

EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION IN RURAL NEWFOUNDLAND:
A COMMUNITY BASED APPROACH

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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**Early Childhood Intervention in Rural Newfoundland:
A Community Based Approach**

by

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Chapter One

Introduction

There has been a great deal of attention given to the restructuring of the education system in Newfoundland over the past five to ten years. The Provincial Government has implemented a number of recommendations from the Williams' Royal Commission Report (1992); however the major focus has been on governance and making the system more cost efficient. This has resulted in a lack of attention to many of the practical issues directly impacting on student performance in the classroom. In fact, one could argue the lack of action on such recommendations as a full day Kindergarten program and the reduction in the number of days for teacher in service have had a detrimental effect on our education system.

Fortunately, many schools throughout the province have been able to adapt to these changes and continue to implement new innovations despite the lack of support and direction from the provincial Department of Education. One such innovation is early intervention programs for children ages 0 to 6 years. Many schools in rural areas have established pre-school programs and Family Resource Centres to help prepare children for their entry into primary school. For the most part these initiatives have been spearheaded by primary teachers who see the benefits of these early intervention programs. In most schools the pre-school program is run by parent volunteers while Family Resource Centres are run by federally funded facilitators.

Unfortunately, reduction in expenditures for education and a declining enrolment will force the closure of many rural schools. This will also mean the loss of many

community based early intervention programs. At a time when the world is realizing the enormous benefits of such programs we are about to eliminate these initiatives with the imminent closure of numerous rural schools throughout the province. In order to ensure governments and school boards make informed decisions when deciding to close rural schools the benefits of such programs need to be documented and placed into a theoretical, financial and social context.

Background To the Study

In rural areas opportunities for children to participate in enriching pre-school or nursery school programs are limited or completely non-existent. Therefore, the opportunities for pre-school children to socialize with other children their age is severely limited. There are also few outlets for parents to get together to discuss child development issues and receive advice and training from child care specialists. Over the past five years this has been recognized as a serious deficiency in rural areas and attempts have been made by community leaders to address this concern.

On the Burin Peninsula most small schools have implemented pre-school or kinder-start programs; all schools have been involved in the Significant Other Reading Teacher (SORT) Program and many small schools have set up Family Resource Centres. Presently, federal funding has not been approved for the SORT Program and the Family Resource Centres are being reviewed, with the intent to close centres having low enrollments. The loss of these two programs will certainly have a negative impact on the communities affected.

To date there has been no research completed on the Burin Peninsula to measure

the benefits, if any, of the two early intervention programs to be discussed in this study. Therefore, there is no body of evidence available to justify their existence other than complimentary words of praise from parents and teachers who have been involved in the programs. It is essential that this phenomenon be examined immediately so that federal agencies, teachers, parents and school board members make informed decisions on the future of these programs.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the experiences of parents, teachers, and childcare workers who have been involved in the two early intervention programs discussed above. This study will focus on one community on the south coast of Newfoundland. This community has been involved in two intervention programs over the past four years. These programs have received national recognition and have become part of a Canadian video series (Community Action for Rural Childcare) on early childhood education in rural areas. By documenting the experiences of participants in this community we can provide a model that may be useful to other rural areas struggling to establish early intervention programs.

Definition of Key Terms

- 1) **Early Intervention Programs:** In this study early intervention programs include any program that is implemented to enhance childhood development from infancy to six years of age. There is also a parent education or information component attached to each of these programs.
- 2) **Family Resource Centre:** This is a federally funded program that has a coordinator

shared between three communities. The coordinator or facilitator as she likes to call herself, is a trained early childhood development specialist. The Family Resource Centre, or Drop In Centre as it is more commonly called, is located in the primary section of Marian Elementary School and is well stocked with books, toys, a computer, art supplies, imagination centre and indoor slides. It is open three days a week and parents are required to accompany children from infancy to age six.

3) Pre-School Program: This is a school sponsored program. It is organized by the Kindergarten teacher who trains parent volunteers. All four year old pre-kindergarten children attend this program which is run out of the kindergarten classroom and Family Resource Centre. These children attend the program one day a week from October until May 31.

4) Pre-school Coordinator: This is a parent who volunteers to attend all pre-school sessions. They help plan activities and take the role of the teacher in the pre-school program.

Significance of the Study

Research specific to issues on rural education in Newfoundland and Labrador is very limited. To my knowledge there has been only one study conducted on the effectiveness of early intervention programs in rural areas. This makes it difficult for decision makers and individuals interested in establishing these programs to weigh the benefits of such innovations. This study is a significant piece of research because it provides a source of data that presently is very limited.

