although higher-income families may be able to afford to purchase materials or engage in activities that enhance literacy development, it cannot be concluded that children in these homes will all necessarily reap the maximum benefits that their life-circumstances can provide. What counts is the extent to which parents successfully utilize their available resources. Lower-income parents who use effective practices and provide high-quality home environments are also successful in contributing to the achievement of their children.

Conclusion

Regardless of the labels applied to describe them, all parents hold high aspirations that their children will enjoy success in life. The complex constellation of status and process variables impact upon the human and physical resources that parent possess for helping their children realize their potential. The extent to which families can and do provide home environments that support the literacy and personal development of their children ultimately determines the success of their goals. Although children from lower socioeconomic levels are called to mind when one hears the term "at risk child", it is evident from an exploration of family factors that single characteristics, described by labels such as "poor"or "minority", do not in themselves determine the literacy success of children.

In numerous studies examining the relationship between family variables and achievement, the quality of the home environment consistently emerges as the most significant factor among all

status and process variables. The design of the home environment is influenced by both status and process factors, but may be thought of as greater than the sum of its parts. While status factors undoubtedly affect the ease with which families can provide optimal home environments, research concludes that quality environments are not the sole construction of the privileged. How people use the personal and physical resources to shape their living conditions, addresses the underlying process by which home environment is created. Determined by parents' beliefs, expectations, and behavior, home environment is the atmosphere in which living and learning take place. Active, resourceful, parents, regardless of status, strive to provide their children with all of the opportunities that they can access. Many low income parents succeed despite the factors that act against their efforts; other parents, whether impeded by physical resources or not, fail to provide homes that nurture literacy development.

Surface characteristics, or labels, provide simple explanations for disparities among groups of people within and across societies. A careful examination of both the conditions underlying such labels, and the interrelation among variables that define these conditions, exposes the extent to which such explanations mask the reasons why disparities exist. In order to truly understand the pathways to children's success in their homes, we must reexamine what we have accepted as truth, and evaluate it against the plethora of research evidence to obtain a more accurate picture of literacy achievement.

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PAPER THREE

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMS AND THE ROLES OF THE SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY IN SUPPORTING THEM

Introduction

This paper discusses the development of educational intervention programs as an approach to help support the literacy development of children. It considers the political and social perspectives that shaped early programs, and the evaluation of these programs that resulted in the design and implementation of new models of delivery. The research evidence regarding the effectiveness of various intervention models and the characteristics that define effective programs are discussed. The ethical issues of intervention with respect to program design and delivery are reviewed. The role of the school and community in family-education programs, and ways these groups may appropriately respond to families, is considered.

The Theoretical and Social Context for the Development of Intervention Programs

Sigel (1983) suggests that intervention is a process whereby individuals or institutions deliberately attempt to change the behaviors, feelings, and attitudes of others. "Such intervention activity always implies the presence of an expert and of a nonexpert: that one of the participants knows what should or could be possible for the other participant" (p. 7). He adds that, "The concept of intervention is based on the belief that there is a way to do something to improve the ongoing behavior or situation, to make it more fulfilling, productive, or healthy" (pp. 8 - 9).

With respect to enhancing the development of young children, such a view may be found in the work of Friedrich Froebel, and Maria Montessori, among others (Shonkoff & Meisels, 1990). It was in the second half of the twentieth century, however, that the culmination of developmental theory, and social and political forces gave rise to a discourse in which social inequality and the discrepancies among the achievement of children in various groups in society, was of primary importance.

Ramey, Bryant, and Suarez (1985) cite the work of John McVicker Hunt and Benjamin Bloom as significant contributions to the belief that environmental influences, particularly in early life, had powerful and long-lasting effects upon human development. The belief that children's intelligence, and potential achievement were malleable, countered the predominant views of the early twentieth century in which heredity was considered the greatest determinant of intelligence and achievement of children. Until environmental influences gained wide-spread attention, the influential work of Arnold Gessell, Arthur Jensen, and others, suggested that children's development would unfold as predetermined by their genotype (Ramey, et al., 1985; Shonkoff & Meisels, 1990).

While the extent to which environment or heredity determines human development continued to be an issue of debate, the possibilities suggested by proponents of the environmental position became especially attractive in the social context of the 1960s. In the United States, the increasing awareness of social inequality among groups within society and the disparities that existed among families' lives and children's achievement resulted in a response at the federal government level, to address social injustice and improve the lives of children and their families. Although some private efforts aimed at educational and social improvements such as the Ford

Foundation's "Great Cities Project", had been in effect on a small-scale basis since the 1950s, federal and state government agendas did not begin to include broad-based intervention, until it became a priority in the millieu of the 1960s (Florin & Dokecki,1983).

The potential benefits of intervention in the lives of disadvantaged people were viewed with great optimism, and educational intervention in particular was viewed as the key to resolving many social problems (Dickenson, 1994). In the United States funding for development and implementation of policies and programs became a priority of the Kennedy administration (Shonkoff & Meisels, 1990). These early approaches to intervention proceeded on the assumption that eradicating the effects of the "culture of poverty" through compensatory education measures could "break the cycle of poverty" (Dickenson, 1994; Florin & Dokecki, 1983). Intervention program design, therefore, operated from a deficit model which focused on what was considered to be missing in families, believing such deficits could be provided to children through program curriculum (Florin & Dokecki, 1983). Wasik, Dobbins, and Herrmann (2001), note that, "Despite evidence that lower-income families value 'growing up literate' and provide opportunities for literacy experiences in the home, socioeconomic differences in literacy and language have been and continue to be documented" (p. 446). Most notably, the quality of language interactions with adults (Snow, 1983; Tough, 1983; Wells, 1985) and opportunities to engage with print, especially storybook reading (Heath,1982; Snow, 1983; Teale & Sulzby, 1999), were cited as areas in which children lacked experiences.

