WHAT PARENTS KNOW AND WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW TO FOSTER PRESCHOOL EMERGENT LITERACY: A RURAL PERSPECTIVE

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by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to synthesize the emergent literacy research on children's reading and writing abilities prior to formal schooling, to compare what parents know about emergent literacy to what is known in the field, and to use this comparison as a benchmark to identify relevant areas in which parents could be guided to enhance preschool emergent literacy development.

The literature on the role of parents in fostering preschool emergent literacy was analyzed. The analysis of the literature focussed specifically on literacy interactions between parents and children and how parents of early readers and writers engaged their children in literacy-related activities. Using these findings on parents who fostered positively their children's early literacy abilities, a questionnaire was designed to determine what parents know about and the extent to which they fostered preschool literacy development. Responses from seventeen preschool parents from rural Newfoundland were examined. Parental responses to each question were coded, tabulated, and analyzed for all 38 questions.

Based on the literature reviewed, the research questions developed, and parents' responses, two main conclusions may be drawn: many parents know generally what they should be doing to promote their children's early literacy concepts and abilities but are less clear specifically on how to help them. Parents are providing books and writing materials

in the home, reading to their children on a daily basis, and helping them to write the letters of the alphabet. However, this study reveals that parents need to be guided to interact more effectively with their children in the context of literacy and to make written language activities a part of their daily lives.

Suggestions for consideration evolving from this study include schools and/or preschools (with support from other agencies) to share some of the responsibility to help parents of preschoolers to learn how to involve their children in literacy in an interactive manner, and to encourage parents to learn as much as they can about fostering preschool emergent literacy abilities.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

The years before a child enters school are a critical time for the development of early literacy concepts (Adams, 1990; Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). The literacy experiences during these preschool years, or the lack thereof, have a powerful impact upon children's emerging literacy abilities and ultimately successful reading experiences in school (Clay, 1979). Parents' knowledge of emergent literacy and the quality of interactive literacy experiences with their children is probably the single most important factor in the development of conventional literacy. Unfortunately, many children start school without the print concepts necessary for the development of conventional literacy abilities. Hence, it is important to understand what parents know and what parents need to know in order to more effectively foster the emergent literacy development of their children prior to formal schooling.

Prior to formal schooling, some children engage in reading and writing behaviors but not in the same ways as older children and adults. Long-term observations of preschool children engaging in literacy behaviors indicate there is a development towards literacy proficiencies as these children attempt, with direction from the parents, to understand and use written language (Hiebert, 1988; Teale & Sulzby, 1989). Despite the knowledge that some parents are helping their children to develop literacy abilities, research conducted in geographic areas where the overall literacy abilities are low has

found that many parents do not know how to foster their children's emergent literacy abilities (Phillips, Norris, & Mason, 1996; Purcell-Gates, L'Allier, & Smith, 1995). Therefore, in areas such as those with low literacy levels, efforts must be made to guide parents as to how they can enrich their children's literacy environment to facilitate the acquisition of the print concepts fundamental to the development of conventional literacy. In order to guide parents on how to foster their children's emerging literacy abilities, a first step is to research what is known about emergent literacy. Thus, using the body of knowledge accumulated in the field of literacy as the benchmark, an examination of what parents know in comparison to what is known in the field of literacy would reveal relevant areas in which to guide parents to more effectively foster preschool emergent literacy.

Significance of the Study

Statistics indicate there is a need to continue to address low literacy levels in Newfoundland and Labrador and that low literacy abilities may be more prevalent in rural areas. Statistics Canada (1991) reported Newfoundland adult residents achieved the lowest estimated reading skills of all adult Canadians. According to statistics from the Department of Education (1990), grade twelve students in this province scored below the national average overall and their reading comprehension performance was among the lowest. Moving down through the grades, grade seven urban students outperformed their rural counterparts in all skill areas on the Canadian Tests of Basic Skills (Department of Education, 1994). Furthermore, results from the Canadian Tests of Basic Skills, Fall,

1996, showed grade four rural Newfoundland students scoring lower than their urban counterparts in all five basic skill areas (Vocabulary, Reading, Language, Work Study, and Mathematics), and that the largest gap between the groups occurred in the area of reading (Department of Education, 1997). Previous reports of performance on the Canadian Tests of Basic Skills confirm that students from smaller schools generally score lower than students attending larger schools (Department of Education, 1990). Furthermore, a study by Phillips, Norris, & Mason (1996) and Phillips, Norris, Mason, & Kerr (1990) found Newfoundland kindergartners scored at least one standard deviation below the U.S. norm on the Metropolitan Reading Readiness Test (MET) and Circus tests, and that rural kindergartners scored, on average, lower on all measures than did urban kindergartners. These results indicate an early and persistent pattern of low achievement.

One contributing factor to the lower literacy levels in rural areas may be the lack of educational resources and institutions available to preschool children and their parents. Many rural areas do not have nursery schools, preschool programs, and other resources that promote the importance of early literacy in society. Hence, there is a lack of personnel in rural areas to provide parents of preschool children with the knowledge and skills necessary to foster their children's emergent literacy abilities. Another factor is that many parents are, "unskilled at supporting their young children's literacy development" (Phillips et al., 1996, p. 176). Many parents need support given the documentation on the low literacy rates of adults in Newfoundland and Labrador and as stated in a study by Phillips

et al. (1990).

Research has shown consistently that one of the most effective ways to develop good readers and writers is to foster the emergent literacy abilities of children at very young ages. Based upon this finding, a study that focuses upon how parents can help their children get a better start in literacy acquisition is undeniably important in a society where advanced literacy is unquestionably the expectation. Such an undertaking requires the cooperation of the parents because they are the primary care givers and the ones who spend the majority of time with the children prior to schooling. Parents must know that success in future reading achievement depends greatly on positive early literacy experiences (Adams, 1990, p. 337) and they must know what sorts of positive early literacy experiences to provide for their children, and how and when to provide them. This study will attempt to outline the knowledge parents have regarding early reading and writing development, and ultimately help give direction to parents in better preparing their children for successful lifelong schooling.

In conclusion, the significance of this study is that it is aimed specifically at the identification of the emergent literacy area(s) in which rural parents can be guided to improve their children's chance for sustained successful school achievement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine what parents know about fostering preschool emergent literacy. Prior to studying what parents know, it is essential to

synthesize what research informs us about preschool emergent literacy development. Subsequently, a comprehensive analysis and synthesis of what is known in the field and a comparative examination of what parents know will likely reveal areas in which parents could be helped. To identify those areas, this study will investigate specifically questions such as the following:

1. Do parents know the importance of early literacy development? If so, what do they know?
2. According to parents, when do children begin developing literacy skills?
3. Do parents teach children that print comes in many forms? If so, how?
4. Do parents teach children that print contains meaning? If so, how?
5. Do parents try to help their children learn to read and write? If so, how?
6. What kinds of literacy behaviors and activities are taking place in the home?
7. Do parents have books in the home?
8. Do parents read to their children regularly? If so, how?
9. Do parents write with their children regularly? If so, how?
10. Do parents color with their children regularly? If so, how?

Definition of Terms

The terms, emergent literacy and rural are most relevant to this study and are defined for two reasons: emergent literacy is the fundamental concept central to the

questions and issues pertaining to this study, and the term, rural sets the context for the study. The definition of emergent literacy adopted is accepted in most educational and social settings, whereas the definition of rural is dependent somewhat upon geographical location. In other words, what constitutes being rural in one setting may not be defined as rural in another.

Emergent Literacy

Development of the association of print with meaning that begins early in a child's life and continues until the child reaches the stage of conventional reading and writing (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 70).

Rural

Communities having one or two small general stores and a post office (Phillips, Norris & Mason, 1996, p. 177)

Contravening Factors

This study will involve an analysis of what parents know and what parents need to know to foster preschool emergent literacy in one rural school district. While the results may not be representative of parents in other rural or urban areas, the general findings may indeed be worthy of further consideration.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The present study is comprised of an examination of what parents know about fostering preschool emergent literacy. Parents spend the majority of time with their preschool children and it is known that this preschool time is crucial for the development of conventional literacy. Therefore, it is necessary for parents to be knowledgeable about the importance of fostering their children's early reading and writing development but more importantly it is essential for parents to know how to foster literacy development. Unfortunately, many parents from areas where the overall literacy levels are low have been found to be, "unskilled at supporting their young children's literacy development" (Phillips, Norris, & Mason, 1996, p. 176). Consequently, it is necessary to identify what literacy related activities are taking place in the homes and the role of the parents in such activities so that they can be helped to foster their children's early reading and writing development.

Studies of the home environments of early readers and writers have shown a positive and significant relationship to the quantity and quality of parent-child interactions. The time parents spend reading and writing to and with their children, the number of questions asked by children during story time, and the availability of books and writing materials provided in the home are among factors found to be related to early literacy development in young children. Parents play a critical role in children's literacy

development, particularly during the preschool years. Durkin (1966) found that those children who had been given an early start in reading at home continued, after six years of instruction, to outperform those children who did not begin to learn to read until first grade (p. 133).

The remainder of this chapter examines current research findings on the role of parents in fostering preschool emergent literacy with a specific focus on the literacy interactions that take place between parents and children. Literacy research by William Teale, Delores Durkin, and Elizabeth Sulzby provided a focus and direction for much of the review that follows. The review is organized around the following five headings: (a) from reading readiness to emergent literacy: creating a role for parents; (b) emergent literacy: an interactive process beginning with the parent and the child; (c) preschool children's acquisition of print concepts; (d) parent-child interactions during story time; and (e) parent-child writing interactions followed by a summary.

From Reading Readiness to Emergent Literacy: Creating a Role for Parents

Over the past two decades the concept of emergent literacy has become accepted by many in the educational community as the way to describe the literacy development of young readers and writers. The emergent literacy concept comprises the process of the development and acquisition of literacy abilities which begins long before a child enters school, even as early as the first few months of life (Sulzby & Teale, 1991). The early reading and writing activities of children are no longer viewed as pre-literacy but as part of

the literacy-learning process. The concept has been extended to include very young children and their literacy experiences in the home and community (Enz & Searfoss, 1996; Morrow & Smith, 1990; Strickland & Morrow, 1989). Consequently, those involved with fostering early literacy development, particularly the parents, need to understand that they play an important role in the development of their children's early literacy concepts which are fundamental to conventional literacy. This expectation of and powerful role for parents is a modification of the role once perceived by educators.

The concept of emergent literacy, although relatively new, has been influenced by previous research, particularly research which began during the 1960's. Prior to then, the popular belief among educators and many parents was that children should not be taught to read until they entered school (Clay, 1967; Durkin, 1966). It was thought that boredom would be a problem if children received help before formal instruction in school (Durkin, 1966). It was also a commonly held belief that children had to be "ready" for reading, that is, they had to attain a certain level of maturity and acquire particular reading readiness skills. This belief was significantly influenced by the results of a study reported by Morphett and Washburne in 1931 (Durkin, 1966). Morphett and Washburne studied 141 first-grade children in Winnetka, Illinois and concluded that children made satisfactory progress in reading if they had a mental age of at least 6 years, 6 months. Therefore, on the basis of Morphett and Washburne's work, a mental age of 6.5 years was deemed to be necessary for success in reading (Durkin, 1966; Sulzby & Teale, 1991). Consequently,

reading instruction was postponed until the age of six because it was believed by the educational community, at the time, that children had to be mentally mature and ready for the task of reading. The concept of being ready to read or "reading readiness" was firmly entrenched by the 1960's (Teale & Sulzby, 1986) but research was being conducted that pointed to other developments in reading research. Researchers began turning their attention to what was going on and what could be going on during the preschool years.

Some of that research was in the field of psychology (Center for Cognitive Studies at Harvard). Researchers, such as Bruner and Kagan, working at the center began to show that during the preschool years children could be learning many skills (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Around the same time, another psychologist (Bloom, 1964) concluded that 50 percent of the intelligence measured at age 17 is developed by the age of 4. In the field of education, Durkin's studies, which began in the late 1950's, led her to challenge Morphett and Washburne's research. Durkin proposed that children are ready to start to acquire the print concepts much earlier than the mental age of 6.5 years.

Durkin (1966) carried out two extensive and landmark longitudinal studies of children who had not received formal reading instruction. Her research showed that those children who had been given an early start in reading at home continued, after six years of instruction, to outperform those children who did not begin to learn to read until first grade (p. 133). Around the same time, Clay (1967) carried out a study of five-year-old children in New Zealand and concluded that there was nothing in her research to prove

that reading instruction should be withheld because of immaturity (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Clay went on to publish works which clearly indicated her rejection of the "reading readiness" concept (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Clay stated:

> Reading instruction places new demands on the child. He must use his old preschool ways of responding in novel situations and he must discover or invent new coordinations. The initiative for this active learning comes from the child and it bears no relation to the 'growth from within' maturational concept of readiness (1979, p. 11).