This study should:

- contribute to our understanding of the role of early intervention programs in rural areas;
- provide an understanding of the types of relationships that exist between parents, children, teachers, child care workers and government agencies involved in early intervention programs;
- identify factors that contribute to a smooth transition for children from pre-school to primary school;
- outline strengths and weaknesses in the two early intervention programs to be discussed in this thesis;
- contribute to a knowledge base that could lead to a model for early intervention programs that will meet the needs of children and parents in rural areas;
- identify the merits of the two early intervention programs outlined above. This should be helpful for school boards or government agencies who have to decide whether or not to retain funding for such programs.

Research Questions

This study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. Why do parents and teachers feel early intervention programs better prepare children for school?

2. How do parents perceive their role in these early intervention programs? How are these roles determined? Are parents comfortable with these roles? Would parents like to play a more active role?
3. How does the school administration and teachers define their role in early intervention programs? Are administrators and teachers comfortable with this role? Would they like to play a more active role in these programs? If so, how?
4. Do teachers, parents and child care workers feel that government agencies providing funding for these programs should be more involved in the administration of the programs? If so, in what capacity?
5. According to educators and child care workers, are early intervention programs more beneficial to certain groups than other? If so, do characteristics such as gender, age, socio-economic status, double or single parent families, or the number of siblings influence the overall benefits of these programs?
6. If early intervention programs are so helpful, why do so many parents decide not to participate? What are the views of participants and non-participants on this issue?

Limitations

The study outlined in this proposal is basically a case study to be conducted at one school, Marian Elementary, St. Lawrence. Therefore it has the following limitations as a research study:

- It has limited generalizability. Most participants will not be randomly selected. The nature of the study does not emphasize sophisticated sampling techniques.

Therefore, the results may not be enough to make broad reaching generalizations outside the actual research site.

- It has limited transferability. In many qualitative research projects it is difficult to replicate the study outside the research site. In this case the research focuses on the experiences and perceptions of participants involved in two early intervention programs. It may be difficult to find sites outside that have similar programs so a replication of this study may be impossible.
- The fact that participants for this study come primarily from one community may create a situation where parents who have been interviewed may discuss interview questions with informants prior to their being. This could influence the types of responses elicited in subsequent interviews or result in the informant providing responses that may be perceived as the information the researcher is looking for, not their own heart felt views on the topic.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The literature on early intervention programs yielded some very interesting observations in the area of early childhood development programs. Although most of the literature uses the terms early childhood development or early childhood care and development programs, I will be using the term early intervention programs when referring to the Family Resource Centre and the pre-school program in my research.. However, throughout the literature review I will use the terms early childhood development (ECD) or early childhood care and development (ECCD).

The literature on early childhood development programs can be placed into three distinct categories: 1) definitions and scope of early childhood development programs, 2) components of successful early childhood development programs, and 3) justification for the existence of early childhood development programs.

Definitions and Scope of Early Childhood Development

Definitions for early childhood development encompass every branch of this area of study. For example, the article published by the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Development (1995), *Overview of Early Childhood Care and Development*, breaks down the phrase, Early Childhood Care and Development, into three parts and attempts to define each component separately. Early childhood is defined as the period of a child's life from conception to age eight. Care was chosen in recognition of the fact that young children need care and nurturing. Development is defined as the process of change in which the child comes to master more and more complex levels of moving,

thinking, feeling and interacting with people and objects in the environment (pp. 1 - 2). Landers (1990) defines child development as, “ ... the unfolding of behaviours from immature to mature; from patterns of behaviour that are simple to those that are complex; and the evolution of a human being from dependency to autonomous adulthood” (p. 3). These are a small sample of the definitions that exist for early childhood development; however they are typical of the types of definitions used by most early childhood development scholars.

The scope of early childhood development discussed in the literature includes two dimensions, the chronological age of the children involved and the socio-economic, cultural, and educational status of parents involved in early childhood development programs. Most scholars feel children from birth to age eight fit into the ECD developmental stage. The rationale for choosing the first eight years of a child's life coincides with the fact that “ ... children below the age of eight learn best when they have objects they can manipulate; when they have chances to explore the world around them; when they can experiment and learn from trial-and-error within a safe and stimulating environment.” (Consultative Group on Early Childhood Development, 1995, p. 1) Some scholars believe six years of age is a more appropriate stage of development and use this time frame because the entry of the child into primary school is a more reasonable transition period in early childhood development. According to Shaeffer (1996) whose research focuses primarily on the first three years of a child's development, “During the first two years critical brain structures develop that affect children's ability to learn.” (p.3) Landers (1991), Halpern and Myers (1989), and Evans (1994) all

support Shaeffer's views and feel more ECD programs need to be implemented for children ages 0 to 3 years of age. Although the scope of involvement for children is recognized at 0 to 8 years of age, most programs are geared toward children in the first four years of development.