While both oral language development and experiences with storybook reading are widely reported to be very significant contributors to print literacy, critics of the "deficit model" would later cite the shortcomings of an approach that focused on what was missing, based on

mainstream norms as a model of appropriate practice, while ignoring other kinds of literacy events that occurred in the homes of these families (Auerbach, 1989, Goodman, 1997; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988).

By the mid-1960s intervention programs increasingly appeared, most notably Head Start, federally funded by the Johnson administration and widely-implemented, in 1965. While some programs focused specifically on the education of preschool children, the mandate of Head Start focused on a wider range of child and family needs, including health and nutrition. It was strongly believed that the costs associated with such programs would not only address social injustice and balance educational outcomes for all children, but would also be financially sound, due to the expected improvements in the effectiveness of schools' impact on the education of these children, as well as the long-term economic implications of having these children grow up to be self-supporting citizens, raising their own children in an enriched environmental climate, thus breaking the cycle of poverty (Dickenson, 1994). Hopes and expectations were high for the outcomes of these programs, and as Florin and Dokecki (1990) suggest, in retrospect it was unrealistic to expect that single measures in relative isolation from other factors influencing families could have such dramatic and far-reaching effects on the quality of life of children and their families.

Early Efforts in Intervention and Evaluation of Effects

The expense of intervention programs led to a call for evaluation of their success. While progress toward the long-term effects, by their nature, could not be measured within the first years after intervention was initiated, in the short term, children's IQ scores were proposed as an indicator to measure program effects. Ramey, Bryant, and Suarez (1985) note that despite the

controversy surrounding the appropriateness of IQ scores, intelligence tests, as a tool to measure program effects, were widely used.

In this "first wave" of intervention, many programs primarily focused on direct delivery of programming to children in educational centers. While some programs included a home-visit component, the delivery of direct service to the child remained the primary method of program delivery. The initial evaluations of intervention programs, primarily using cognitive data as the main evaluative criteria, such as the Westinghouse Report, did not yield the results that had earlier been hoped for. While there was a varying range of reported gains across programs, IQ scores generally were more modest than expected, and typically faded within a year or two after intervention ended (, 1990). For some, these results were evidence of the immutability of intelligence, and intervention was pronounced a failure. For those working within the field of intervention, it was evident that a critical examination of the factors contributing to the variance in success reported among programs was necessary (Condry, 1983). A reconsideration of program implementation models resulted in experimental designs of delivery in an attempt to determine the characteristics that define effective programs.

Although critics of the initial programs were not optimistic that new designs would yield better results, the proponents of intervention had gained broad-based community and political support. The increasing awareness of the needs and rights of disabled children and adults, as the 1970s progressed, added support to the efforts to study and "invest in" the early education of children with special needs and was strengthened by The Education For All Handicapped Children Act (Shonkoff & Meisels, 1990). Although no Canadian law parallels this Act, the implications of it significantly influenced policy and practice in Canada. Winzer (2002) notes that beyond the

human rights accorded to all people living in Canada by The Declaration of Human Rights, no specific federal legislation exists with regard to the education of children with special needs. All provinces have, however, adopted educational policies that in a broad sense encompass the concept of facilitating the maximum potential of all children.

Newer Delivery Models: Toward Family Literacy

In response to the initial evaluation reports of program effects, new designs for intervention programs began to emerge. Most significant were two factors: the involvement of parents in programming and the consideration of the family context of literacy. Dickenson (1994) reports that programs increasingly began including home visits and involving parents in the intervention activities directly with their children. "In the 1970s and increasingly in the 1980s the ranks of these first generation programs were augmented by programs supporting families" (p. 4). As these programs emerged the literacy practices and needs of the whole family began to be included in the scope of program design. Within this model, adult literacy was recognized as an important influence on children's development. Educational programs to address the literacy needs of adults began to increase. A design that provided the basis for the development of many subsequent programs was the Kenan Model which was designed to enhance the basic literacy needs of adults, offer parent education, and provide early-childhood programs for the children of the adult participants (Morrow, Tracey, & Maxwell, 1995). This broader perspective of the intergenerational literacy needs of children, parents, and other family members became known as "family literacy" a term coined by Taylor (1983) which has eclipsed the term "intervention" and defined the broadened scope and practices that had evolved.

Snow (1994) indicates that family literacy programs which focus on child outcomes may

differ across five factorial components. These are: the target of intervention (child, parent, teacher, or a combination thereof), the age of the child upon entry into a program (infant programs, preschoolers, or school age), the participation structure (parent - child, facilitator - child, facilitator - parent, or a combination of models), the nature of evaluation (the extensiveness and chosen indicators as criteria for assessment, which include cognitive, behavioral, or affective measures exclusively, or in conjunction with others) and the conduit for training (the activities by which the learning takes place, which may include modeling strategies in workshops, the provision of informational materials to parents, or the provision of educational materials for children, such as children's storybooks).