Her rejection was significant because of the distinction made between a reading readiness approach and an emergent literacy approach to literacy development (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Clay also conducted one of the first studies which placed emphasis on literacy development during the early childhood period and was the first person to use the term, emergent literacy (Morrow & Smith, 1990; Teale & Sulzby, 1986).

Influenced, in part, by the works of Durkin and Clay, other researchers were motivated to continue to study the literacy developments of preschoolers (Edwards, 1989; Heath, 1983; Lomax & McGee, 1987; Mason, 1980; Mason, Kerr, Sinha, & McCormick, 1990; Pellegrini, Perlmutter, Galda, & Brophy, 1990; Phillips, Norris, & Mason, 1996; Sulzby & Teale, 1986; Swift, 1970; Whitehurst, Falco, Lonigan, Fischel, DeBaryshe, Valdez-Menchaca, & Caufield, 1988). Recent studies, particularly since the 1980's, have focused on literacy development from the child's perspective in an attempt to understand the child's struggles in the world of print (Teale, 1995).

Teale and Sulzby (1986) collected the works of some of the leading researchers

about emergent literacy. Since that time, emergent literacy has been the subject of numerous research studies, used in the titles of articles, books and other pieces of writing and has provided the basis for much of schools' early literacy curriculum. The concept of emergent literacy has almost totally replaced the idea of "reading readiness". The concept of emergent literacy has placed greater emphasis on the role of parents in developing their young children's literacy concepts and abilities than did the concept of reading readiness. The view now is on the development of young children's literacy abilities as they occur in authentic settings such as the home and community. Emergent literacy is the concept adopted in this study not only because it is a more comprehensive and coherent one but also because it includes a role for the parents.

Emergent Literacy: An Interactive Process Beginning with the Parent and the Child

One of the most important factors that influences children's early literacy development is parent and child interactions (Heath, 1983; Pikulski & Tobin, 1988; Wigfield & Asher, 1984). Parents are ultimately responsible for the quantity and quality of early literacy-related interactions with their children. Numerous research studies on parents fostering children's early literacy development have been conducted. Although early research has shown that factors such as the socioeconomic status of families and parental educational levels affect children's literacy development (Wigfield & Asher, 1984), other studies have concluded that parent-child interactions is a better predictor of children's reading achievement (Bradley, Caldwell, & Elardo, 1977; Hansen, 1969;

Pikulski & Tobin, 1988). Consequently, recent research has focused on what parents are "doing" with their children (Sulzby & Teale, 1991). The trend now is to find out how families can be helped to foster their children's literacy development. Therefore, researchers are looking at how literacy is a part of the everyday lives of families, particularly in those families where early readers have been identified.

Durkin (1966) conducted one of the first studies to investigate what parents were doing to promote early literacy development. This study was also one of the first to conclude, "there is no simple connection between early reading and the socio-economic status of a family" (p. 136). Durkin carried out two longitudinal studies; the second of which was more concerned with identifying factors associated with early reading. Because there was no group of non-early readers in the first study to use as a comparison to her sample of early readers, Durkin's first study arrived at only, "tentative conclusions about factors that seem especially significant in fostering preschool reading" (Durkin, 1966, p. 67). Thus, Durkin's second study was designed to investigate the preschool years of two cohorts, early readers and non-early readers, in order to identify factors related to early reading and which allowed for comparison between both cohorts. She concluded at the end of her second study, "the presence of parents who spend time with their children; who read to them; who answer their questions and their requests for help; and who demonstrate in their own lives that reading is a rich source of relaxation, information, and contentment" is positively related to early literacy abilities of young children (p. 136).

More specifically, Durkin identified the following literacy-related events occurring in the homes of early readers: parents frequently read to themselves and to their children. children were curious about print and initiated questions pertaining to their struggles with understanding print, children were early "writers", that is, they were often observed scribbling and drawing, materials such as blackboards, pencils and paper were readily available in the homes, and parents believed they could help their preschool children learn to read and were eager to help.

An analysis of the conclusions from Durkin's research reveals that parental interactions with children are critical events that promote early literacy. Children spent some time engaging in literacy events on their own but a great deal of their preschool learning activities were occurring in the context of parent-child interactions. The parents' style of interactions with their children included making their children part of the reading and writing activities taking place in the home.

Not long after Durkin's study, Swift (1970) carried out an investigation of the effects of mothers' reading style on their interactions and communications with their children during story time. Swift was concerned with the fact that although it was known that children's literacy abilities must be fostered as early as possible, outside factors such as the influence of the school were given more attention than what was going on in the homes. Influenced by this concern, Swift's study included an intervention program whereby low-income mothers of preschool children were taught through the technique of

modeling to expand upon ideas presented in stories and to increase the number of questions asked of their children. Swift concluded that there was a significant development in the mothers' abilities to communicate with their children during story time as well as a significant and positive development in their own perceptions of their roles in their children's education and achievement.

Flood (1977) conducted a similar study to that of Swift. He also investigated the effects of parental style on children's early reading abilities. Flood, however, did not limit his study to one particular ethnic, gender, or socio-economic group. His study group comprised parent-child cohorts representing four ethnic groups and three socio-economic levels. All children were administered a prereading test prior to their parents reading to them. The prereading test included five skill areas deemed to be critical to successful reading achievement: alphabet recognition, whole word recognition, vocabulary, visual discrimination, and recognition and reproduction of geometric shapes. The parents were asked to read to their children while they were being tape-recorded; no observer was present. Prior to the reading sessions, fourteen components of parent-child reading interactions such as number of questions asked by the child were selected which served as the basis for analysis of what was going on during the parent-child interactions. Flood concluded that parent and child questioning and discussion as well as parent encouragement were positively related to the development of early literacy concepts as specified in the prereading test.

Parent and child interactions were further investigated through the ethnographic studies of Heath (1983), Pikulski & Tobin (1988), and Taylor (1983). Heath carried out an ethnographic study, lasting over a decade, of two communities in the Piedmont Carolinas, southeastern United States. The main objective of her study was to find out, "the effects of the preschool home and community on the learning of those language structures and uses which were needed in classrooms and job settings" (p. 4). Although Heath did not focus on identifying factors related to early literacy development, she did conclude that early reading and writing were fostered by the daily literacy-related activities taking place in the home and community. Heath observed that literacy-learning developed in the context of life experiences and not from the teaching and learning of a set of isolated skills. In her study, she described one group of parents as consciously focusing their children's attention on events that happened in their lives. The following is an example of an adult, from Heath's study, expanding upon a young child's simple phrase, "Go kool" and Heath's analysis of the event:

> Sally, banging on the backdoor, screamed "Go kool," and Aunt Sue responded "No, Sally, you can't go to *school* yet, Lisa will be back, come on, help mamma put the pans away." Aunt Sue assumed Sally both wanted to *go to school* and was commenting on the fact that Lisa had just *gone to school.* This phenomenon of expansions, taking a minimal phrase such as "Go kool" and interpreting and expanding it, characterizes much of the talk adults address to young children (Heath, 1983, pp. 124-125).

This particular group of parents expected children to have a clear understanding of daily experiences and to be able to verbalize their thoughts accurately to others which,

consequently, often entailed conversation between the parent and the child and/or parental verbal extension of the child's ideas.

Also investigating the influence of family context on early literacy, Taylor (1983), using Durkin's (1966) questionnaire, developed a list of questions to be used in her study of early readers. Although the questions from Durkin's study provided a good starting point for Taylor, she found that her informants took her well-beyond the boundaries of the questions. After three years of research, Taylor, like Heath, concluded, "literacy develops best in relational contexts which are meaningful to the young child" (p. 79), that is, children have a better understanding of the processes of reading and writing when these processes mediate events between and among family members. An example of building relational contexts is given by one informant in Taylor's study:

> The other night Ellie and I bought a copy of *Peter Rabbit* in French for Hannah, to put in her stocking (for Christmas) because we wanted to have a toy or something. And Hannah has always loved *Peter Rabbit*, so we had it out here and we were looking at it trying to decide whether Ellie should have it because she just started taking French or whether we should really give it to Hannah. Hannah came in from dancing class and said, "Oh my goodness, French *Peter Rabbit*" and picked it up and we both said to her, "Well, Merry Christmas to you." Everyone was tired. Hannah has decided she's old enough to date; we've decided she isn't. Great constant conflict and very few close moments; it's a real pulling away. And she sat down with it and she opened it up and began looking through it and she said, "Look, the pictures are exactly the same." We always keep *Peter Rabbit* right here, so we got the English and we read a page and then she read a page and the next thing we knew we were going through all the *Peter Rabbit* books, and when we looked up Dan had gone to bed hours ago. It was twenty minutes to eleven and we were reading *Peter Rabbit*, curled up on the couch, the three of us. What a marvelous evening that was, to go back all the way back to the age of three or four, and it was just a wonderful time (pp. 82-83).

The point of this story is that literacy provided a medium through which a mother and her daughter could communicate again and feel a close relationship. Additionally, in a context such as this, the daughter has a concept of what she is doing, in other words, the event has meaning for her. Also, there is a comfortable and positive atmosphere between the parent and child; not the kind of tense atmosphere that often arises out of a drill and practice exercise used by some parents.

Drill and practice exercises, or isolated exercises for the sake of literacy-learning were not often observed in the homes of the families that Taylor studied. Rather, she observed that reading and writing occurred as naturally as listening and speaking in the families of those children whose literacy skills developed early which is probably why literacy developed (Taylor, 1983). Children were observed, sometimes with the help of parents, "reading" signs, typing, playing with plastic letters, writing on driveways with chalk, writing their own names, "writing" messages and "reading" books. In a majority of the observed cases, children initiated the events and then requested help from the parent.

Teale and his colleagues (1986) conducted a study of 24 low-income children representing three ethnic groups in San Diego. This study clearly pointed out that low-income children, like many other children from families of different socio-economic levels, have a variety of experiences with print prior to school entry (Teale, 1986). He concluded it is the quantity and quality of their interactions with print that make the differences in their literacy development. Another major finding from this research, as found in the

studies of Heath (1983) and Taylor (1983), was that literacy activities for the sake of literacy learning occurred only a small percent of the time. The majority of literacy-learning encounters occurred because of other family-related activities: daily-living routines (e.g. shopping and paying bills), entertainment (e.g. reading a novel and reading a T.V. guide), school-related activities (e.g. playing "school" and observing siblings' homework lessons), work-related activities (e.g. reading a manual and filling out forms), religious events (e.g. Bible reading and reading children's Sunday school work), interpersonal communication (e.g. sending cards and writing letters), participating in "information networks" (e.g. reading the sports page and browsing a magazine) and storybook time (Teale, 1986). The amount of time children were involved in these learning encounters varied greatly from child to child. Furthermore, those children who had received greater amounts of exposure to and interactions with print were the children who were superior in reading development.

Building on the research on parent-child interactions and its relationship to early literacy development, Pikulski and Tobin (1988) conducted a study which included investigating two cohorts, 30 early readers and 30 nonearly readers, over a six-year period; from kindergarten to grade six. The first report on this study by Tobin (1981) included the results of an investigation of the factors associated with early reading (Pikulski & Tobin, 1988). He concluded that parental assistance was a critical factor in young children's literacy advancement and:

> ... that the parents of early readers were more likely: a) to engage their children in informal, game-like activities which could be expected to promote their mastery of letter-sound correspondence; and (b) to take advantage of opportunities to help their children develop and/or extend their sight vocabulary, i.e. by pointing out the words on signs, packages, etc. (pp. 2052A-2053A).

Tobin and Pikulski (1988) conducted the second segment which involved following the two cohorts until the sixth grade to find out if the early reading group would continue to achieve better than the nonearly reading group. They concluded that the early readers did maintain superior reading achievement which led them to the final portion of their study to investigate why the early readers continued to achieve better than the nonearly readers. They concluded that the most important factor associated with early reading and continuous reading achievement of the children in their study was parental assistance. The parents not only spent quality time reading and writing with their children but encouraged their children to read independently.

Current research in emergent literacy has found literacy-learning to be an interactive process powered by parental expectations and values. Parent-child interactions as they pertain to how parents consciously focus their children's attention on the meanings of print in their environment, how parents create daily environments where print mediates social interactions and independent activities, and how children and parents read and write together, will be explored in subsequent sections.

Preschool Children's Acquisition of Print Concepts

As parents interact with their preschool children in the context of reading and writing, they provide opportunities for their children to acquire print concepts which are fundamental to the development of conventional literacy. Print concepts include children's understanding of oral to print matching, their knowledge of the conventions of reading and writing (left-to-right), their understanding that they can produce print in a variety of ways, their abilities to recognize print in their environments, as well as their letter and word recognition abilities and phonological awareness (Adams, 1990; Lomax & McGee, 1987; Phillips, Norris, & Mason, 1996).