The second dimension in the scope of involvement in ECD programs is the socio-economic, cultural, and educational status of parents. Most scholars believe all parents could benefit from involvement in ECD programs, but those of low socio-economic status with little or no education could particularly benefit from involvement in ECD programs that have a strong parenting education component. In fact, the literature places considerable emphasis on parent training in an effective ECD program. It would appear that all parents need to get involved in parenting education programs in order for their child to receive the full benefit from ECD programs. This leads us into the discussion of what comprises a successful ECD program.

Components of a Successful Early Childhood Development Program

The literature on early childhood development reveals a number of components that should be present in order for an ECD program to be successful. The first component is parental involvement. Obviously, parents have to take the initiative to ensure that their children participate in these programs. However, the most successful programs also include a parenting education program to teach skills that can be used to enrich the learning environment for their children and learn about the importance of good health and nutrition in the development of their child. The Consultive Group on Early Childhood Development (1995) *Parent Education and Parenting*, stresses the need for

parent support. It states that, “parenting education teaches parents and non-parental caregivers how to provide children with the kinds of parenting they require to maximize their potential physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively” (p. 1). This view is supported by a Statistics Canada (1998) study on 23,000 children across Canada. The findings reveal that parenting style matters more than family income in maintaining the health and welfare of Canadian children. This study goes on to say that the Federal Government should invest more money into parenting programs. This view supports the literature on ECD as it pertains to the importance of parent education programs.

The second component of a successful ECD program is the close connection between the school and pre-school programs. Helping prepare children for school is one of the most important factors that influence a parents’ decision to involve children in an ECD program. An adage used by Shaeffer (1996) summarizes nicely the views of parents and educators alike. He states, “Before you can build a house, it is necessary to lay the foundation stones to support the entire structure” (Shaeffer, 1996, p. 2). Halpern and Myers (1985) and Myers and Landers (1989) addressed this issue and concluded that it is important for the child to develop the social, emotional and intellectual skills during their involvement in ECD programs, but schools must also be ready to receive these children. Schools must be aware of these children’s level of development, have adequate resources to support them, have a highly trained staff and maintain a close connection with parents to ensure that each individual child continues to grow to his or her full potential.

A third component which is part of most successful ECD programs is the multi-

faceted approach which includes information and education that includes children and parents using a variety of resources. Information on nutrition, child rearing practices, health concerns, pre-natal and post-natal care, learning styles, and community issues should all be part and parcel of a comprehensive early childhood development program. This can be accomplished through the use of mass media television or radio, through the distribution of pamphlets, and through small group instruction or discussion groups.

A fourth component of a successful ECD program as revealed in the literature is an emphasis on a non-formal structure for these programs. This issue is addressed directly by Myers and Landers (1989). They suggest that it is necessary to move away from a highly structured and directive curriculum for children and away from an overemphasis on learning letters and numbers to a greater emphasis on learning concepts. Some early pre-school programs employed very structured curriculums and used primary and elementary teaching techniques to teach pre-school children (Evans, 1994). In recent years more emphasis has been put into an interactive, participative approach with the promotion of imagination and creativity (Myers & Landers, 1989).

Justification For Early Intervention Programs

The final section of this literature review deals with arguments put forth by a number of scholars to justify the existence of early childhood development programs, the intent being to convince parents, governments and non-governmental agencies of the benefits of ECD programs. The following list by Landers (1990) summarizes most of the arguments in support of ECD programs:

- 1) Scientific argument: Research demonstrates that the early years are critical to the

child's social, emotional, and cognitive development.

- 2) Human rights argument: Children have a right to develop to their full potential.
- 3) The moral argument: The transmission of moral and social values that will guide the future of our children begins in the earliest months of life.
- 4) The social equity argument: Stressful conditions that inhibit development can affect the poor more than the rich, reinforcing social inequalities.
- 5) Economic argument: Social benefits through increased productivity and cost savings associated with enhanced early child development.
- 6) Birth spacing and population argument: The link between fertility rates and education level suggests that efforts to improve the education of girls and women will have a strong intergenerational effect on fertility.
- 7) The programmatic argument: The effectiveness of health, nutrition, education and income generating programs can be improved through integration with child development programs, thus taking advantage of interactive effects among these variables. (p.2)

Shaeffer (1996) makes his case for the existence of ECD programs by listing the benefits of such programs. His list is similar to Landers' arguments for ECD programs. However, he does see a few additional benefits. He believes ECD programs can cause reductions in gender inequality, increase social mobility and increase benefits to the community and family unit through improved parental education programs.

Halpern and Myers (1985) used the results of longitudinal studies completed in the

United States to present evidence of the long-term benefits of ECD programs. They found that children who participated in successful ECD programs scored one half to one standard deviation point higher than students who did not participate in ECD programs. These students showed evidence of positive effects on adjustment to the demands of formal schooling. In early and late adolescence, there is strong evidence to suggest that participation in well implemented early childhood education programs can have significant long-term effects on progress through their school career, as measured by promotion, need for special education, and high school completion. Finally, children involved in successful ECD programs were found to have less self-reported delinquent behaviours, fewer contacts with the law, and fewer arrests.