The numerous programs that were developed varied accordingly by the selection and combinations of these five factors. Measurement of program effects on children's outcomes and identification of the effectiveness of characteristics of these programs are reported in the literature (Barnett, 2001; Campbell & Ramey,1994; Lazar, 1983; Wasik & Karweit, 1994). Several criteria typically appear as indicators of measurement effects, however, IQ scores are most frequently reported. For school-age children, grade retention and children's involvement in special education services are also frequently cited indicators. Less often, affective measures such as child and parent beliefs and expectations of themselves and their children, parents' valuing of intervention programs, and the frequency of literacy engagement in families are cited, although their impact upon achievement is reported in the literature (Fagan, 2001a; O'Sullivan & Howe, 1996, and 1999).

Fagan (2001a) reports that parents' beliefs about participation in family literacy programs and their resulting behaviors are critical to the success of intervention efforts. He cites Vygotsky's

view that, "An important factor in fostering participatory involvement is realizing the relationship between the cognitive and the affect" (p. 50). In a study of the transfer of learning among participants of PRINTS, a family literacy program in which parents are encouraged to use their knowledge about their own children in a variety of learning activities, to enhance their young children's literacy development, Fagan notes that affect – the way in which parents perceived themselves to be viewed by facilitators, was an important influence on the transfer of learning between facilitators and parents. In evaluating parents' views on their experience in participating in this program, he states, "Parents made it quite clear ...that they were more likely to learn in a setting in which they felt valued, although they were more likely to describe it as warm and caring" (p. 51). Evaluation of intervention programs, then, must not only address the cognitive outcomes of children but also the affective outcomes of parents and children, which influence thought and behavior both during and after intervention.

Cognitive and Affective Outcomes of Programs

In the numerous studies of children's outcomes, researchers have examined the relationship between program effects and the features of program designs. These studies examined programs for infants, preschoolers, and school-age children in home based and center-based programs, both with and without a home visit component, and the degree to which children or parents were the focus of delivery (Barnett, 2001; Campbell & Ramey, 1994; Condry, 1983; Florin & Dokecki, 1983; Lazar, 1983; Ramey et al., 1985; Royce, Darlington & Murray, 1983; Seitz & Apfel, 1994; Wasik & Karweit, 1994). The research findings suggest a number of conclusions that can be made about programs designed to enhance children's development.

A robust finding among the studies is that children's cognitive development is

significantly enhanced in programs that directly involve the child. Royce et al. (1983) report, "The conclusion that a well-run cognitively oriented early education program will increase the IQ scores of low-income children by the end of the program is one of the least disputed results in educational evaluation" (p. 426). With regard to the long-term effects of intervention with children, effects on IQ scores tend to fade within a few years (Barnett, 2001; Florin & Dokecki, 1983; Royce et al. 1983). Despite the fade in IQ gains, the effects of intervention on actual achievement on school performance may remain for several years (Barnett, 2001; Condry, 1983; Royce et al. 1983). In some cases, beneficial effects have been noted not only in school achievement (successful completion of highschool, less involvement in special education, and less grade retention) but also into early adulthood through greater rates of continuing education and employment (Royce et al., 1983). Long term effects on achievement, however, are not consistently found.

The intensity of programs has been directly attributed to both the size of program effects and the length of time that effects last after interventions end. Ramey, Ramey, Gaines and Blair (1995) define intensity as the amount of program time per day and the overall length of programs. They report that more intensive programs yield greater effects on children's cognitive outcomes. Wasik and Karweit's (1994) examination of several programs of varying intensity also concluded that intensity of programming was a significant factor in both effect gains and the length of time that effects lasted after programs ended. Ramey et al. (1985) also state that:

> The preponderance of evidence seems to suggest that programs which are of high intensity (defined by amount and breadth of contact with children and/or families) are likely to bear a direct and positive relationship to the degree of intellectual benefit derived by children

participating in such programs. (p. 289)

Other studies report similar findings (Barnett, 2001; Campbell & Ramey, 1994). Ramey et al (1985) and Wasik and Karweit (1994) suggest that continued support for children should be provided from infancy through preschool and into the early years of school, so that early gains may be maintained and children's skills further enhanced. Lazar (1983) suggests that the costs associated with such intensive programming would be offset by the savings from a reduced demand for special education services in the school.

Perhaps the most significant of the research conclusions was the finding of positive correlations between parent involvement in programs and cognitive effects on children, particularly effects after intervention ended (Florin & Dokecki, 1983; Seitz & Apfel, 1994). Florin and Dokecki (1983) report the suggestion by several researchers that the involvement of parents, especially mothers, in programs, whether center-based, home-based or a combination of both, resulted in effects on the home environment. As a result, the potential for beneficial learning experiences occur not only within programs, but at all times and settings for children. As Fagan and Cronin (1998) state, in describing PRINTS, a parent-focused program for the early literacy development of children:

> It makes more sense to provide assistance to parents and caregivers of preschoolers than to work only with the children. The value of empowering parents with an understanding of early literacy development and ways to foster it means that they can make the most of all the experiences they have with their children. (p. 3)

Other reasons for the correlation between parent involvement and child outcomes focus on the effects of parents' valuing of particular kinds of learning. Lazar (1983) suggests that family

involvement in programs demonstrates to children that parents value the learning outcomes. Fagan (1998) has discussed the powerful effect of family and cultural context in shaping children's learning; that is, meaningful learning takes place in events that children have learned are valuable. The adoption of these values occurs through the implicit and explicit beliefs and practices of significant people in children's lives, within their families and communities. The events that families devote time and attention to, which may include family educational programs, influences the value that children learn to attribute to it.