Durkin (1966) conducted one of the first studies to show that preschool children can acquire print concepts through experiences provided by their parents. She was able to show that prior to the children's conventional reading abilities, parents provided environments that fostered their young children's interest in and learning of letters and words, "Many parents of early readers attributed preschool interest in reading partly to interest in the meanings of words" (Durkin, 1966, p. 100). Many of the parents reported their children would often ask, "What do these words say?" Additionally, Durkin found through interviews with the parents that many of them gave help to their preschoolers in the areas of identification of written words, the meanings of words, spelling and the sounds of letters (p. 101). The evidence provided in Durkin's studies led the way for further research on the acquisition of print concepts (Lass, 1982; Mason, 1980;

McCormick & Mason, 1989; Phillips et al., 1996).

Mason (1980) conducted a nine month study of 38 middle to upper-middle class preschoolers. At the preschool in which this study took place, two programs were conducted; one focused on the learning of words and another focused on the learning of letters. She wanted to determine if the children in the preschool settings were able to learn to read, and if so, how they acquired this ability. Mason also set out to identify the role of the parents in fostering their children's abilities to read by analyzing parents' responses to questions such as, "Does the child point out and name letters of the alphabet when playing?" and, "How often is the child read to at home per week?" (pp. 225-226).

Mason stated although studies have shown many children have a great deal of knowledge about reading when they enter school, few studies have, "attended to children's changing interest or expertise in letter naming, printing, and sign and label reading" (p. 205). Thus, Mason set out to show that children go through, "a set of natural steps" to acquire the ability to read; a developmental sequence comprised of the acquisition of concepts about letter symbols, letter sounds, and printed words as labels for objects. Children were tested individually at select times throughout the year on their "word and letter knowledge, interest in reading, word learning ability, recall of words previously learned, and ability to verbalize the distinction between a class (animals) and a subclass " (p. 210).

Results of Mason's study showed significant increases from September until May

in the children's abilities in areas deemed by Mason to be significant in the development of reading. By May, 95% of the children could recognize more than 20 letters, 82% could print more than 20 letters and 63% could read more than 20 words. These results supported Mason's belief that children go through "a set of natural steps" to acquire conventional literacy skills; that is, naming and printing of letters precedes the reading of signs and labels. Analysis of the questionnaire answered by the parents revealed that help from the parents was significant in the development of those skills tested. Mason concluded:

> Experiences in printing, recognizing letters and words, and trying to read -- when fostered by parents-- are the sorts of events which allow children's formation of scripts about what reading is and how it is executed (p. 222).

Another study which focussed on the development of print concepts prior to the acquisition of conventional literacy skills was conducted by Lass (1982). Encouraged by observations of her ten month old son's apparent scanning of words in a magazine, Lass took on the role of parent-researcher. She followed her son's reading development from the time of his birth until he was two. By recording her son's reading behaviors in a diary at least twice a month, Lass defined reading behaviors as, "skills with and interest in print (graphic symbols), books, or the language of literature (stories, rhymes, traditional songs)" (p. 22). Lass stated that the reading behaviors displayed by her son did not result from learning through drill and practice exercises but from learning through daily exposure to and use of literacy. Lass concluded the home environment fostered literacy learning

because reading and writing materials were readily available in the home, she and her husband frequently read to their son, and when he asked questions about print they were eager to answer.

Results of Lass's study were very specific. She outlined skills acquired by her son over the two year period. Some of her observations include the following: at 2 1/2 months of age the child was scanning print from left to right; at 16 months of age he was scribbling with his finger; at 18 months he was able to identify 14 letters of the alphabet; at 20 months he could spell his name; and at 24 months he could identify products from logos. These results confirm the "natural hierarchy" of reading skills identified by Mason (1980). It appears from these two studies (Lass, 1982; Mason, 1980) that naming and printing letters as well as recognizing words on signs and labels provide the necessary background for the development of early literacy abilities.

Building on Mason's model which outlined a hierarchy of "natural skills" in which children go through to attain conventional literacy, McCormick and Mason (1989) carried out a two year study aimed at "encouraging parent-child book reading during preschool years" (p. 154). They supported the view that the role of parents is critical in fostering early literacy concepts such as knowledge of letters and words which later leads to "beginning reading success in school" (p. 155). Fifty-one preschool children attending four Head Start classrooms participated. The children were pretested individually on the abilities of letter naming, identifying signs and labels, and book reading. Parents were

initially asked to fill out a questionnaire; a questionnaire aimed at identifying, "the children's interest in and knowledge about literacy and parents' support for it" (p. 160). The children were then divided into two groups. In one group, McCormick not only read and discussed books with the children, but she encouraged the children to talk about the books, to read with her, and to read independently. In an attempt to achieve these goals, books containing such features as simple text and brevity were chosen; books from a series originally developed by Mason. Following the reading sessions, copies of the books were mailed to each child's home. In the other group, McCormick told stories such as *The Three Little Bears* and *Little Red Riding Hood.* Since the stories were recited, there was no text involved. However, McCormick did show pictures to the children as she was reading which were mailed to each child's home.

At the end of this part of their study, the children were tested again. The children who participated in the group that focussed on the use and reading of books scored higher on all posttest measures. Parents were asked to fill out another questionnaire similar to the first one but this time they were asked to respond to additional questions pertaining to their children's interest in the materials sent home. Results indicated that those children who received the books in the mail showed greater interest in hearing and telling stories, in printing, in reading, and in naming words on signs and labels (p. 163).

The second part of McCormick and Mason's study included following the children through their kindergarten year. Intervention consisted only of sending books to those

children who had received books in the first part of this study and sending worksheets to those who had received pictures. Children in the "book" group were found to be developing superior emergent literacy concepts over the picture group and the former were more likely to succeed in first grade. McCormick and Mason clearly pointed out the value of reading to and with children prior to formal instruction:

> The results of this study, in conjunction with the earlier studies, support the thesis that children initially at risk for reading can be helped by learning to recite texts and receiving little books at home. The process of change appears through an increased interest in reading and more parental involvement in their child's interest in literacy. Children then try to read, they read and write more often, and they learn more letters, letter sounds, and printed words. We conclude that such a treatment for academically at-risk populations of children can lead to active involvement in literacy and to a more even start in first-grade reading (p. 173).

Using the work of McCormick and Mason (1989) as a foundation, Phillips, Norris, and Mason (1996) conducted a five-year study which included an intervention program aimed at encouraging, "parent-child, teacher-child, and child-child book reading" (p. 174). Three purposes were given for this study; the first of which was to conduct an investigation to find out if intervention provided through the kindergarten year could lead, "to positive effects on knowledge of early literacy concepts at the end of kindergarten" (p. 174). The population for this study comprised young children from the province of Newfoundland. These children were considered by the authors to be at risk of school failure and likely to encounter difficulty with the kindergarten language arts program. Phillips, Norris, and Mason stated:

> Given the persistently and disproportionately low literacy levels in the eastern province of Canada in which this study was conducted (Southam Newspaper Group, 1987; Statistics Canada, 1991), we conjectured that the likelihood of such a mismatch is heightened, and that an intervention that fostered the early literacy concepts that underlie knowledge of the structure and functions of print, concepts presupposed by kindergarten language programs, might help these children get a better start in literacy acquisition (p. 175).

Thus, these researchers designed a new program to be used with the population of children participating. This program consisted of using a modified version of Mason's Little Books (McCormick & Mason, 1990). It was predicted that the use of these little books would lead the children, "into acquiring basic concepts about print, such as left-to-right directionality, oral-to-printed word matches, and some sounds of letters heard in words" (p. 180). The acquisition of these concepts was deemed by the authors of this study to be critical to the ability to read.

The population of kindergarten students was divided into four groups; three treatment groups and one control group. The control group received no intervention. The first treatment group received the Little Books at home and the parents were responsible for reading to the children at home. Parents were instructed on how to use the books with the children and help was available by telephone if it was needed. The second treatment group was also exposed to the use of the Little Books at home but this group received the additional use of the books in school. Parents and teachers in this group were instructed on how to use the books with the children. The third treatment group received intervention at the school only.

At the end of kindergarten, "the children in the control group were an entire standard deviation behind the treatment groups" (p. 186). The children in the treatment groups had shown considerable improvement on measures such as print and book directionality, letter knowledge, phonological awareness, word recognition and the ability to identify words in isolation. Phillips, Norris, and Mason followed the children until the end of fourth grade and found the children in the treatment groups continued to show slightly better reading abilities. The authors stated, "it appeared that the children in the treatment groups were able to use what they had learned in kindergarten about early literacy concepts to profit more from what they were taught in subsequent grades" (p. 191).

It is evident from the research that the time parents spend with their preschool children in the context of reading and writing is crucial to the development of their children's emergent literacy abilities. Children can learn not only the functions of print in society but also the forms and structures in which various kinds of print are found and used. However, given the research available on how some parents are helping to foster their children's emergent literacy abilities, many parents currently are still, "unskilled at supporting their young children's literacy development" (Phillips et al., 1996, p. 176). Therefore, an examination of research conducted on literacy interactions between parents and early readers and writers will likely reveal information for working with parents to better prepare their children for successful literacy achievement.

Parent-Child Interactions During Story Time

No other area in the research of young children's literacy development has received more attention than the act of reading to children (Sulzby & Teale, 1991). Studies on the relationships between reading to children and such factors as language development (Roser & Martinez, 1985; Whitehurst, Falco, Lonigan, Fishel, DeBaryshe, Valdez-Menchaca, & Caufield, 1988), vocabulary development (Senechal & Cornell, 1993), and increasing knowledge of concepts about print (Durkin, 1966; Snow & Ninio, 1986) have been as numerous. Based on research findings, there is no question that reading to children facilitates their literacy development but questions have been asked about "how" reading to children fosters such a complex process.

Studies have shown that parents discussing stories with children, expanding upon and extending children's ideas as they relate to the story, as well as parents and children posing questions in the context of story time are significantly and positively related to literacy development (Flood, 1977; Roser & Martinez, 1985; Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Swift, 1970). Current research has revealed the amount and levels of discussion and questioning vary within families because of factors such as socio-economic status (Heath, 1983) and the ages of the children (Resnick, Roth, Aaron, Scott, Wolking, Larsen, & Packer, 1987; Senechal & Cornell, 1993). However, throughout the research on emergent literacy, the interaction of discussing and questioning that takes place as parents read to children has been identified as critical to the fostering of early literacy development,

"Simply reading aloud to children has merit; however, reading and discussing the story may be more valuable in helping children develop reading skills" (Ollila & Mayfield, 1992, p. 20). Despite the fact that much is known about the importance of parent-child interactions during reading time, many parents do not know that reading to children includes the verbal interactions of discussing and questioning (Edwards, 1995; Strickland & Taylor, 1989). Hence, if it is known that parents do not have the knowledge about the quality of interactions that should take place during reading time, then intervention programs are needed whereby parents can learn "how" to interact effectively with their children while reading to them. Edwards (1989) concluded effective intervention programs can be developed based on the intervention models developed and implemented as described in the research (Edwards, 1989; Flood, 1977; Resnick et al., 1987; Shanahan & Hogan, 1983; Spewock, 1988). However, no one program is likely to meet all the goals selected for a particular group of parents and their children. Each program has a specific focus and hence, the program must be selected or altered to include those features most appropriate given the purpose of an intervention program, the age level of the children, the status of the parents, and the geographical location.

Flood (1977) conducted one of the first intervention studies that attempted to relate early literacy development with what was going on during parent-child reading time. Flood's sample comprised parent-child cohorts representing four ethnic groups and three socio-economic levels. All children were administered a prereading test prior to their

parents reading to them. The prereading test included five skill areas deemed to be critical to successful reading achievement: alphabet recognition, whole word recognition, vocabulary, visual discrimination and recognition and reproduction of geometric shapes. The parents read to their children while they were being audio recorded; no observer was present. On the basis of fourteen preselected components of parent-child reading interactions such as positive reinforcement by the parent, Flood concluded that parent and child questioning and discussion as well as parent encouragement were positively related to the development of early literacy concepts as specified in the prereading test.

Flood's study, although empirically linking components of parent-child interactions with early literacy development (Shanahan & Hogan, 1983), was limited by the use of a tape-recording of the parent-child reading sessions to arrive at an analysis of the interactions. The presence of an observer would likely inhibit parent-child interactions, many parents would probably feel uncomfortable being observed by "experts" and consequently behave differently. On balance, however, observations of the sessions would provide additional information such as the parent pointing to the words while reading or the child holding the book; parent and child behaviors that could only be arrived at through observations (Shanahan & Hogan, 1983).