The abundance of data supporting ECD programs stresses the importance of early childhood development programs. If one accepts the arguments put forth in ECD literature, it would be difficult to dispute the need for an infusion of financial resources worldwide.

Trends in Early Childhood Development in Canada

In Canada most of the studies dealing with childcare have been part of an overall plan to improve the level of child poverty in the country. Therefore childcare has not been studied in isolation but rather as part of an integrated effort to bring together all agencies that deal with children who may be at risk because of their economic circumstances. Nevertheless providing quality childcare that is affordable to everyone is viewed as a critical component in addressing the issue of child poverty.

There are four themes that emerge from studies conducted on childcare in Canada:

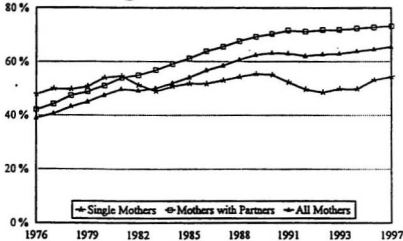
1) Links between poverty and childcare, 2) parenting programs, 3) school readiness and 4) developing a comprehensive childcare model. Each of these topics highlight the importance of childcare and the need to take immediate action to improve the quality of childcare presently being offered in Canada.

A number of studies have examined the connection between poverty and childcare in Canada. The research suggests that one in five Canadian children lives in poverty (National Council of Welfare, 1999). This is a very disturbing trend and one which has recently sparked a great deal of controversy. The Canadian parliament made a unanimous resolution in 1989 that it would eliminate child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. Since this time, the level of child poverty has increased with little hope for improvement in the near future.

One factor which is contributing to this problem is the lack of inexpensive quality childcare. This creates a situation in which parents who may be able to find work are not able to participate in the workforce because they cannot afford to pay to have their children in day care or this service is not available. This is particularly troublesome for single parent families who make up sixty-eight percent of those families that fall below the poverty line. Often in single parent families the mother is the head of this household and she has low levels of education and little job experience which means she can only acquire low paying jobs. Having to manage a household and look for work is very difficult and reduces the likelihood of finding work. They certainly would not have the same opportunity as a mother in a two parent home. Graph 2-E (National Council on Welfare 1999, p. 15) clearly indicates the difficulty single mothers have seeking

employment as compared to dual partner families.

Employment Rates of Mothers Youngest Child Under 16



Graph 2-E

One can begin to picture how the lack of access to affordable daycare can make life difficult for a single mother struggling to make a better life for her family. In fact, if she did get a minimum wage job she would have very little left over after she paid for childcare. This might explain why it is difficult for many single parent families to break out of the poverty cycle.

Both the federal and provincial governments have recognized this problem but have not taken action to rectify it. For example in the Strategic Social Plan (1996) for

the Province of Newfoundland it states; "families in the province have difficulty finding and maintaining high quality childcare." This is not surprising considering the fact that Newfoundland has the fewest licensed child-care spaces per child of any province in Canada, and does not have any form of licensed care for children under the age of two. (See Table 4-G National Council of Welfare 1999, p. 57)

| TABLE 4-G SPONSORSHIP OF REGULATED CENTRE-BASED SPACES, 1996 | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| | Number of Non-Profit Spaces | Number of Commercial Spaces | Total Spaces | Percent Non-Profit |
| Newfoundland | 579 | 1,979 | 2,558 | 23% |
| Prince Edward Island | 2,634 | 1,250 | 3,884 | 68% |
| Nova Scotia | 4,202 | 3,179 | 7,381 | 57% |
| New Brunswick | 4,657 | 3,445 | 8,102 | 57% |
| Quebec | 83,344 | 19,842 | 103,186 | 81% |
| Ontario | 111,277 | 23,946 | 135,223 | 82% |
| Manitoba | 10,551 | 1,276 | 11,827 | 89% |
| Saskatchewan | 4,726 | 97 | 4,823 | 98% |
| Alberta | 22,381 | 33,240 | 55,621 | 40% |
| British Columbia | 20,145 | 11,757 | 31,902 | 63% |
| Northwest Territories | 989 | 123 | 1,112 | 89% |
| Yukon | 617 | 215 | 832 | 74% |
| National | 266,102 | 100,349 | 366,451 | 73% |

Seventy-seven percent of all childcare spaces being offered in the province are commercial (National Council of Welfare, 1999). This trend is well below the national

average for commercial spaces which is twenty-seven percent.