Seitz and Apfel (1994) also report that "diffusion effects" are another benefit found to occur in programs involving parents, which supports the proposal that involvement of parents has long -term positive effects on the learning environment of the home. In a study of parents involved in programs with their first-born child and the impact this intervention had on later born children, they determined that, "The results provide evidence that early family support for parents continues to have benefits even for children who were born after intervention ended. Making parents the primary focus of intervention efforts thus appears to be a particularly efficient strategy" (p. 681).

This realization is perhaps the most significant factor in the shaping of later family intervention program designs. Wasik, Dobbins, and Herrmann, (2001) cite Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, in which the importance of the family and the broader community in shaping children's development, is recognized as an important influence on the direction future programs would take. "His early writings promoted a shift toward recognizing the family itself as a more appropriate focus for intervention rather than the child only" (p. 448). They note his argument that, without family involvement, intervention is likely to be unsuccessful, and any effects that

are achieved are likely to disappear after intervention ends. "His theory predicts that the most enduring child outcomes occur from interventions that encompass a variety of significant people and settings in the child's life" (pp. 448 - 449).

Numerous other findings have emerged from reviews of cognitive effects. A comparison of home-based only and center-based programs (with or without a home visit component) suggests that while home-based programs help facilitators to individualize support for families centers provide peer support that is important for helping parents maintain enthusiasm and participation (Florin & Dokecki, 1983). Fagan (2001a) reports that centers offer a sense of community that helps to support parents in their efforts to help their children. He suggests that the opportunities for parents to share their feelings and experiences helps them realize that they are not alone, that other parents also share these experiences and concerns in their efforts to support their children's achievement. The size of center-based programs have been correlated with effects (Barnett, 2001; Florin & Dokecki, 1983). Barnett (2001) suggests that smaller - scale centers tend to provide more intensive parent involvement, while in larger programs parents more often act as observers. In addition, the curriculum content of programs and child outcomes have been compared. Florin and Dokecki (1983) and Ramey et al. (1985), report that a comparison of programs focusing on oral language development, sensory-motor development or general cognitive development, found no significant immediate or long-term differences. Wasik and Karweit (1994) report, however, that language-based programs appear to yield more significant long term gains. They suggest that further study on the effects of a variety of curriculum designs is needed to determine both short term and long term achievement effects.

Some reviews of program effects have reported affective outcomes for parents and

children, including increases in parent and children's sense of competence and expectations for immediate and long-term success (Barnett, 2001; Fagan, 2001a; Florin & Dokecki, 1983; Royce et al., 1983). Perceptions of control or ownership, and of internal and external conditions that affect achievement, influence both motivation and behavior in approaches to learning (Meece, 1991; Midgley, 1993; Stipek & MacIver, 1989).

Parents' own perceptions of competence in teaching their children and their expectations for their children's success appear to significantly influence those of their children. Florin and Dokecki (1983) have also reported a strong correlation between parent's perceptions of themselves as educators of their children and children's actual outcomes. They suggest that parents who perceive themselves as capable engage in literacy practices that improve the quality of the learning environment of the home.

O'Sullivan and Howe (1996, and 1999) report that children's perceptions of competence not only influence children's desire to engage in literacy tasks but also their success with these tasks. They conclude that young children who perceive themselves capable readers, regardless of actual skill, tend to persevere in the application of strategies, thus attaining greater success. They also note that parents of these children held especially strong expectations that their children would be very successful in reading upon entry into school. Royce et al. (1983) report that high parent-expectations are correlated with their children's outcomes in several ways: less involvement in special education services in school, less grade retention, higher frequencies of successful highschool completion, and successful job attainment.

Family literacy programs can, then, be an effective strategy for enhancing children's educational achievement. Programs that involve children directly can make significant gains, but

may not always impact on long-term achievement. Programs that involve parents either in conjunction with direct programming for children, or with parents who later work with their children, often report effects for both parents and children. Parent perceptions of greater competence in helping their children and increased use of effective practices in the home which enhance their children's development are reported.

Family Literacy: The School and the Community

Recognition of the children as learners in the context of family and society suggests that the school and community have significant roles to play in supporting family literacy. With public and private funding support, groups and individual members within society, in cooperation with community schools, have an opportunity through collaboration to support and strengthen family literacy within the local community.

In the United States, family literacy programs grew out of a strong federal mandate and many, for example, Head Start and Even Start, continue to be funded and supported by legislation (Shonkoff & Meisels, 1990). In Canada, however, family literacy programs are characterized more as a response by local communities to local needs, and thus operate with varying levels of financial support from provincial, federal, or private sources (Thomas,1998). While federal and provincial governments support literacy development through financial grants, for literacy development they do not mandate that specific programs must exist to meet community literacy needs. Instead, groups and individuals within communities initiate literacy programs to meet local needs. Across Canada, these programs may be affiliated with educational institutions, including universities, colleges, or research centers but often function independently. Thomas' (1998) sample of current family literacy programs across Canada illustrates examples of local initiatives

designed to address the family literacy needs of their particular communities. These programs operate from large urban to small rural communities, and may focus on one or more dimensions of family literacy: child education, parent education, adult education, and employability skills. The role of the community in family literacy development in Canada is then especially significant. It is largely from the efforts of individuals and groups who live in these communities that the identification of the literacy needs of the local people and the initiation of action to bring people and programs together occurs.