To overcome the shortcoming of the taped sessions, Shanahan and Hogan (1983) used observations to investigate the relationship between children's print awareness and parent-child reading episodes in an attempt to isolate and describe effective parent reading

behaviors. Eighteen parent-child cohorts representing white middle socio-economic status families from Chicago comprised the population for this study. Prior to observations of the joint reading episodes and interviews with parents, which took place in the homes of the families, the *Concepts About Print Test* (Clay, 1979) was administered to all children. Parents then read *The Little Engine That Could* to their children while being observed. The interactions were recorded using a checklist. This checklist included, according to Shanahan and Hogan (1983):

> prereading preparation (discussions of title, content, pictures, references to the child's past experiences, seating arrangement); reading interactions (number of questions asked by parents, questions answered by parents, pictures discussed, references to child's experiences, pages on which pointing occurred, pages the child watched, encouragement to join in the reading); and post-reading interactions (discussion, number of parent-asked questions) (pp. 213-214).

Following the observations, all parents were interviewed to obtain other pertinent information such as how often they read to their children.

Shanahan and Hogan found three factors to be significantly related to children's print awareness: minutes per week parents read to their children, answering children's questions, and relating the story to children's past experiences (Shanahan & Hogan, 1983). Although limited by a small sample size and the use of only one observation of each parent-child cohort as stated by the researchers, this study does support the findings of other research that parent questioning (Flood, 1977; Swift, 1970), the amount of time parents read to children (Briggs & Elkind, 1973; Sutton, 1964) and relating the story to children's experiences in life (Flood, 1977; Heath, 1983) are positively related to

children's early literacy development.

In 1987, Resnick and his colleagues conducted an intervention study of mothers reading to their preschool children with the attempt to clarify further the interactions that go on; particularly the reading behaviors of mothers. The researchers stated that there was no observational tool available whereby parents' reading behaviors could be recorded and analyzed. Therefore, Resnick and his colleagues, through a comprehensive analysis of 116 episodes on videotapes showing mothers reading to their children (ages 6 months-24 months), developed an evaluation tool which could be used to isolate particular components of a parent's reading style. The final product of the evaluation tool contained 56 items which was further divided into 4 domains: body management (e.g. lies alongside child), management of the book (e.g. points to the pictures/words and varies voice), language proficiency (e.g. describes pictures and repeats child's vocalizations), and attention to affect (e.g. pauses for child's response) (Resnick et al. 1987). Also included in the checklist were behaviors deemed to impact negatively on parent-child reading sessions such as: limiting child's movements, child not allowed to turn the pages, and parent so engrossed in the book that the child is forgotten. If these negative behaviors were observed, they were scored and subtracted from a parent's total score. One outcome of this study was a comprehensive and clear instrument which could be used to identify a parent's reading style. However, the degree to which certain reading behaviors affect literacy development would need to be further investigated.

Spewock (1988) discussed the findings of a nine-year home-based intervention program implemented in Tyrone, Pennsylvania. This program was designed to deal with the problem of children entering school not prepared for the literacy demands of the kindergarten program. In order to deal with this problem, a reading specialist was hired to assess the children's literacy abilities at the beginning of and at the end of the program and to train parents at home. The training sessions included the specialist reading to the child but allowing the parent to participate and following up the session with book-related activities such as finger plays and puzzles. Before the specialist left the homes, materials such as books and related activities were left for the parents. Spewock described this program as successful in creating a role for the parents in their children's early education. The parents learned how to more effectively interact with their children as indicated through the parents' comments. Examples of statements made by some parents include: "The program has helped us to understand the stages in which a young mind grows, what to expect from our son, and what might be too difficult for him to understand" and, "The program has helped me to see the importance of reading to Tommy. He really loves books now. We've developed a closer relationship by sharing this time together" (pp. 651-652). In addition to the information obtained from the parents, an analysis of the test scores of the children showed that progress was made in literacy development.

Also working with parents, Edwards (1989) conducted an eight week study of five low income black mothers and their preschool children. The purpose of her study was, "to

extend research concerning the interactive behavior between lower socio-economic status black parent-child dyads during story readings and children's responses to these readings" (p. 225). Although numerous studies are available on parents reading to children, Edwards claims little information is available on lower socio-economic populations in this area of emergent literacy and further that limited research is available to provide strategies to parents as to how to effectively interact with their children during story time.

Using previous research conclusions about the importance of questions asked and comments made during reading episodes between a parent and a child, Edwards set out to teach these five mothers how to use effective questioning and discussion when reading to their children. Edwards' comments and suggestions to the mothers were consciously aimed, "at developing their children's knowledge of questions, book reading, print awareness, and oral and written language development" (p. 228). In order to track the progress made by the mothers, Edwards used a checklist similar in format to that of Resnick et al (1987). At the end of the study, Edwards found that the parents were using more appropriate reading strategies but more importantly they were engaging in a literacy event previously not a part of their daily lives. Edwards pointed out that despite the lack of knowledge that some parents have, intervention programs can be put in place whereby parents can be taught "how" to interact effectively with their children during story time.

Senechal and Cornell (1993) stated that although much research has concluded that parent-child joint reading interactions foster literacy development, "the beneficial

effects of these different reading practices have yet to be determined" (p. 362). These researchers went on to say that the beneficial effects of parent reading behaviors on children's literacy development have not been proven experimentally. In other words, it is not known precisely which parent reading behaviors affect which components of literacy development. While this is true, there is much evidence available in the literature to show that those children who actively participate in joint book-reading interactions with their parents generally develop earlier and superior literacy abilities, even though we do not understand fully the specifics.

Senechal and Cornell (1993) conducted a study of 80 four year-olds and 80 five year-olds in an attempt to determine whether certain parent-reading behaviors fostered children's vocabulary development and whether a single reading of a book to a child could facilitate vocabulary development. An experimenter tested each child's vocabulary knowledge before another experimenter read to the child. Four reading control groups were set up whereby the researchers could isolate specific adult reading behaviors deemed to foster children's reading development: the use of what- and where-questions, the use of recasts, reading the text as presented but emphasizing certain words by repeating them, and reading the text as presented (p. 362). Immediately following each reading session, a child was retested and one week later was tested again.

Senechal and Cornell concluded reading a book verbatim was just as effective in fostering a child's receptive vocabulary as actively involving a child in the reading episode,

and furthermore a single reading of a book increased young children's receptive vocabulary development. However, an analysis of the results showed the children did not improve significantly in learning the target words, "only 21% of the ten new words were acquired" (p. 370). Test results also showed the children performed better in the groups in which recasting and questioning were used by the readers. Although the scores were only slightly higher than the scores of the children in those groups in which the techniques of verbatim reading and word repetition were used, they do support other research findings that active participation of children in joint reading episodes often lead to superior reading achievement scores. Senechal and Cornell stated, "a single rendition of the book might not be sufficient to allow the emergence of potential differences in vocabulary acquisition as a function of reading practice" (p. 369). Therefore, reading episodes in which the children were actively involved may have led to even better performance if the book had been read to the children more than once.

Research on emergent literacy has shown parent-child interactions are related to literacy development. The quality of parent reading behaviors as they read to their young children will positively affect their children's level of print concepts and abilities. The acquisition of these concepts and abilities is not limited to reading development but is also part of writing development. Parent-child interactions as they relate to and positively affect young children's writing development will be explored in the next section.

Parent-Child Writing Interactions

Emergent literacy includes not only the process of learning to read but also the process of learning to write. Teale (1986) states, "Perhaps nowhere is the importance of the concept of emergent literacy more evident than with young children's writing" (p. 201). In other words, it is probably easier to study the development of young children's writing than their reading. However, a review of the research on emergent literacy indicates that research on emergent writing has been limited, particularly when compared to the studies on emergent reading (Sulzby & Teale, 1991).

Early writing development has been studied from a variety of perspectives. For example, studies have been conducted on the stages of early writing development (Clay, 1987; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982), the connections between writing and reading (Chomsky, 1971; Durkin, 1966; Tierney & Shanahan, 1991), and the positive influences of parents on young children's writing development (Clay, 1987; Gundlach, McLane, Stott, & McNamee, 1985; Taylor, 1983). It is the latter, parental influences, that will be the focus of this section but there will be references to other concepts such as the stages of writing development since these concepts are part of what parents need to know in order to influence positively their children's early writing development.

In a previous section of this chapter, it was stated that research on emergent literacy has shown that quality parent-child interactions are related to positive literacy developments in young children. More specifically, research has shown that parents can

play a critical role in the fostering of their children's writing abilities (Clay, 1987; Gundlach et al., 1985; Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983). Children's experimentation with written language allows them to move from very early stages of scribbling and drawing to the conventional form of writing. However, in order for experimentation to take place, young children must live in a home environment that allows for these activities to occur (Morrow, 1992). The opportunities for use of and exposure to written language that parents provide for their children as well as the interactions that take place between them positively affects, "the specific behaviors they display" (Dyson, 1994, p. 301), that is, the writing behaviors displayed by the children. Children who display superior and early development of literacy are usually from literacy-rich and interactive home environments. Subsequently, an analysis of what is going on in such environments may reveal important information to parents, particularly to parents who do not know how to help their children get an early start with writing.

Durkin (1966) found in her longitudinal studies that the early readers were also early writers. Parents of the early readers were interviewed and asked why their children were interested in reading prior to starting school. The majority of the parents reported, "the availability of paper and pencils in the home" (p. 100). From Durkin's interviews with the parents, she was able to identify a sequence in which children's written language developed into their interest in reading. Durkin stated:

> Almost without exception the starting point of curiosity about written language was an interest in scribbling and drawing. From this developed interest

> in copying objects and letters of the alphabet. When a child was able to copy letters--not all of the children who had the interest developed the skill--his almost inevitable request was, "Show me my name".
>
> Many parents also told of how a child's interest in his own name grew to include interest in copying the names of parents and siblings, other relatives and friends, and sometimes pets. Here, too, it appeared that interest in copying led to long-term and seemingly, intense "projects" which included, for example, the making and remaking of calendars and address books. What all of this emphasized is that preschool interest in reading very often develops from a prior interest in copying and writing. As one mother put it, some young children are "pencil and paper kids" (p. 108).

The children's exploration with writing appeared, from the information obtained from the parents in Durkin's study, to develop before their interest in reading; a concept reinforced by Chomsky (1971). Although Durkin's study pointed out early readers were involved in early writing and that parents often interacted with the children during writing episodes, it was limited in that it did not specifically outline how parents helped their children advance from scribbling and drawing to conventional writing.

A pioneering study by Bissex (1980) provided much information on young children's writing development before they received formal instruction (Gundlach et al., 1985), though it did not focus specifically on the role of parents in fostering early writing development. Rather, Bissex focused on her own son, Paul's "natural" writing development. Bissex began taking notes on Paul's language development, not from the perspective of a researcher, but as a parent interested in her son's reading development. Later, influenced by a fascination with her five year old son's spelling strategies and the work of Read (1970), Bissex became a parent-researcher and began a six year case study

of Paul. He already had a great deal of knowledge about written language and was ready to explore and experiment with writing independently, without the help of his parents. Additionally, Paul was using inventive spelling in his writings. Consequently, the fact that this study began when he was five years old and was writing at the inventive spelling stage limits our understandings of what went on before the age of five; the preschool ages. These limitations of Bissex's study set the stage for the research conducted by Gundlach et al. (1985), research that will be discussed later in this section.

Taylor (1983) studied the development of young children's writing by observing what was going on in the homes of early readers. She found that the parents did not intentionally teach their children to write. Rather, they provided opportunities for their children to experiment with writing while observing them. These opportunities were not literacy-learning activities for the sake of literacy-learning but were part of the daily activities that took place in the homes. Furthermore, when Taylor questioned parents about particular pieces of writing completed by their children, some could not remember anything about the writings since writing was part of their daily routines and not something out of the ordinary for the families. Children were often "writing" in the contexts of other activities; writings which quite frequently went unnoticed (Taylor, 1983). Taylor provided, in her study, an example of such an incident:

> We finished looking at the papers, and I followed Jill into the kitchen where she was preparing a Chinese meal. She showed me a cookbook and told me of her Chinese cooking class. Moving around the kitchen while we talked, I picked up a piece of yellow lined paper off a counter top. I asked Jill if it was for my

> collection. She looked at it and said, "No, I don't know where that came from." Steven walked into the kitchen and I asked him if he knew anything about the paper. He said, "Sure, I just did it." While we were talking, Steven was drawing letters. No one was watching him, and no one had seen him put the paper on the counter top--a perfect example of unnoticed momentary writing activities (p. 58).