The fact that non-profit, regulated childcare is not readily accessible or affordable in Newfoundland is a serious impediment to improving child poverty in this province for two reasons. First of all it does not encourage families living below the poverty line to seek employment or educational opportunities that will improve their lot in life. Secondly, the shortage of non-profit childcare could have a negative impact on the development of the child. Research has proven again and again that regulation makes an important difference to the quality of childcare. Non-profit childcare programs have lower staff turnover, better staff training and satisfaction, better ratios of children to caregivers and smaller group sizes (National Council of Welfare, 1999). These are all factors that benefit the children who participate in these programs. They are particularly important for poor children because it helps prepare them for entry into the school system.

The issue of school readiness has become increasingly important for officials studying childcare in this country. Both provincial and federal governments are interested in the impact quality childcare can have on the success of children when they enter school. This is obvious in the following excerpt from the Strategic Social Plan (1996) for Newfoundland.

What happens before children enter kindergarten profoundly effects the success they will achieve in school. Appropriate intervention during this stage can ensure that children who are disadvantaged in some way, are at risk of failure, receive the experiences necessary for intellectual growth, social skills development and healthy self image (p. 44)

In order to truly understand the impact of early intervention programs on school

readiness one needs to understand what learning readiness encompasses. Marangello (1997) examines this issue and identified three approaches to learning readiness.

1. The possession of certain academic skills, such as being able to identify numbers and letters;
2. It is represented by general cognitive abilities such as memory and the ability to manipulate objects;
3. It is a broader developmental definition that includes all aspects of the childcare experience and capacities. For example emotional maturity and social skills are as important as academic and cognitive skills. (p. 28)

Marangello believes the third approach is the best approach for assessing readiness for school.

Doherty (1997) also looks at the issue of school readiness and comes up with her own components for learning readiness prior to children entering kindergarten. Her list is similar to Marangello's but she emphasises five factors rather than three. Doherty's list of learning readiness components include:

1. Physical well being and appropriate motor development;
2. Emotional health and a positive approach to new experiences;
3. Social knowledge and competence;
4. Language skills;
5. General knowledge and cognitive skills. (p. 29)

Despite the differences in factors associated with learning readiness most scholars believe quality childcare positively impacts upon the rate of success for children who

enter kindergarten. A recent article in the *Applied Research Bulletin* (1998) highlights some of the benefits of having a good start in school. "A good start in school increases the likelihood that children will feel good about themselves, high school, find and retain employment, be interested in life-long learning and become a caring, contributing member of society" (p. 28).

This study also stated that lack of readiness for school may make it difficult for a child to adjust to school, to succeed academically and to be accepted by peers.

Another study conducted by the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (1997) looked at school readiness in a whole different light. They found that school readiness is linked to income, parents' education and parenting style.

Results from the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) indicate that twenty-five percent of children from lower income households faced developmental delays compared to sixteen percent in middle income households and nine percent in upper income families.

Parents' education levels have a significant impact on school readiness. The test results suggest that children's school readiness increases with their parents' educational attainment levels.

Parenting style is another important factor. Based again on the PPVT results, sixty-nine percent of children whose parents had average or high scores on a positive interaction scale were within the normal developmental range compared to forty-seven percent of children whose parents had the lowest positive parenting scores. (pp. 12-13)

The results from this study clearly indicate how these factors can contribute to poor readiness skills for children coming to school.

These studies demonstrate how important quality childcare is in preparing children for kindergarten. The experiences of children from birth to age five are

extremely important and research in Canada and other parts of the world has shown how it can affect many aspects of a child's life well into adulthood.

Even though quality childcare is significant in a child's development, parents, who are the primary caregivers will ultimately determine the fate of their child. Services such as family resource centres are established to offer programming to parents with the intent of improving parenting skills. This is accomplished by providing specific training to parents on a variety of childcare issues and through a sharing of positive parenting strategies by those who participate in the programs. Most scholars believe that most successful early childhood development programs are those with a parent training component attached.

Preston and Miller (1995) suggested that parenting education programs in the early years are important in giving them the skills they need to become better caregivers. In this study they identified four reasons why parenting programs are so important:

1. It enhances the capacity of parents;
2. It enhances family relationships;
3. The parent helping parent approach offers a very necessary support to parents who may feel isolated because of their geographical separation from other family members;
4. It helps parents address the issue of information overload. New parents tend to be bombarded with information about parenting and the advice they receive at resource centre programs help them sort through this data. (p. 2)

This study suggests how parenting programs can benefit the family unit as a whole,

particularly in the early stages of parenthood when the stresses associated with this new shift in lifestyle can become unbearable. The support provided through parenting programs help make this transition much easier for everyone.