The sample of Canadian family literacy programs reported by Thomas, reveals strong inter-community cooperation among community members where programs are offered. These include literacy program facilitators, community center staff, local business people, health services professionals, church leaders, and local school educators, all of whom provide support financially with funding or in-kind donations, space to operate, expertise in education or other human development areas, or avenues for public awareness about literacy programs available. Thomas (1998) reports:

> As noted in the recent survey of family literacy projects across Canada (Thomas & Skage, 1998) and based on the descriptions of family literacy program development contained in the present work, a continued emphasis of local support for programs with a variety of partnerships and funding sources has been the pattern for family literacy. (p.10)

Considerations in the Design and Delivery of Programs

Prospective initiation of family literacy programs demands careful consideration of the ethics of intervention. Sigel (1983) has suggested, "When one enters the arena of creating change in the behavior of others, an implicit and explicit ethical question is raised that, in my view, must

be addressed. Why?" (p. 2). He adds that it is important to recognize that intervention efforts involve value judgements about the practices that families engage in around literacy or otherwise.

The issue of value judgements about what children and their families need is especially significant with respect to the content and delivery dimensions of family programs. In community literacy programs that focus on child outcomes, especially parent education programs, significant controversy is found in the discourse around the approaches to the design and delivery of programs (Auerbach, 1989, 1995; Goodman, 1997; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Two models, the "deficit model" and the "wealth" or "sociocultural model", have been suggested to describe assumptions and practices in the implementation of child and parent education initiatives.

The term "deficit model" is attributed to the early approaches of intervention in which what was perceived to be lacking in the homes of children, especially low-income and minorities, became the focus of curriculum whereby direct intervention programs with children were established. Parenting practices and the home environment were viewed as the problem, for which "compensatory education" was the solution (Ramey et al., 1985). Condry (1983) discusses the term "culture of the poor", a term coined by anthropologist Oscar Lewis in 1968 to describe the effects of poverty on families which significantly influence life experiences and expectations. Lewis had noted that these effects result in life conditions very different from those of families not living in poverty. The term, however, gradually became associated with beliefs about inherent human characteristics of particular groups based on socioeconomic or ethnic reasons. The poor and minority groups often began to be considered as "culturally deprived". Condry (1983) suggests that the evaluations of poor families based on comparisons with mainstream families had significant implications for program design:

> The technique of using the (white) middle-class category as the standard for comparison tended to deify that segment of the population, and there was often the implication that middle-class behaviors and values should be the goal of other groups. (p.10)

This deficit model has been strongly criticized by some researchers for its assumptions and practices. Auerbach (1989) suggests that family differences are not deficits, despite the fact that they do not mirror mainstream practices. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) in their ethnographic study of poor inner-city families also report that these families engage in a wide variety of literacy practices and value literacy in the lives. Yetta Goodman (1997) suggests that the "multiple roads to literacy" other than school-like practices need to be recognized as legitimate paths for becoming literate.

A response by these researchers is the proposal of an alternate model of literacy, sometimes referred to as the "wealth model" or "sociocultural model". Auerbach (1989,1995) suggests that the differences among families, such as language and cultural practices, should be viewed as strengths that can and should be included in educational models. In programs that involve child outcomes, the family life experiences of the children within their social context must be considered in program design and delivery. Vincent, Salisbury, Strain, McCormick, and Tessier (1990) agree that in order for programs to be effective they must be relevant to the life experiences of the participants. They suggest that, "Early intervention strategies must establish a match with the child's and family's ecology of learning and should be delivered in ways that respect cross-generational and cross-familial bonds" (p.180).

Numerous other researchers have also suggested that the relevance of programs to participants and the success of programs depend on the extent to which programs are sensitive to

the sociocultural context of the participants' lives (Alexander & Entwisle, 1996; Cochrane & Woolever, 1983; Fagan, 1998; Morrow, 1995; Wasik et al., 2001). As Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) suggest, "...a hallmark of a successful family program is that it is tailored to the needs of the specific population it serves" (p.146). Morrow, Tracey and Maxwell's (1995) survey of family education programs in the United States, and Thomas'(1998) review of Canadian programs suggests that in the field of family literacy, significant efforts are being made to address the diverse needs of different families.

In family literacy programs that focus on children's outcomes, respect for the family and their literacy values and practices is balanced with the knowledge that certain practices associated with mainstream, middle-class families are strongly correlated with school success, especially oral language interaction and storybook reading (Teale & Sulzby, 1999). The focus of many current programs include these two components as the whole or partial emphasis of intervention with children. Edwards (1994) acknowledges that many forms and practices of literacy exist in most homes, but suggests that they do not all equally contribute to children's print literacy development for reading. She argues, therefore, that parents want and have a right to know which practices will help their children achieve success in school, and how they can assist their children with this. She notes that the most requested activity by educators of parents, that is, to "read to your child", has much more impact when parents use effective interaction strategies. Goldenberg (2001) agrees, stating that many parents are more familiar with using skill-oriented practices to help their children than using effective book-reading practices.