In addition to describing these independent writing activities by the children, Taylor described other, "longer episodes where children sought the participation of a parent or sibling" (p. 59). One example was of a three year, eight month old boy who enjoyed making letters out of wooden blocks with the help of his mother or older sister. During the activity the boy and the older adult would talk about and/or question the letters that were made as shown in the following episode from Taylor's study:

> While Donna and I talked and listened to the tape, James played. After a while, he called out, "*U*!" He had put two of the curved blocks together, and it did indeed look like a *U*. Donna turned around and said, "That's right, *U*." She joined James on the floor and started sorting through the blocks. After a few seconds, she said, "If we add some more we could make an *O*." She added some blocks to the *U* and said, "What's that?" James chirped "*O*!" (p. 59).

Another example was of a three year, six month old boy who "wrote" a letter to his friend but sealed it an envelope before his mother could see it. The boy then asked his mother to address the envelope, after which, they took it to the post office (p. 42). Although the children in these writing episodes sought the help of their parents, it is important to notice that it was the children who initiated the writing events and not the parents. The parents were supportive and informative, and provided the children with the help they needed but they did not "take over" the writing activities.

Gundlach et al. (1985) attempted to extend the findings of Bissex (1980) by

uncovering information about preschool children's emergent writing. They conducted three case studies of the writing developments of preschool children, the first of which described the interactions between four year old Jeremy and his parents in the context of writing activities. The purpose of this study was, "to describe the kinds of activities and interactions between Jeremy and his parents that involved writing, and the kind of support his parents provided for his early writing" (p. 6). The authors postulated that if children are learning to write at home then, parents must be involved, "in other words, writing does not just happen" (p. 6).

The information obtained for Gundlach et al.'s first case study came primarily from the notes taken by the mother of four year old Jeremy. She was asked, "to observe and record Jeremy's writing activities as well as her (and her husband's) part in them" (p. 6). The information obtained from Jeremy's mother indicated that the parents played a critical role in the development of Jeremy's writing. The parents spent a lot of time with their son as he engaged in writing activities and they provided a "language and literacy rich" home environment (p. 7). Both of the parents in this study were writers and often wrote and read at home in the presence of their son thus providing excellent literacy role models. Jeremy often imitated the writing behaviors displayed by his parents as described in this example:

> One evening, Jeremy told his father that he wanted to make a book. His father gave him four 5 x 8 cards, and Jeremy typed a line of randomly chosen letters on one side of each card. He then took them to his father and asked him to staple then together into a book. His father asked him what he had written, and Jeremy

> replied "a surprise" (In reporting on this, his mother commented that this response usually means that Jeremy doesn't have an answer.) (p. 13).

Jeremy and his parents often played games and engaged in pretend-play together. These activities usually had some sort of writing involved. Not only did the parents write but Jeremy wrote in his own "emergent" way. Jeremy's parents accepted what he had written and often tried to expand or elaborate on what he had accomplished himself as shown in the following example:

> Mother: What word do you want to spell?
> Jeremy: Ball.
> Mother: Okay. What letter do you think it starts with?
> Jeremy: B.
> Mother: Can you write a B?
> Jeremy: I'll write a small b. That's easier. (Writes b.)
> Mother: Very good. What do you think has an "ah" sound for the next letter?
> Jeremy: I?
> Mother: No.
> Jeremy: E?
> Mother: That does sound like it, but the letter you use for ball is A.
> Jeremy: (Writes a capital A.)
> Mother: Very good. Now what has the "LL" sound?
> Jeremy: (No hesitation.) L.
> Mother: Right! Can you write that?
> Jeremy: No. You do it. I did all these other letters. Now you have to do some.
> Mother: Alright. (She writes an L.) Now you can write another right next to it?
> Jeremy: Okay. (Writes an O.)
> Mother: That's not an L.
> Jeremy: (Laughs wickedly. Great delight at the trick he has played.)
> Mother: Do you want to read a story now?
> Jeremy: Yes.

Writing was a part of Jeremy's daily life but not something that was taken for granted by his parents. His parents valued reading and writing and took special notice and

pride in their son's writing accomplishments (p. 19). Gundlach et al. summarized the role of the parents in Jeremy's writing development and this can be valuable to many parents who want to help foster their children's early writing development:

> Within the context of this relationship, there are several specific things that Jeremy's parents do that may encourage and facilitate the development of his writing activities; they read to Jeremy; they encourage his pretend play, his fantasy stories, and his pretend writing and reading; and they assist him in his efforts to write and spell correctly. For his parents, it seems natural to do all of these things with Jeremy; activities that involve writing are *in* the relationship. Writing is part of the fabric of the relationship, and writing is one of the many activities in which the relationship is formed and through which it is expressed (pp. 19-20).

Although many families do not include reading and writing in their daily lives, print does mediate many of the activities of today's families. Consequently, the role of parents must include their preschool children in reading and writing activities in an interactive manner. Parents must guide and direct their children's exposure to and involvement with print so that their children will acquire the print concepts fundamental to the development of conventional literacy.

Summary

The research on emergent literacy supports the premise that the interactive role of parents is critical to the development of preschool children's literacy abilities. The parents must not only be informed about ways to help their children learn to read and write but they must take on an interactive role whereby they read to and with their children, they expand upon their children's literacy related knowledge, and they provide materials in the

home that foster literacy learning.

However, much of the research has focused on parents of early readers and writers or on intervention programs aimed at helping low-income parents develop sufficient literacy skills to help their children. Very few studies have examined what parents know about preschool emergent literacy. Consequently, there is a need for a study such as this one which examines what parents know in comparison to what is known in the research. The design of this study is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

THE DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the present study was to examine what parents from rural communities know about fostering preschool emergent literacy. The review of the literature presented in Chapter II was critical for an analysis and synthesis of the research on emergent literacy development. This examination revealed factors such as children's preschool literacy experiences, parents' knowledge of emergent literacy, and the quantity and quality of interactive literacy experiences between parents and children to have a significant and positive influence on children's development of conventional literacy. On the basis of these factors and using, as guides, two questionnaires previously used in related studies, a questionnaire was modified to examine what rural parents know about preschool literacy development and the extent to which they foster their children's early reading and writing abilities.

This chapter is organized into three main sections: method, final data collection, and coding the data. The method includes descriptions of the sample, the data-collecting instrument called the Parent Questionnaire on Emergent Literacy (PQEL), and the pilot study of the PQEL. The final data collection includes a description of the procedures used. Coding of the data details the methods by which the data was organized and analyzed.

Method

Sample

Participants in this study were taken from three rural northern Newfoundland communities located approximately 60 km from the nearest urban center. These communities are within the area of the province in which I work and hence my interest in them.

Each of the communities have populations of fewer than 1500 people. Services available are typical of rural communities: convenience stores, a post office, a small public library, and a medical clinic. Also, common to most rural communities, many people were employed in the fishing industry but are now receiving financial assistance due to the northern cod moratorium. Other people are employed in forestry-related jobs, in such places as craft stores and restaurants during the tourist season, and at small businesses such as the post office, convenience stores, and service stations. A small number of people are teachers, social workers, and medical workers.

Parents of children who were born between January 1, 1992 and April 30, 1994 inclusively were asked to participate in this study. Thirty-three parent names and addresses were obtained through preschools but only 22 parents, each with 1 child between the ages of 3 and 5, participated. Preschool children aged three to five years were chosen because they were old enough to be engaged with their parents in literacy events such as scribbling, coloring, looking at books, and attempting to read. Those children born in 1992 would be

attending school in September 1997 so parents were probably preparing their children by trying to teach them the alphabet, to print their names, and other early literacy-related activities. Furthermore, most of the research on preschool literacy involved children ages three to five, so it was most appropriate for this study to include children within the same age range.

Instrument

The PQEL was designed to find out what parents know about preschool literacy development and the extent to which they foster their children's early reading and writing abilities (See Appendix A). The questionnaire focused on four areas related to children's emergent literacy abilities: parents' knowledge of emergent literacy, children's early literacy experiences and development, and the quantity as well as quality of parents' interactive literacy experiences with their children. Each area is discussed in turn.

1. Parents' Knowledge of Emergent Literacy--Parents' knowledge of emergent literacy is one of the single most important factors in fostering the literacy development of their preschool children. However, research has shown that in areas where the overall literacy abilities are low, parents do not know how to foster their children's emergent literacy abilities (Phillips, Norris, & Mason, 1996; Purcell - Gates, L'Allier, & Smith, 1995). Hence, parental responses to the PQEL provide a focus for any attempts to educate parents as to how they can enrich their children's literacy environment and experiences to facilitate acquisition of print concepts fundamental to the development of

conventional literacy.

2. Preschool Children's Early Literacy Experiences and Development--Literacy experiences during preschool years have a powerful impact upon children's emerging literacy abilities and ultimately upon successful reading experiences in school (Clay, 1979). Recent studies by Phillips, Norris, Mason, and Kerr (1990) and Phillips, Norris, and Mason (1996) found that kindergartners from select areas of Newfoundland were at risk of reading failure and that rural kindergartners performed more poorly on all reading measures than did urban kindergartners. The early literacy experiences either being developed or not developed during the preschool years that are known to be critical in fostering preschool children's reading and writing development comprised another set of questions on the PQEL.

3. Quantity of Parent-Child Literacy Experiences--The quantity of time parents spend reading and writing with their children is among the critical factors related to early literacy development in young children. However, reading and writing with young children may occur in many ways in many situations. This set of questions dealt with whether parents are aware of the many opportunities available throughout the day to expose their children to quality literacy experiences.

4. Quality of Parent-Child Interactive Literacy Experiences--The quality of interactive literacy experiences between a parent and a child is more important than the amount of time these experiences take (though quality and quantity together are very

important). Parents who include their children in literacy activities in the home provide valuable opportunities for early reading and writing development. Parents who discuss stories with their children, who question their children about the stories being read to them, and who allow their children to ask questions and make comments about reading and writing activities provide quality literacy experiences.

The PQEL contains 38 questions including questions which provide a range of possible answers and others which require short answers or descriptions. In order to allow for a parent's response that may not be listed among the range of answers, many of the questions included an "other" option. The format and the questions chosen for this questionnaire are based primarily on two previously used questionnaires; one designed by Durkin (1966) and the other designed by Phillips, Norris, Mason, and Kerr (1990). Since both of these questionnaires were used to acquire detailed information on the role of parents in children's literacy development, many of the questions were applicable to this study. However, other questions were added pertaining to events that occur as parents and children interact such as question 3 which asks parents to tell how they read to their children. Additionally, other questions such as questions 33, 34, and 35 which were related to parental reading habits were asked in order to find out if reading and writing were occurring frequently in the child's environment (Hale & Windecker, 1992).

The PQEL included a variety of questions related to parents' knowledge of emergent literacy, their children's literacy development, and the quantity and quality of

interactive literacy experiences with their children. More specifically, questions were developed pertaining to the amount of time parents spent reading to their children, the number of books in their homes, whether they write and color with their children, and whether they help their children to read and write.

Pilot Study

The PQEL was developed primarily using questions and information from two questionnaires (Durkin, 1966; Phillips, Norris, Mason, and Kerr, 1990). Since many of the questions were piloted through previous studies, only one pilot study for this questionnaire was carried out. The purpose of this pilot study was to determine the appropriateness of the questionnaire for a rural setting, the appropriateness of the length of time it would take the respondents to complete the questionnaire, and the clarity of the instructions and questions.

At the outset of gathering parent names for this study, 33 parents received a letter explaining the study and a consent form. Prior to the pilot study, five of the 33 parents were telephoned to request their participation in the pilot phase of the study and to outline the nature of their involvement. Subsequently, five parents of preschool children agreed to participate.

A meeting was held with the parents one evening in a school staffroom in the participants' community. The study was explained briefly and parents were asked if they had any questions. Initially, there were no questions or comments so the questionnaire was

distributed. Directions for completing the questionnaire were not explained in order to establish whether the directions were self-explanatory. While completing the questionnaire, parents were told to question anything they did not understand and to make suggestions if changes needed to be made to make the questionnaire clearer for other parents.

All parents were positive in their comments regarding the format and the length of the questionnaire. They reported the questions to be clear and brief, and were pleased with the length of time it took them to complete the questionnaire, which was approximately 35 minutes. There were, however, some explanations needed regarding four questions: 20, 28, 32b, and 33b. Each is discussed briefly.

Question 20, "Does your child talk to you about writing, reading or TV?" confused one parent who said that she did not understand exactly what the question was asking. It was modified to read, "Does your child talk to you about what he/she writes, reads, or watches on T.V?" Question 28, "Is your child present when help is given to siblings with their homework?" was modified to read, "If you have other children attending school, is your child present when help is given to siblings with their homework?" One parent responded that her child did not have an older sibling attending school so she did not know how to answer this question. Questions 32b and 33b were also modified because two or three parents responded to 33b saying that their husbands read newspapers and magazines but not books. Therefore questions 32b and 33b were

changed to read, "Describe the kinds of books, magazines, and news the child's mother (father in question 33b) likes to read" instead of, "Describe the kinds of books the child's mother (father) likes to read."