In most parts of Canada parenting programs are delivered through programming at family resource centres and are facilitated by trained early childhood educators. The range of services offered vary from centre to centre and are determined by the level of funding provided. Kyle and Kellerman (1998) provide the following definition of family resource programs:

Family resource programs are multi-service, non-profit, community based programs that promote social support, cooperation, collective responsibility and citizenship through offering a mix of education, information, activities, material support and other resources to family members and groups of families across a number of service areas. (p. 1)

One can see from this rather idealistic definition that family resource programs have a far reaching mission. Obviously, most centres are not equipped to meet this mandate.

However, Kyle and Kellerman (1998) have identified eleven components that have been associated with successful family resource programs:

1. Parent and caregiver education and support;
2. Family preservation services such as counselling, outreach and home visits;
3. Childcare and children's programs;
4. Health education and care;
5. Material support and nutrition programs such as lunch programs and pre-natal care;
6. Housing: Assistance in helping families locate subsidized housing;

7. Youth programs such as drop-in centres and recreation programs;
8. Literacy programs for adults, English as a second language and homework havens;
9. Employment support and community economic development in the areas of life skills and pre-employment training;
10. Other adult education and recreation programs;
11. Community education and leadership development. (pp. 3- 4)

These eleven components present us with a model which would provide the best possible training and support for parents and caregivers. These goals can be accomplished through the family resource programs as long as adequate funding is provided to upgrade existing programs to include all these components.

Providing quality parenting programs has become a priority in some provinces, particularly in the Atlantic region where unemployment rates are generally higher and literacy rates lower than other parts of country. The province of Prince Edward Island has taken the lead in this area of study and has created a training program called Learning and Reading Partners Adult Learning System. This is a comprehensive training manual for parents using an adult learning approach. It focuses on a variety of factors that affect child development such as nutrition, learning styles, developmental stages, and language development. This study was led by Maitland McIsaac an advocate of quality parenting programs and received financial support from the Canadian Childcare Federation. McIsaac and his team of researchers created a resource that can be used throughout the country to train parents and caregivers.

One cannot under estimate the significant role parents play in creating a stimulating learning environment for children. Therefore it only stands to reason that more effort must be directed toward providing support and training to them. This is the only way to significantly improve the quality of care given to our children.

The trend in most provinces in Canada is to develop a comprehensive childcare strategy. This will include not only the provision for availability of adequate daycare services for children, but also attempts to addresses every factor that influences the quality of childcare. The province of Quebec is leading the rest of the country and has already developed a comprehensive Family Policy and the establishment of a new ministry responsible for children and family services. Since it was introduced in 1997 it has made sweeping changes to the delivery of family services throughout the province. There are three major components to this policy: 1) childcare; 2) unified financial support to families; and 3) childcare assistance for those seeking quality childcare.

The new childcare services are intended to be non-profit, community-based and parent-controlled after a five year transition period. The plan is that all childcare will be provided by Early Childhood Centres which are new organizations that incorporate many of the existing non-profit childhood education centres. This bold endeavour will virtually eliminate commercial childcare centres. The government encourages many of these centres to convert to non-profit centres. It is obvious the new ministry believes a regulated non-profit model is the best one for delivering childcare. The literature would certainly support this view.

The second component, unified family support, is an attempt to address the issue

of child poverty. The following excerpt from the National Council of Welfare (1999) study describes this new program:

Quebec replaced several family support programs such as the baby bonus, welfare and family allowance with one unified family allowance. Families with children now get a unified allowance from the provincial government and child tax from the federal government. Poor families with earned income as opposed to income from government programs may also qualify for benefits from the Parental Wage Assistance Program. Benefits are based on earnings from the previous year and can be as high as \$3,784 a year depending on family size and circumstances. (p. 9)

This is probably one of the best family support services in the country and it goes a long way in providing additional financial support to those who need it most.

The most popular component of the Quebec Family Policy is the plan to provide childcare for five dollars a day, to anyone requesting it for all children under the age of six by the year 2001. Provisions have also been made to provide this service for a reduced cost to low income families who wish to use the service. This will certainly eliminate affordability as a reason for parents not being able to avail of quality childcare in Quebec. Another part of this support for working parents is the increased maternal or paternal leaves and a provision which does not allow a loss of benefits for those who decide to take parental leave. The National Council of Welfare (1999) provides a brief synopsis of these benefits:

Quebec now provides eighteen weeks of unpaid leave for mothers and thirty-four weeks of unpaid leave for the mother, father or adoptive parents. Workers on maternity or parental leave have the right to return to the same job with any salary increases or rights that would have been received if they had been at work. (p. 40)

This policy encourages parents to spend more time at home with their babies during the

early stages of development when nurturing and close contact with parents is critical.

The comprehensive Family Policy adopted by Quebec is without a doubt the best in the country. The government has placed the family at the center of policy initiatives and has committed the necessary resources to establish and maintain this system.