Many parent-child reading programs have been designed to provide children with the benefits of storybook reading that enhance later school success, including Edward's program,

Parents as Partners in Reading (1990), and Oldford-Matchim's (1989) SORT (Significant Others as Reading Teachers). Other programs, including Fagan and Cronin's (1998) PRINTS (Parents' Roles INteracting with Teacher Support), which focus broadly on learning in everyday family-life experiences, with storybook reading as one of many family activities, may more closely reflect the spirit of the sociocultural model.

Another dimension of the design of programs that focuses on child outcomes, in which parent education is a component, is the relationship between the parents and program facilitators. In the definition of intervention suggested by Sigel (1983), in which "experts" impart knowledge and skills to "nonexperts", the roles of participants and the balance of power in the parent-program facilitator relationship is obvious. What parents may bring to the process, especially the intimate knowledge about their own child's interests and personality, was not acknowledged. In the wealth model, such knowledge is viewed as a valuable asset for individualizing what programs offer to parents and what parents contribute to make the process more personally meaningful and effective.

Auerbach (1989) suggests that programs focusing only on the "transmission of school practices" approach miss opportunities for parents to demonstrate the usefulness of other kinds of learning practices more familiar in their homes. Fagan (2001a) agrees that programs must respect the knowledge that parents bring to the process and acknowledge their competence to build on this knowledge, with support. He cites Tice's view that, "parity in which each person's contribution to an interaction is equally valued, [is] a link between trust building and program collaboration" (p. 51). Edwards (1994), in discussing a program to help parents utilize effective storybook reading practices, also acknowledges that two-way communication is important in

order for learning to occur on both sides of the parent-professional relationship. She suggests that all parents have a valuable contribution to make toward the ultimate success of programs by sharing their perspectives with professionals, especially with regard to material selection and design.

Who May Benefit from Family Literacy Programs?

The question of who literacy programs should be for is considered in the literature. In the United States, low income and minority population children and their parents have been targeted for intervention because of the risk factors associated with the life conditions of many of these families. Meisels and Wasik (1990) note Tjossem's categorization of types of risk that have the potential to impair children's outcomes: medical risk (diagnosed medical disorders), biological risk (a history of biological factors during prenatal, neonatal, or postnatal periods) and environmental risk. They cite Meisels and Anastasiow's definition of environmental risk as occurring in children "...whose experiences are significantly limited during early childhood in areas of maternal attachment, family organization, health care, nutrition, and in opportunities for physical, social, and adaptive stimulation. Such factors are highly correlated with a probability of delayed development" (p. 609).

Upshur (1990) suggests that assessment of risk in children cannot be determined only by environmental variables such as family income, as protective factors in the child's environment may mediate detrimental effects. As Garmezy (1991) and others report, some children and families do demonstrate resiliency against detrimental life conditions because the family is characterized by protective factors including warmth and nurturing by the parent and the provision of learning opportunities in the home. It is widely reported, however, that many

low-income families are vulnerable to the effects of poverty. Family income is strongly associated with children's academic success, not only because of the influence it has on material resources, but also because it may significantly impact parents' stress and the emotional resources to provide stimulating home environments (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994).

Although families associated with high-risk life conditions have traditionally been considered appropriate populations for intervention, some researchers suggest that programs that focus on enhancing children's outcomes are beneficial for all families. Florin and Dokecki (1983) lend support to this view and report that, increasingly, many programs provide literacy support to middle-class families. Fagan (personal communication) agrees that social class itself does not determine the level of knowledge and skill that parents can bring to their role as educators of their children. Belonging to the middle-class does not ensure that parents will utilize optimal strategies in storybook reading or other learning activities in the home.

Initially in the United States, funding for program participation was provided for only the poorest of families, through programs like Head Start (Ramey et al., 1985; Shonkoff & Meisels, 2001). As Morrow et al.(1995) report in a survey of American family literacy programs, among the multitude of programs currently ongoing, most do not limit participation to income-related criteria. Upshur (2001) suggests that, in the United States, it is prudent for government and private organizations to support broad-based inclusion of families, rather than limit participation to the poorest of families. She argues that considering the complex nature of identifying risk, it makes sense to offer more program services to more families as preventative measures, rather than to less.

In Canada, program participation has been less associated with socioeconomic criteria,

that is, enrollment in programs has not been limited to low-income families only (Thomas, 1998). Patterns of participation and how parent beliefs influence participation in family literacy programs are not well understood or documented, however, and further research is warranted. Encouraging increased participation across all socioeconomic groups can provide benefits to more children regardless of the social group to which they belong.

The Role of the School within the Community

In many communities, schools participate in supporting family literacy development in a number of ways. These may be categorized as recognizing, valuing, and making a place for a variety of forms of literacy that children and their families cultivate at home, initiating and developing family literacy programs where services do not currently exist, and supporting existing community-based family literacy programs with physical and human resources.