Thirty-eight questions remained on the questionnaire with only minor revisions made to these four questions. The questionnaire was then reviewed carefully for other revisions, and later printed and prepared for the final data collection.

Final Data Collection

The final data collection took place over a period of one month, April-May 1997. In order to accommodate 17 parents, four meetings were arranged. Each meeting started with a brief explanation on how to complete the questionnaire and then parents were asked to proceed. Few questions were asked by parents during all four sessions and those posed were mainly to confirm what they already assumed the questions were asking. The majority of parents did not appear to have any difficulty completing the questionnaire. Additionally, all parents were positive in their comments regarding the format and the length of time it took to complete. Some parents stayed after the meeting and asked questions regarding the nature of the study and indicated they would be interested in reading it upon completion.

Although there was genuine interest shown by parents in helping children learn to read and write, there is a concern about the low number of parents who participated. Of the 27 parents who returned the consent forms, only 17 completed the questionnaire. Six

parents who agreed to meeting times did not show up, three reported they were busy and could not possibly meet during the arranged times, and one did not return any messages left for her. Every effort was made to accommodate as many parents as possible. As a result, only 52% of the possible 33 parents participated. Given the number of parents who were registered with the preschools and the number of preschool children living in the area (75), the number who participated in this study is small.

Coding the Data

Parental responses to the PQEL provided the raw data for this study. Questions in which parents circled or provided more than one response were considered to be comprised of parts, for example, question 3 became questions 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d, 3e, and 3f. All other questions used a range of numbers from 1 to a maximum of 5 to represent possible responses. Results for each question were tabulated using a numerical value of (1) if a response was circled or provided by a parent or a value of (0) if it was not circled or provided. Descriptive statistics for all responses to each question were then calculated using SPSS for MS WINDOWS Release 6.1. A discussion of the findings and results is the subject of Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The present study was designed to determine what rural parents know about fostering preschool emergent literacy. A review of the literature on emergent literacy demonstrated that parents need to take an interactive role in literacy development. The nature of the role of rural parents was examined using the Parent Questionnaire on Emergent Literacy (PQEL) in order to identify areas for improvement of preschool children's reading and writing abilities. In this chapter, the findings will be examined in an attempt to answer the questions that guided this research. Each question is presented and discussed in turn. The chapter closes with a summary.

Question 1: Do parents know the importance of early literacy development? If so, what do they know?

An analysis of the results from the PQEL shows parents reported reading to their children on a daily basis and they reported beginning to read to them as early as one year of age. If parents are doing this fundamental literacy-related activity on a daily basis, then it can be expected that children will perform well in the areas of early literacy development. However, it has been found that rural Newfoundland children are not achieving as well as their urban counterparts in the areas of early reading and writing (Department of Education, 1994; Phillips, Norris, & Mason, 1996; Phillips, Norris, Mason, & Kerr, 1990). Consequently, a question arises as to why, if parents report

helping their children at very young ages, children from rural areas generally are not attaining high levels of literacy achievement. Perhaps one answer may be in the way parents interact with their children during reading and writing activities.

A high percentage, 71%, of parents reported reading entire stories to their children. However, fewer parents reported interactions such as discussions and questionings and even fewer, only 29%, reported children attempting to read while parents read to them. It appears that parents know they should be reading to their children and think reading to them is sufficient. However, research has shown that reading aloud to children is not enough; discussing and questioning while reading to children may be more instrumental in fostering early literacy abilities since children become involved in the reading episodes (Ollilia & Mayfield, 1992). The role of parents must include their preschool children in reading in an interactive manner through discussing and questioning while reading.

Discussion and questioning are not only critical when reading aloud to children but also in literacy events occurring in the context of daily living (Heath, 1983; Morrow & Smith, 1990; Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Taylor, 1983; Tobin, 1981). Parents reported taking their children shopping, visiting relatives and walking, all activities that are excellent sources for literacy-related discussions. However, very low percentages of parents reported their children liking to read words on traffic signs (35%) and words on other signs and labels (29%). Why aren't parents taking advantage of these vital

opportunities such as pointing out to their children words on road signs when they are walking or names of stores when they are shopping? There may be many opportunities available to children to attain basic print concepts such as word recognition and oral-to-printed word. Furthermore, learning that reading and writing are very much a part of their worlds is important and parents must know that these opportunities exist and know how to use them.

Parents who are aware of and use literacy-related events as they occur are likely parents who make written language a part of their daily lives. According to the parents in this study, reading and writing in the context of daily living take place to some extent in their homes. Over 70% of the parents reported mothers reading and writing on a daily basis, whereas less than 50% reported fathers reading and writing on a daily basis. For many of the children there is only one prominent literacy role-model in the home, the mother. Parental influence may be reflected in some of the things parents reported: less than 20% reported their children writing messages and other texts like letters, 59% reported their children looking at books and magazines when alone, but over 80% reported their children watching TV or playing with toys when alone. It is true many parents reported their children trying to write their name and letters of the alphabet and to read their name and picture books, but are these children learning these things through the context of family literacy practices or because of drill and practice? Drill and practice for the sake of literacy learning occurred only a small percentage of the time in studies of early

readers and writers (Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983). Therefore, parents must know that early reading and writing abilities are fostered in the context of family literacy practices and not through the teaching of isolated skills.

In conclusion, an analysis of what parents reported indicates that parents know what they should be doing to help their children develop early literacy abilities but are less clear in how to help them. Providing books and writing materials in the home, reading to children on a daily basis and helping them to write the alphabet are good for parents to do, however, current research on emergent literacy states more is needed. Parents need to interact with their children when reading and writing and parents must make written language a part of their daily lives so that children learn that reading and writing are not just "things they do in school".

Question 2: According to parents, when do children begin developing literacy skills?

In this study, 82% of the parents reported on the PQEL that their children were less than one year old when they began reading to them. Clearly, parents know that reading to children shortly after birth is important to developing early literacy abilities. The importance of reading to children is supported by research in the area of emergent literacy which states that children's literacy abilities must be fostered as early as possible, indeed as early as birth (Sulzby & Teale, 1991; Swift, 1970). In addition to stating the benefits of reading to children from birth, current reading research confirms that children must be engaged in reading episodes. Reading is an active, cognitive and affective process and

engagement in the reading task is essential. Unfortunately, many parents do not know how to take full advantage of the times when they read to their children as indicated by their responses on the PQEL: 65% reported reading and discussing stories with their children and only 59% reported both the parents and children asking questions while reading.

Interaction between parents and children is critical in other literacy-related events which foster the development of children's literacy skills. Research in the area of emergent literacy clearly shows that the development of young children's literacy abilities occur in authentic settings such as the home and the community and in the context of daily living activities and not as a result of drill and practice (Clay, 1979; Durkin, 1966; Heath, 1983; Sulzby & Teale, 1991; Taylor, 1983). Results of the PQEL show that parents reported their children involved in literacy-related activities prior to school entry. However, an analysis of what parents reported shows that parents believe the most important literacy skills to be learned by their children are those skills often taught in isolation. High percentages of parents reported their children involved in isolated reading and writing tasks: 88% of the parents indicated children liking to read their own names and 82% reported trying to write the letters of the alphabet. Few reported children participating in literacy-related events occurring in the context of family living: 53% indicated they or any other family member takes the child to the public library to borrow books, 41% reported their children helping with household chores daily, and 29% reported going to church with their children during a previous one month period. Consequently, it appears that on the

basis of parents' responses, it is reasonable to conclude that some children are missing out on many opportunities for quality parent-child interactions and possible valuable literacy experiences.

In conclusion, it is clear that parents must come to understand that the preschool years are critical times for quality interactive literacy experiences. The literacy experiences during these preschool years have a powerful impact upon children's emerging literacy abilities (Clay, 1979). Parents know that reading to their children at an early age is important but they must also come to see literacy develops best when it is integral to their lives, when children are exposed to and interact with print on a daily basis and in meaningful ways.

Question 3: Do parents teach children that print comes in many forms? If so, how?

An analysis of the results from the PQEL showed that books were the most common form of print parents made available to their children. Parents reported reading to their children on a daily basis and having books in their homes. Over 80% reported their children reading print such as their names, picture books and alphabet books. However, few reported their children reading anything other than books. For example, 35% reported their children reading words on traffic signs and only 6% reported their children liking to read words on household tins and boxes.

Furthermore, the results show that children were limited in the forms of print they produced. Over 80% of the parents reported their children trying to write their own names

and letters of the alphabet but low percentages of parents reported their children writing in other forms such as labels on drawings (6%), messages (18%), and birthday cards (35%). Children writing messages and making birthday cards are examples of writing events which are often child-initiated, that is, the child rather than the parent takes responsibility for the event. However, the forms of writing parents reported their children producing is a reflection of the kinds of reading the parents reported their children liking to do, "school-like" reading and writing, that is, reading and writing activities which are often under the direction of someone else. These "school-like" activities are important for children to participate in but parents must understand that children need to engage in reading and writing various forms of print. Parents must come to understand that children who are aware of and experiment with many forms of print are those who live in print-rich environments, have access to a variety of reading and writing materials, and have parents who direct their children's attention to the print around them.

Children are surrounded by many forms of print, and these forms often go unnoticed by children and even their parents. In homes, for example, print can be found on food packages and in magazines, television guides, and recipe books, and perhaps even available through the use of home computers. In the community, words are on road signs and on labels on items in grocery stores. In a society depending so much on reading and writing, parents must assist their children in learning that there are many forms of print surrounding them daily. One way parents can help their children develop a knowledge

about forms of print is by taking advantage of opportunities like pointing out words on signs and labels (Tobin, 1981). Unfortunately, according to parental responses in this study, children are not exposed to many forms of print other than through books. Storybooks remain the most familiar form of print to their preschool children and probably for the majority of preschool children in this province. While exposure to stories and storybooks is very important, it does restrict children's exposure to one form in a print-rich multiform environment.

Question 4: Do parents teach their children that print contains meaning? If so, how?

Results of the PQEL show higher percentages of parents reported reading aloud while their children listened than those who reported interacting with their children while reading. Additionally, only 59% reported their children reading or trying to read on a daily basis. Given the above parental responses, while it is good that parents read to their children, it seems reasonable to suspect that many children are not learning that there is meaning in print. How can children learn that words on pages in storybooks or on packages have meaning if parents do not direct their children's attention to print and discuss with them what words say and mean? It is true parents are reading to their children on a daily basis and many children are trying to read print such as their own names and picture books (not on a daily basis), but it is clear from what parents reported that many children are limited when it comes to learning that there is meaning in the various kinds of print around them. It is interesting to wonder why only 35% reported their children liking

to read words on traffic signs and only 18% reported their children trying to write messages. Perhaps the reason is that parents may not know their children must learn that print exists well beyond the boundaries of books and do not engage in a variety of print-related experiences.

Children's exposure to various forms of print is important to the development of emergent literacy abilities. However, exposure alone is not sufficient, parents must also engage children in print activities so that their experiences have meaning for them. Teale (1995) stated, "Emergent literacy examines changes over time in how the child thinks about literacy and in the strategies the child uses in attempts to comprehend or produce written language " (p. 71). Accordingly, children think about literacy and use strategies when they have experiences with print. However, positive literacy changes will occur only when children are guided and supported in literacy experiences by their parents (Hiebert, 1988; Teale & Sulzby, 1989). Parents must interact in quality literacy experiences with children so that they develop print concepts necessary for the development of conventional literacy, one such concept is that print contains meaning.

Children's experiences in literacy begin at home, hence, it is critical for parents to create print-rich environments for their children. Parents must make available to their children all sorts of reading and writing materials since emergent literacy research has shown that children who develop early reading and writing abilities are those who have access to a variety of literacy-related materials (Chomsky, 1971; Durkin, 1966; Dyson,

1994; Lass, 1982; Morrow, 1992). Furthermore, print-rich environments include homes where parents make written language an important part of their daily lives (Heath, 1983: Morrow & Smith, 1990; Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Taylor, 1983; Teale, 1986). Parents who read and write on a daily basis provide excellent opportunities for children to experience print outside the genre of storybooks. Furthermore, parents who discuss with their children the kinds of adult reading and writing activities they are involved in allow children to understand that other forms of print have meaning as well.

In conclusion, it is the quantity and quality of parent-child interactions with print which allows children to know that print contains meaning. Parents cannot take for granted that children will learn such literacy lessons on their own. They must take the initiative to involve their children in a variety of reading and writing experiences and perhaps more importantly, learn to recognize and to take advantage of literacy moments for learning the value and meaning of print.

Question 5: Do parents try to help their children learn to read and write? If so, how?