Other provinces have not been able to develop a comprehensive plan for early childhood development. Instead they have examined various models for delivery in isolation. For example, in Newfoundland the issue of childcare was addressed in the Strategic Social Plan (1996). They recommended an increase in the number of non-profit childcare seats available and stressed the importance of early intervention programs. Since the release of this report in 1996 very little has been done to rectify deficiencies in the system. The only progress has been a policy statement which sets limits on the number of children that can be accommodated in a home day care setting.

In Ontario a number of different childcare models have been examined. One such model is school based childcare. This is a trend which is catching on fast in Ontario. According to Young (1994) fifty-seven percent of the new childcare spaces in the province since 1985 have been school-based. This seems like a logical place for childcare since these facilities have a variety of services including a gym, music room, computer lab and library. In addition to this, the children can leave their classrooms and enter daycare without leaving the building. This strategy also helps orient children into formal schooling. Ontario has a well established junior kindergarten program and it also uses the family resource centre model extensively especially in rural areas.

British Columbia has a secretariat of the child which coordinates and regulates

issues related to childcare in the province. This is similar to the ministry of the child in Quebec, however the programs being offered are not as comprehensive. There are a variety of childcare models deployed in this province including many of those mentioned earlier. One interesting initiative is the Rural Childcare Project. Vaughn (1997) describes this program as one in which flexible childcare services are provided to seasonal workers who are employed in orchards. In order to accommodate the schedules of these workers a shift system is used for childcare workers so that childcare is available throughout the working day. The government also provides a subsidy for this service which makes it more affordable and enables mothers to work. This allows these families to double their annual incomes. Without this type of assistance children would probably be in the orchards with their parents putting them at risk of injury. British Columbia is moving towards a comprehensive childcare program and is closer to achieving this goal than most other provinces with the exception of Quebec.

In summary, government officials are beginning to realize the significance of providing children with quality childcare in this country. Most provinces are making an effort to address this issue, but there seems to be no clear direction in many regions. Tremendous progress has been made in Quebec with the introduction of its new Family Policy in 1997. This is a bold initiative but one which is an investment in the child and family. Other provinces are looking at the Quebec Family policy very closely to see if it is effective. This may be the direction taken by others in the future. Probably a more logical strategy might be to administer this type of program at the federal level. This will maintain consistency across the country and make childcare much easier to regulate.

Conclusions

There is a substantial body of literature that supports the implementation and maintenance of quality Early Childhood Development programs. On an international scale these programs have been recognized as strategies for improving the quality of childhood development prior to their entering school, especially in third world countries where high rates of poverty and low literacy levels among parents impede child development for many children.

On the other end of the spectrum, in rich countries such as the United States longitudinal studies have indicated the positive benefits of quality early intervention programs. Such benefits include; higher grades in school, a decreased likelihood to need special education services, less likely to get involved in crime and more likely to find a good job and become productive members of society. If one accepts the conclusions of these American studies ECD programs can make a tremendous contribution to society as a whole.

In Canada a tremendous amount of research has been done and most provinces are in the process of developing policies for the implementation and regulation of ECD programs. To date, little progress has been made at the implementation stage in most provinces with the exception of Quebec. Quebec has developed a Ministry of the Child which has made some significant progress on childcare issues. Although ECD literature in Canada supports this model there are no immediate plans for other provinces to adopt this approach in dealing with childcare issues.

In Newfoundland and Labrador the government has concentrated on issues

relating directly to commercial childcare with little attention being given to formalized early intervention programs. This thesis attempts to focus on early intervention programs and how they affect the quality of childcare in rural areas. Examining the two early intervention programs in this study should add another dimension which will help in the development of a comprehensive childcare model in this province.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Design of the Study

This research project collected data that documented the experiences of parents, teachers, school administrators and childcare workers that have been involved with the two early intervention programs discussed earlier. This data was collected using direct observation, participant observation, and in-depth face to face interviews. In addition to this, surveys were conducted with parents of children in grade one who were the first children to have participated in both intervention programs when they first started.

Direct observation and participant observation sessions took place over a two month period at the Family Resource Centre and in the kindergarten classroom where the pre-school program took place. These observation sessions provided an opportunity for me to witness first hand the structure of both early intervention programs and document the level of involvement by all stakeholders involved in them.

I completed three participant observation sessions at the Family Resource Centre on days when school was closed for holidays. During these sessions I volunteered my time to take the children to the computer lab on two occasions and spent another session working with students at the computer centre within the Family Resource Centre. I was fortunate enough to attend one observation session with the kindergarten teacher present.

I conducted eleven in-depth interviews at different locations throughout the school and was hoping to interview more parents, but they were reluctant to participate. I was also not able to interview one childcare worker at the centre because she went on

sick leave. Nevertheless, I was fortunate in receiving a great deal of information and insight from those I did interview. The longest interview I conducted was fifty minutes and the average length of most interviews was thirty minutes. All participants agreed to have their interviews tape recorded.