Inclusion of Families and their Literacy in the Classroom

Morrow (1995) argues that a strong association between schools and the community is essential to the ongoing success of family literacy efforts. She suggests that literacy as it is used in the family context should be included in the school curriculum. Taylor (1983) also supports this view of a multifunctional model of literacy as appropriate for the classroom context and suggests that classrooms should incorporate materials and practices that reflect children's understanding of literacy as they know it from their own family-life experiences. Other researchers support the practice of linking what is meaningful to children from their home life to classroom pedagogy, thus acknowledging and valuing the various kinds of literacy that children and families share (Auerbach, 1989). Using culturally appropriate material, including children's literature, which is meaningful to the life experiences of the children in the school's population, and allowing for

alternate forms for expression of learning (for example story telling, art or drama, as alternatives to only written response) are examples of approaches that respect the diversity of human experiences and ways of expressing knowledge.

The literature suggests that while the goal of parent-focused intervention centers around parent education and participation in the educational development of their young children, entry of children into the school system should not relegate parents to a minor role. The demonstrating by parents of the value of, and expectations for, the success of their children has significant influence on children's outcomes (Clarke, 1983; Fagan, 2001a; Garmezy, 1991; Seginer, 1983; O'Sullivan & Howe, 1996 and 1999). Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, and Hemphill (1991) state that school and teacher practices have a significant impact upon the level of parent participation in both the school and home-focused educational activities and that there is a significant, reciprocal correlation between parent participation and children's outcomes.

Eccles and Harold (1996) report that both educators and parents report a desire for improved parent-school relationships. They also report that educators' beliefs and practices strongly determine the quality of the home-school relationship. They argue that increased parent-teacher communication and collaboration should include utilizing ways that allow parents to be important learning resources, for example, drawing upon parents' knowledge about their life experiences and cultural heritage. Snow et al. (1991) advocate increased parent involvement in classroom learning. "One way to make schools more accessible to parents is to involve the parents in classroom activities more directly... " (p.174). They suggest numerous ways that parents can demonstrate skills and knowledge that enhance classroom learning and improve parents' sense of involvement in their child's school life. Fagan (2001b) also notes that school involvement of

parents must include meaningful ways of participation:

> If parental involvement in the literacy development of their young children is fostered, then it follows naturally that parents will want to follow the progress of their child at school age. But there must be meaningful roles for parents in schools. Duplicating worksheets and doing secretarial tasks should be minimal. (p. 9)

Other researchers also have suggested that parents can play a meaningful role in the school-based curriculum when given the opportunity to come into the classroom and share their unique skills, culture, and knowledge (Auerbach, 1989; Goodman, 1997).

Mitchell (1989) challenges schools to critically examine their practices to determine if school policies and procedures and teacher's classroom practices enhance or deter the development of a strong home and school relationships. In discussing the stresses on modern family life that can affect parents' efforts to help their children, he argues that only by rebuilding the social-network infrastructure, of which school and home relationships are key, can optimal learning conditions exist for children. He also suggests that the school's role in this rebuilding process is to focus on the life of the child not only in the school setting , but within the context of family and community. He advocates that schools need to strengthen links with community agencies and private sectors business to increase resources and avenues for literacy development. Mitchell also argues that schools need to become more informed and exert greater influence in shaping government policies that impact upon families and their ability to help in the education of their children.

Numerous researchers advocate the dismantling of the "expert" and "nonexpert" dichotomy that has inhibited the development of genuine home-school partnerships (Fagan,

2001a; Florin & Dokecki, 1983). Snow et al. (1991) suggest that through well established home-school relationships, parents and educators can determine together the role each will play in the education of the child. By defining roles and sharing responsibility for the outcomes of children they suggest that the likelihood for children's success increases.

Some researchers question the degree to which home-school relationships currently function as true partnerships. Fine (1993) argues that the issues of power, authority, and control over the education environment of schools, must be critically examined in order to reveal the true extent to which parents are actual partners in education. She concludes that currently the concept of partnership is more of a facade than a reality. Similarly, Lareau (1996) contends that while middle class parents may engage in and exert some influence on school processes, lower-income parents often do not. She suggests that lower-income parents often have a strong sense of the professional expertise of educators while perceiving a limited sense of their own power to participate or effect change in their children's school environment. She argues that the term "family-school partnership" implies an equality in the balance of power between parents (of all social- economic levels) and educators, that in reality does not exist.

As the concept of parents as partners in the shaping of schools continues to evolve such views will undoubtedly have substantial impact on the degree to which the success of future home-school relationships are evaluated. In order for parents to become true partners in the education of their children, schools need to recognize that it is within the family context that meaningful literacy learning takes place, not only in the reinforcement of school-like practices, but in the many ways that real-life learning experiences cannot be duplicated in school. This recognition of the important role of parents as educators must be acknowledged. Parents need to

see that school-based educators value and encourage this learning context. It is essential, however, that first educators must understand and believe that outside of school experiences are equally or more powerful and significant in the lives and learning of children (Auerbach, 1989; Goodman, 1997).

School Support For Community Family Literacy Programs

In addition to the ways that schools support parents in their ongoing participation in their children's education, schools play a role in family literacy by supporting existing community family literacy programs or, in some cases, initiating them where programs did not exist. Many Canadian and American family literacy programs are affiliated with schools in numerous ways (Morrow et al., 1995; Thomas, 1998). In Canada, the United States, and in other countries, many locally and nationally implemented programs operate within school facilities and with the cooperation and often direct participation of school-based educators. Morrow et al. (1995) identify several American programs that function with school-based support. These include ongoing teacher participation with families in a home-based community reading program (Dog Gone Good Reading Project), teacher involvement in program materials development (Parents as Partners in Reading), teachers and parents as co-leaders of parent education programs (Parents Sharing Books Program), teachers as leaders of community sponsored, school-based programs (Running Start), and many other roles.