PQEL results indicate that there was only one prominent reported person, the mother, who helped children learn to read and write. Fifty-six percent of the parents reported another family member helping the children to read on a daily basis and another 53% reported a family member helping the children to write on a daily basis. Hence, the children were limited in the number of family members who fostered their early literacy development. Research in the area of emergent literacy has shown that it is imperative for

the whole family to engage daily in reading and writing. Preschool emergent literacy is fostered in homes where parents make written language an important part of their daily lives (Heath, 1983; Morrow & Smith, 1990; Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Taylor, 1983; Teale, 1986); and in homes where parents daily help their children to learn to read and write (Durkin, 1966; Lass, 1982; Tobin & Pikulski, 1988).

Furthermore, in order for preschool children to learn to read and write, parents must spend quality time with their children engaging in literacy-related activities. Research on preschool emergent literacy has shown that quality parent-child interactions are among the best predictors of children's literacy development (Bradley, Caldwell, & Elardo, 1977; Hansen, 1969; Pikulski & Tobin, 1988). However, an analysis of parental responses to the PQEL indicated that parents were not making the best use of the time they spent with their children. For example, only 65% of the parents reported reading and discussing stories with their children and a very low percentage, 53%, reported they or any other family member helped children with spelling. It is reasonable to assume that parents want to help their children become good readers and writers but unfortunately they often do not know how best to do it. Phillips, Norris, and Mason (1996) found that in geographic areas where the overall literacy abilities are low many parents do not know specifically how to foster their children's literacy abilities.

It is interesting to wonder why many parents do not know how to foster their preschool children's reading and writing abilities. Perhaps the most reasonable answer is

that they have not acquired the appropriate information required to help them help their children. Many parents know that they must read to their children on a daily basis and start reading to them from birth. This kind of information is publicized frequently through the media. Parents also know that preschool children should learn to read and write their names and to identify colors. Unfortunately, many of the skills parents think their children should learn are those which are often taught through drill and practice in isolation rather than in the context of a story being read, an item of clothing being selected, or an item being procured on the basis of its size, weight, shape, and/or color. For some reason, parents have failed to learn that literacy development occurs when parents make written and spoken language an important part of their lives and when they engage their children in reading and writing on a daily basis. Subsequently, parents must come to understand that if they are going to foster their children's early reading and writing abilities, they must learn more about how emergent literacy is developed and the importance of quality interactive literacy experiences to emergent literacy development.

Question 6: What kinds of literacy behaviours and activities are taking place in the home?

Parental responses to the PQEL show that the kinds of literacy behaviours and activities taking place in the homes of those parents who participated in this study were wanting. It seemed most parents were trying to help their preschool children but unfortunately some parents were lacking knowledge of how best to develop emergent literacy abilities. My interpretation was based on a number of findings: only 6% reported

going to a library with their children over a previous one month period, and only 53% reported discussing the meanings of words with children when asked to identify words. Hence, it is critical for parents to come to understand that knowing the importance of helping children learn to read and write is not enough, parents must also know how to develop early literacy skills.

Early literacy development in young children has been found to be positively and significantly related to the quantity and quality of parent-child interactions (Heath, 1983; Pikulski & Tobin, 1988; Wigfield & Asher, 1984). Unfortunately for many parents who participated in this study, their children were lacking in both the quantity and quality of parent-child reading and writing episodes. For example, an analysis of the results from the PQEL showed that there was only one reported prominent person, the mother, who helped children learn to read and write. Furthermore, parents reported that 71% of the children's mothers read daily while only 47% of the children's fathers were reported to read daily. Given that it was the mother, in the case of this study, who likely spent most of the time trying to foster children's literacy abilities, it is reasonable to assume that children may not be engaged in literacy-related activities to effect significant and positive changes. Certainly mothers have many other obligations throughout the day especially since 76% of the parents reported having more than one child. Perhaps parents' limited amount of available time accounted for the high percentage (71%) who reported reading entire stories while their children listened and fewer parents (59%-65%) who reported

interactions such as discussions and questionings taking place.

Another interpretation raises the question, is the lack of parent-child interactions during story time a result of parents believing that the quantity of reading to children is more important than the quality of reading episodes? Taylor (1983) concluded, "literacy develops best in relational contexts which are meaningful to the young child" (p. 79), that is, children have a better understanding of the processes of reading and writing when these processes mediate events between and among family members. Unfortunately, parental responses to the PQEL indicate that many children need to engage in meaningful contexts more often with their parents. Some examples of missed relational contexts include 77% reported their children watching at least one educational program per week but only 65% reported sitting with their children and discussing what was happening on those programs. Furthermore, only 41% reported their children helping with household chores on a daily basis. While many parents appeared to be making the best use of the time they spent with their children, many were trying to foster their young children's literacy abilities. Eighty-eight percent reported reading to their children on a daily basis and 94% reported asking their children's opinions on books to read. Results from the PQEL showed that parents wanted to help their children learn to read and write but appeared to need guidance. Parents need to understand the kinds of literacy behaviours and activities which more effectively foster the emergent literacy development of their young children.

Question 7: Do parents have books in the home?

On the PQEL there are two separate questions asking parents how many books they have in their homes. Question 5 asks parents to indicate the number of children's books and question 31 asks for the number of adult books. Fifty-four percent of the parents reported having approximately 50 to 100 children's books and 35% reported having approximately 50 adult books. Clearly, the preschool children of parents who participated in this study have books available to them.

Emergent literacy has shown that the availability of books in the home is an important factor in the development of preschool children's literacy abilities (Durkin, 1966; Lass, 1982; Morrow, 1992). However, children's emergent literacy development requires much more than the mere presence of books. Studies have shown that parents discussing stories with children, expanding upon and extending children's ideas as they relate to the story, as well as parents and children posing questions in the context of story time are significantly and positively related to literacy development (Flood, 1977; Roser & Martinez, 1985; Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Swift, 1970). In particular, Delores Durkin (1966) emphasized the importance of parents as literacy role-models in order for children to observe the importance of reading and writing in daily life. Durkin stated, "the presence of parents who...demonstrate in their own lives that reading is a rich source of relaxation, information, and contentment" is related positively to the early literacy abilities of young children (p. 136). Contrary to some of the research on emergent literacy, parental

responses to other questions on the PQEL suggest that many are not interacting effectively with their children during story times and many are not reading daily in the presence of their young children. Hence, parents must be helped to come to know that their role is not only to provide books for their children but also to ensure that books are used in interactive ways to foster more effectively their preschool children's emergent literacy development.

Question 8: Do parents read to their children regularly? If so, how?

Parents reported reading to their children on a daily basis and doing so when their children were less than one year of age. An analysis of the results further shows that a high percentage, 71%, of parents, reported reading entire stories to their children but fewer parents reported interactions such as discussing and questioning taking place. These results coupled with results from research questions 5, 6, and 7 suggest that parents seem to know they must read aloud to their children regularly but unfortunately many parents do not seem to know that reading to children must also involve quality parent-child interactions.

Research has shown that reading aloud to children on a daily basis is critical but insufficient. The acts of discussing and questioning while reading to children may be more instrumental in fostering early literacy abilities (Ollilia & Mayfield, 1992) than simply reading aloud to children because discussing and questioning encourages children to become actively involved in reading episodes. Therefore, the role of parents must include

involving their preschool children in reading in an interactive manner. If the parents who participated in this study are reading to their children on a daily basis, then endless opportunities to foster their children's early reading and writing abilities could be captured. Unfortunately, many parents reported not interacting with their children during story times which results in diminishing the potential value from literacy learning experiences. Consequently, parents must learn that reading aloud to their children on a daily basis is important but that the most effective reading events require quality interactions between parents and children.

Question 9: Do parents write with their children regularly? If so, how?

Seventy-one percent reported that their children wrote or printed letters, words, or stories on a daily basis. Parental responses to another question (14) on the PQEL, however, were somewhat different: 88% reported their children trying to write their own names and 82% reported trying to write alphabet letters while only 35% reported their children trying to write words, and 6% reported them trying to write stories. These results suggest that when parents help their children to write, the writing events are probably specific to copying names and alphabet letters. Opportunities for exposure to written language as well as the interactions that take place affects, "the specific behaviours they display" (Dyson, 1994, p. 301), that is, the writing behaviours displayed by the children. In other words, young children's writings reflect the writing experiences parents model.

Helping children daily to print alphabet letters and their names are valuable literacy

experiences. Research has shown that, "preschool interest in reading very often develops from a prior interest in copying and writing" (Durkin, 1966, p. 108). Many parents of early readers and writers in Durkin's study (1966) reported their children moving from copying and printing to engaging in longer and more sophisticated writing activities such as making address books (p. 108). The parents who participated in this study reported their children involved in writing alphabet letters and their names. However, few parents reported their children engaging in longer and more meaningful writing events, for example, 35% reported their children trying to write birthday cards, 18% reported their children trying to write messages, and 6% reported them writing labels on drawings. Given what is known about the beneficial effects of encouraging writing, parents must attempt to involve children in daily writing interactions which go beyond copying and writing alphabet letters and names.

Taylor (1983) found, in the homes of early readers, that parents provided opportunities for their children to experiment with writing rather than intentionally teaching their children to write. Furthermore, these opportunities were not literacy-learning activities for the sake of literacy learning but were part of the daily activities that took place in the homes. Unfortunately, parents in this study appeared not to be taking advantage of the daily opportunities to engage their children in writing as indicated by the results from PQEL questions 3 and 5. It seems parents do not know the importance of providing children with quality interactive writing opportunities and its role in literacy

development. The concept of reading to children and its influence on children's emergent literacy abilities has been so highly publicized perhaps to the extent that many other factors related to early literacy development such as parents writing with children regularly have been overlooked.

Question 10: Do parents color with their children regularly? If so, how?

Forty-seven percent of the parents who participated in this study reported coloring weekly with their children, while 35% reported coloring daily. These results suggest that parents were coloring with their children regularly. However, it is interesting to wonder about the type of interaction that occurs when parents color with their preschoolers. This is of interest because results from research questions 1, 2, 8, and 9 suggest that parents do not know how best to interact with their children to promote early literacy development.

Research on preschool emergent literacy has shown that the quantity and quality of parent-child interactions with print including children's exposure to various forms is critical to the development of emergent literacy abilities (Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983; Teale, 1986). Although this study confirms parents coloring with their children, results from research question 3 suggests many are unaware of other forms of print such as coloring books which can be used to promote reading and writing abilities. Furthermore, quality parent-child interactions such as discussions and questionings (Edwards, 1989; Flood, 1977; Ollilia & Mayfield, 1992) are occurring but less frequently than possible. This inference is based on the fact that a high percentage (94%) of parents reported their

children choosing colors, whereas only 18% reported talking with their children about the colors they were using. Hence, it is reasonable to conclude parents are missing out on literacy opportunities such as discussing with their children why they are choosing particular colors or questioning the possible colors that can be used and why. Consequently, parents must come to know that literacy-related events involve more than reading to children and that engaging children in discussions and questionings in the context of coloring can foster the development of concepts and ideas fundamental to understanding meanings of words, sentences, and stories (Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983; Teale, 1986). Parents must learn how to take full advantage of opportunities which promote preschool literacy development since it is critical to their children's chances for successful school achievement.

Summary

An analysis of the combined results of the above questions reveal that many parents know generally what they should be doing to foster their preschool children's literacy development but are less clear specifically on how to help them. It was shown in research questions 1, 5, 8, and 10 that parents seem to be lacking knowledge on how best to interact with their children during reading and writing episodes. Parents knew that it was important for their children to engage in reading and writing activities but they did not seem to know the nature of nor the importance of making the most of both interactions.

Parents also reported not engaging children in reading and writing in the context of

daily living activities. Often parents encouraged their children to participate in isolated reading and writing tasks as reported in research questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 9. Parents are providing reading and writing materials for their children, according to their responses to research questions 3 and 7, but they are failing to make the best use of these resources. In conclusion, an examination of what parents know about early literacy development in comparison to what is known in the field of emergent literacy certainly reveals relevant areas in which rural parents need guidance. The next and final chapter will identify those areas which parents could be helped to foster more effectively their children's early reading and writing abilities.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study was aimed specifically at the identification of aspects of emergent literacy in which rural parents can be guided to improve their children's early literacy development, and ultimately their chances for successful schooling. In the first chapter, ten research questions were proposed in order to identify areas in which parents could be helped. A review of the literature on emergent literacy revealed that parents must take an interactive role through engagement in literacy activities such as reading to and with their children. An examination of what rural parents reported about their role in fostering early literacy abilities was undertaken, as outlined in chapter three. An analysis and synthesis of what they reported in comparison to current research was the subject of chapter four. The conclusions to evolve from the ten research questions as well as corresponding suggestions comprise this final chapter.

Question 1: Do parents know the importance of early literacy development? If so, what do they know?

The parents who participated in this study know the importance of early literacy development but they are less clear in their knowledge of how to help foster their children's early literacy abilities. Parents know they should read to their children on a daily basis and provide books and writing materials in the home. Nonetheless, what seems to be lacking is their knowledge of how to provide quality literacy-related parent-child

interactions such as expanding upon ideas presented in stories and using discussion and questioning during story times.

Suggestions. Schools could take on some of the responsibility to help parents of preschoolers learn how to involve their children in literacy in an interactive manner so that reading and writing become a part of their daily life. However, schools should not be expected to do this on their own. Parental support as well as support from agencies such as the Departments of Education and Social Services would be helpful to signal the importance of successful early literacy development.

Question 2: According to parents, when do children begin developing literacy skills?

Many of the parents know that children begin developing literacy abilities shortly after they are born because they reported that their children were less than one year of age when they began reading to them. However, few parents encourage their children to participate in discussions and questioning, and many continue just reading to their children. As a result, many preschool children miss out on opportunities to expand their knowledge of concepts and words fundamental to the development of literacy. Consider the literacy possibilities when a parent reads a story to a child about a duck, and they discuss why the duck has webbed feet, the colour of the duck, and the sounds it makes thus expanding the child's vocabulary and concept of a duck.

Suggestions. Parents should continue to read to their children. As they read, parents need to talk about the pictures, point to the pictures and discuss them, to name the colours, to

identify characters, and to name animals and letters. As the children get older, parents should ask them questions about the stories and encourage them to ask questions about what they are reading as well as encourage them to read along.

Question 3: Do parents teach children that print comes in many forms? If so, how?

Parents are exposing their children to storybooks but other forms of print such as signs, labels, and words on television are rarely being used to promote literacy abilities. Consequently, it is reasonable to conclude that the parents who participated in this study are not teaching their children that print comes in many forms since the children appear to be limited in their exposures to and experiences with print. Hence, children's literacy development is curtailed and they are led to believe that reading and writing occurs only in books.

Suggestions. Parents need to know that children must interact with print beyond the boundaries of books. Parents need to learn how to attend to and use print that surrounds them daily such as pointing out and reading words on signs, household items, and labels to their children. Children must not be limited only to one form of print in a society where there are so many forms of print.

Question 4: Do parents teach their children that print contains meaning?

Parents are reading to their children on a daily basis and are trying to help them read print such as their names, but it appears they are not teaching their children that print is meaningful. Many parents do not use the techniques of discussion and questioning when

reading to their children, many do not discuss the meanings of words with their children, and children rarely attempt to read environmental print. Hence, children are missing out on some of the best daily opportunities to learn that print contains meaning.

Suggestions. Parents must take the initiative to engage their children in a variety of reading and writing experiences such as following recipes and writing letters to friends. They must also learn to recognize and take advantage of literacy as it occurs daily such as reading labels and writing messages so that children learn the value and meaning of print.

Question 5: Do parents try to help their children learn to read and write? If so, how?

The mother appears to be the prominent person who helps children learn to read and write. Hence, many preschool children are not living in home environments where other family members engage them in reading and writing on a daily basis to model literacy. Therefore, learning to read and write for these children seems to be for the sake of having to learn it rather than as a part of daily living.

Suggestions. Mothers need to know that other family members should take an active role in helping children learn to read and write. Additionally, family members need to be encouraged to read to and with children in order to foster preschool emergent literacy. Many role models in a household is a clear message of the importance and place of literacy.

Question 6: What kinds of literacy behaviours and activities are taking place in the home?

The majority of the parents are trying to help their preschool children learn to read

and write. Children appear to be participating in literacy events that are initiated by the parents for the sake of teaching reading and writing skills. There is no doubt that children are read to, learn how to write their names, and learn to print the letters of the alphabet. While these are all necessary literacy activities, they are not sufficient for meaningful and sustained literacy development.

Suggestions. Schools and/or preschools need to guide parents that reading and writing is learned best when it occurs in situations that have meaning for the child. It is true that children need to learn the letters of the alphabet and how to write their names but these are only some of the print concepts. Vocabulary development, literacy conventions, and the beauty of language are learned best in the context of wonderful children's literature and discussions about the literature.

Question 7: Do parents have books in the home?

Parents reported having books in their homes but what seems to be lacking is their knowledge of how to use books to foster their children's early literacy development. Parent-child interactions during story times are limited primarily to parents reading to their children while their children listen. Additionally, many parents, particularly fathers, are not reading much in the presence of their children.

Suggestions. Agencies and individuals who work to promote preschool literacy have succeeded in teaching parents that having books in the home and reading to children are important in helping children learn to read. However, more work needs to be done by

these agencies and individuals to guide parents further on how best to make the most of literacy experiences in the home.

Question 8: Do parents read to their children regularly? If so, how?

The majority of the parents are reading to their young children on a regular basis. While this is the beginning of providing a solid foundation for successful reading and writing abilities, many parents are failing to build upon this foundation since many do not seem to know that reading to children must also involve interactions such as discussing what is happening in a story, and expanding upon an idea by relating it to similar stories or experiences.

Suggestions. Parents have shown a keen interest in helping their preschool children develop literacy abilities by reading to and with them on a regular basis. Parents need to go another step and learn how to interact with their children during reading times since quality parent-child interactions are as important as the amount of time parents spend reading to children. Schools and/or preschools would most likely have such information and these institutions are accessible to all parents.

Question 9: Do parents write with their children regularly? If so, how?

Parents are writing with their children on a regular basis but the daily writing interactions are limited primarily to copying and writing alphabet letters and names. They seemed to teach their children to write through drill and practice kinds of activities, rather than through daily opportunities such as writing messages to a family member, or writing

something on a picture they coloured together, or telling about something they did in order to give children a sense of the meaningfulness of letters and letter sounds, words, and written thoughts.

Suggestions. Parents need to be guided about the role of quality interactive writing in literacy development. Similar to reading development, writing is best learned when parents make it a part of their daily living experiences and engage their children in those experiences. Parents need to learn that children write, and that they love to write in meaningful contexts such as signing a name on a birthday card.

Question 10: Do parents colour with their children regularly? If so, how?

Parents are colouring with their children on a regular basis but it seems that many parents do not know that colouring is a form of print that can be used to promote literacy abilities. Many parents did not report using the time they spend colouring with their children to engage in positive literacy interactions such as questioning why the child chose a particular colour or discussing the colours that might be used.

Suggestions. The times parents spend colouring with their children may be excellent opportunities to foster literacy development since literacy-related discussion and questioning could take place in context. Parents need to learn how to take advantage of these colouring events to foster literacy abilities by first understanding that they exist, and secondly, by learning how to interact with children so that they gain new information and understanding about colours, the appropriateness of colours, children's reasons for colour

selections, and other relevant language considerations.

Summary

The parents who participated in this study know that the preschool years are important to their children's literacy development and their success in school. They also know that their parental roles involve preparing their children for school. Unfortunately, these parents and perhaps many others have not learned how best to foster their children's reading and writing abilities. Parents are often told what they should be doing but they are less frequently guided about how to carry out such significant responsibilities. In order to provide children with the best chances for early literacy development, parents need to learn more about preschool emergent literacy, particularly, what constitutes quality parent-child interactions in the contexts of literacy. Schools and/or preschools (with support from other agencies) could initiate educational programs for parents but parents must also be encouraged to take responsibility for learning as much as they can about how to help their children.

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APPENDIX A

Parent Questionnaire on Emergent Literacy

Parent (s') Name(s): Telephone Number:
Address:
Child's Name: Birth date:

1. How often do you read to your child?

   Daily Weekly Monthly Hardly Ever Never

2. How old was your child when you began reading to him/her?

   < 1 year old 1 year old 2 years old 3 years old 4 years old

   5 years old

3. How do you read to your child? Circle those that apply.

   parent reads entire story and the child listens

   parent reads and discusses the story with the child

   parent reads and asks questions to the child

   parent reads and both the parent and the child ask questions

   parent points to the words as he/she reads

   List others: _____

   _____

4. Does your child read or try to read?

   Daily Weekly Monthly Hardly Ever Never

5. About how many children's books do you have at home? _____

6. What is your child's favorite book? _____

7. In addition to you buying books for your child,

   a. Do you or any other family member take your child to the public library to borrow books?

   Daily Weekly Monthly Hardly Ever Never

   b. Do friends or family members give books to your child ? _____

8. Describe the kinds of books your child likes to borrow or to receive as gifts:

   _____

   _____

   _____

9. Circle the kinds of things your child likes to read:

   own name, words in books, words on traffic signs,

   other signs and labels, words on tv, cartoons, newspapers,

   picture books, comics, magazines, jokes,

   alphabet books, favorite book, cereal boxes, words on tins

   List other things:

   _____

10. Do any family members help the child read?

    Daily Weekly Monthly Hardly Ever Never

11. How often do you color with your child?

Daily Weekly Monthly Hardly Ever Never

12. Circle what happens when you color with your child:

you choose the colors, child chooses the colors,

you and your child talk about the picture,

child likes to color without being interrupted too often

List other things that happen: _____

_____

13. Does your child write or print letters, words, or stories?

Daily Weekly Monthly Hardly Ever Never

14. Circle the things your child tries to write:

alphabet letters, words, own name, others' names, stories,

poems, birthday cards, messages, shopping lists,

labels on drawings, copying words

List other writing activities: _____

15. Do any family members help your child write?

Daily Weekly Monthly Hardly Ever Never

16. Circle the writing materials the child likes to use at home:

pencils crayons markers pens paper chalk

chalkboard coloring books activity books construction paper

List others: _____

17. Do you or any other family member help your child with:

A. identifying words? Yes Occasionally No

B. discussing sounds of letters? Yes Occasionally No

C. discussing meanings of words? Yes Occasionally No

D. spelling? Yes Occasionally No

E. discussing the illustrations? Yes Occasionally No

F. counting when appropriate to do so? Yes Occasionally No

G. talking about the colours? Yes Occasionally No

H. discussing whether the story/pictures are exciting, scary, playful, etc.

Yes Occasionally No

18. List the television programs that your child watches every week.

_____

_____

19. Do you sit with your child and discuss with him/her what is happening in the programs that your child is watching?

Daily Weekly Monthly Hardly Ever Never

20. Does your child talk to you about what he/she writes, reads or watches on TV?

Daily Weekly Monthly Hardly Ever Never

21. Do you ask your child's opinion on any of these topics?

TV watching, when it is time to go to bed, choice of food,

buying toys or games, planning a trip, clothes to wear,

spending money, books to read, activities to do together

List others: _____

22. Circle what your child likes to do to occupy his/her time when he/she is alone?

make things, play with toys, dolls, etc. watch TV,

look at books, magazines, etc. try to get adult's attention,

color

List other things your child likes to do when he/she is alone: _____

_____

23. Does your child help with household chores?

Daily Weekly Monthly Hardly Ever Never

Circle how your child helps: making bed, cleaning room, dusting,

picking up toys, cooking, dishwashing, vacuuming, gardening

List other chores: _____

24. Circle the activities that you did and the places you went with your child in the last month:

sports event, shopping, library, park, museum, fishing,

boating, gardening, visiting relatives, restaurant, movie,

church, community socials, walking, parade, concert,

berry picking, skating, Brownies, Beavers, swimming, dancing

List other activities: _____

25. When your child grows up what do you think he/she will be? Why?

_____

_____

_____

26. Does your child go to preschool or day care or did he/she go before kindergarten?

Yes Occasionally No

27. How many brothers and sisters does your child have? _____

How many are older? _____ How many are younger? _____

28. If you have other children in school, is your child present when help is given siblings with their homework?

Daily Weekly Monthly Hardly Ever Never

29. Circle the highest level of schooling the child's mother completed:

Elementary, Junior High, High School, Vocational School

University

30. Circle the highest level of schooling the child's father completed:

Elementary, Junior High, High School, Vocational School,

University

31. About how many adult books do you have at home? _____

32. How often does the child's mother read?

Daily Weekly Monthly Hardly Ever Never

Describe the kinds of books, magazines, and news the child's mother likes to read:

_____

_____

33. How often does the child's father read?

Daily Weekly Monthly Hardly Ever Never

Describe the kinds of books, magazines, and news the child's father likes to read:

_____

_____

34. Where does the child's mother usually read?

in bed, at meal times, while watching TV, in the living room

List other places: _____

35. Where does the child's father usually read?

in bed, at meal times, while watching TV, in the living room

List other places: _____

36. How often does the child's mother write?

Daily Weekly Monthly Hardly Ever Never

Describe the kinds of writing the mother does: _____

_____

37. How often does the child's father write?

Daily Weekly Monthly Hardly Ever Never

Describe the kinds of writing the father does: _____

_____

38. Is there anything else you do with your child that you'd like to tell me about?

_____

_____

_____

_____