Morrow et al. (1995) also document examples of schools' support of community based family literacy programs in a variety of ways. Such support includes the provision of space for conducting the programs (Ready For Reading), sharing of materials such as children' literature from the school resource center (Parents as Partners in Reading), and cooperating with

researchers for the development of family literacy programs (The Collaboration and Literacy Model), among many other examples.

Thomas (1998) reports similar Canadian examples of school-community cooperation that supports community- based family literacy programs through the provision of space and use of computer resources (Chilliwack Family Literacy Model) in Chilliwack, British Columbia, program development (Read With Me) in Fogo, Newfoundland, and increasing parent awareness of existing community programs (Learning With My Child) in Montreal, Quebec. Fagan (personal communication) notes that many facilitators of the parent education program PRINTS, are active or retired teachers.

The variety of responses in which schools demonstrate support for family literacy programs supports the view that the role of the school is significant, multifaceted, and continuously evolving. Participation by schools, however, does not occur uniformly across school boards or provinces. The successes of children and their families, where active school supports are provided, suggests that schools should continue to pursue ways in which to support the literacy community outside of the immediate school environment and involve parents more directly. Where school-community program connections do not exist, schools should examine the potential for initiating such development.

Conclusion

The designs of early intervention programs were significantly shaped by the concept of the malleability of children and the pursuit of social justice through the provision of educational opportunities for children considered to be at risk. As theory and the models of delivery evolved, programs increasingly recognized the importance of considering the child's learning in the context

of family and society. Assessment of intervention initiatives, which were not overwhelmingly positive, led researchers and practitioners to critically examine program design. Increasingly parent involvement in programs and recognition of the sociocultural context of the family became cornerstones of many programs designed to improve children's achievement.

Initial programs in the United States that were funded and mandated by federal and state governments focused on the poorest and minorities as appropriate populations for intervention. As the concept of intervention evolved, it began to include consideration of not only children's needs but also those of their families. The acknowledgment that families use literacy in many ways for daily living to realize their goals led program facilitators to again reexamine the design of programs. Family programs began to include a focus on adult literacy, employment skills, and helping parents access other family services.

In Canada, while the scope of family programs also paralleled the broadening inclusion of the whole family's needs, direct government intervention in program delivery was not pursued. Community initiatives designed to meet local needs, with the support of public and private sector funding, have characterized Canadian family literacy programs and continue to shape policy and practice.

The role of the community is critical in the design and delivery of family literacy programs. Local individuals and groups play a major role in identifying community needs and developing or adopting programs to meet these needs. Increasingly it is being viewed that broad-based community cooperation is the most effective strategy for meeting the literacy needs of families. Communities can be successful in meeting these needs to the extent that its members recognize that success is not possible through isolated efforts and collaborate to make the best use of

community resources.

The various participants uniquely contribute to the community's effect on literacy development. Literacy educators and parents share responsibility in identifying the needs of families and the methods and materials that will be most useful to address these needs for the construction of effective family literacy programs. They may choose to develop curriculum or adopt or adapt existing programs. Participation can be best realized when parents are committed to attend and facilitators recognize that support may be necessary in order to maintain attendance, such as child-care (in parent-only programs) or transportation. Governments, and private sector support is necessary for the funding of family literacy programs. Individual adults within the community, with support, are responsible for the development of their own literacy needs, whether assessing their abilities as parents to provide effective learning opportunities for their children, or evaluating how their own level of literacy impacts on their lives. The support of the school is important in the success of community-based literacy programs in implementing policies and practices that support inclusion of all families, supporting the continuation of parent involvement of school age children's development, and offering resources to support community programs. Where participation, regardless of risk assessment, is encouraged and programs are available to meet the diverse needs of families within a community, more children, their families, and schools, may realize the benefits of family literacy programs.

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Conclusion

From a very early age, young children actively engage in the construction of meaning - making. The early childhood years are replete with opportunities for children to enhance their cognitive development, through the ordinary experiences of everyday life. The family is the most significant social and learning environment for the preschool child, and within this context, innumerable opportunities exist for children to enhance their literacy development.

A complex constellation of factors influence the success with which families contribute to their children's development. While labels attributed to families, as explanations why children succeed or fail are commonly suggested, these often do not receive support in the research literature. Some variables, especially family income, do affect the ease with which families can provide optimal learning environments for their children. Regardless of socioeconomic labels, however, what actually matters in children's success is what people *do*, not what they *are*.

There does continue to be however, significant numbers of children who do not succeed in school. A major response to the academic difficulties that children experience, has been the development of intervention programs. These have evolved over time and have increasingly responded to the literacy needs of family and community at large. Various programs, especially in Canada, are community based and affiliated with local schools.

As children progress through school, families continue to yield powerful influence on their children's achievement. Families, schools, and the community must recognize the potential power of the family to influence children's development. The fostering of improved home-school

relationships, and the continued community and school efforts in supporting the literacy needs of children and their families, holds the potential for improving the educational outcomes for all children.