Parents at the Family Resource Centre were very cooperative as they agreed to take care of each others' children while I interviewed them. Those who were interviewed were also very interested in what I was doing and did whatever they could to assist me. In fact, some participants came to me days after the interview and mentioned things they had forgotten in the interview.

Interviews with school staff were held after school hours and during preparation periods. Only two staff members participated in the study. They were the ones who had been actively involved in these programs right from the very beginning. Other teachers had little to do with these programs so they were not interviewed.

I was not able to arrange an interview with the regional coordinator for Brighter Futures, but I did interview Carol Goth, the individual responsible for producing the national video series on childcare in rural areas. This was very informative and it allowed me to compare the programs here with similar programs in other parts of the country.

Finally, I conducted a very detailed interview with the childcare worker that presently works at the centre. She provided a lot of insight into the program from a variety of different perspectives. She also gave me an overview of early childhood programs and services that could be offered at the Family Resource Centre.

The surveys with the grade one parents were conducted by telephone in the evenings and on weekends. They usually only took about twenty minutes to complete. All parents I contacted were eager to participate. This group was chosen because they had recently completed both programs and their children had completed the kindergarten program. I wanted to know if they felt these two intervention programs made a difference for their children.

This study can be described as inductive, generative, constructive and subjective. Previous deductive studies have focussed on the economic benefits of pre-school programs using gains in intelligent quotients (IQ) as a justification for early intervention programs. This study is more practical; it examines this phenomenon through the lens of the experience of parents, teachers school administrators and childcare workers. The study was conducted primarily in the natural setting where the two early intervention programs take place which helped keep all those involved in the study more focussed.

Data Collection

A network sampling plan was used to identify the parents who participated in the two early intervention programs. Usually parents who were interviewed would recommend someone to me or they would ask them to come and see me to set up an interview. This provided an adequate cross section of parents and generated sufficient data to document the experiences of parents in these two programs. The two staff members, child care worker and national childcare video producer were asked directly if they would like to participate and interviews were arranged at their convenience.

Each individual participating in the interview component of this study received a

letter outlining the purpose of the study, assurances that confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained, the name of the supervisor for this project along with a second contact person. acknowledgement that participation was purely voluntary and that the participant could withdraw at any time, a section granting consent to conduct a tape recorded interview and a time frame when tapes and transcripts from interviews would be destroyed..

Data Analysis

All interview tapes were transcribed using WordPerfect. The tapes were carefully labelled and sorted into parent, teacher, school administrator and child care worker categories. Field notes from observation and participant-observation sessions were also converted into WordPerfect files.

After all information was compiled it was put into a framework that was meaningful and manageable. The method outlined by Burnard (1994) using WordPerfect was a very practical way of “bringing together” the ideas and perceptions of the participants in this study. The cut and paste function of WordPerfect was also an excellent tool for cleaning up the text and removing any dross.

Once the meaning units were established, text was separated so it could easily be skimmed when generating a list of categories. Twenty five categories emerged from the data. Once these categories were further compressed, a letter was assigned to each one. The text was then re-analysed and letters put in margins along side the appropriate text. The sort function of WordPerfect was used to reorganize all data according to the categories chosen. For example, one of the categories was labelled A: Parental

Involvement, all text that dealt with parental involvement or all "A's" were put together. This method could be validated by the researcher if he or she verified these categories with the respondents or by asking a colleague to use a sample transcript to develop his or her system of categories. There should be a reasonable match between the two sets of categories.

The next stage in this data analysis method was to explain why the patterns or categories outlined above emerged from the data. The pattern of categories from this study can be explained using sociological or psychological criteria since the study dealt primarily with social interactions and human experiences of a particular phenomenon. Another aspect of this analytical stage was the link between the findings in the research and that of other literature on the topic. Although it is advisable to move back and forth between the literature and the data, it is not advisable to overuse the findings of other researchers to influence or guide the responses of participants at any time throughout the study. The literature should also not be used to validate categories of data or findings unless it is a duplication of an existing study in some other area. Even in this case it should be used cautiously.

In his article Burnard (1994) restricts the use of this method to interview transcriptions. I used this method with all computerized data. It was very easy to modify field notes and observation jot notes to fit into this sorting system. Even though this method may have saved time and helped to keep the information organized in easily manipulated computer files, it was important to keep hard copies of data and not let the computer take the place of the researcher in the re-reading and re-analysing of data.

Conclusions

The fact that this study was conducted in the school where I have worked for the past three years made data collection very easy. Arranging interviews with those who volunteered to participate was not a problem and I made myself available at any time that was convenient for them. The type of data generated in my research worked well with the analytical procedure discussed earlier. It allowed me to very quickly pull together common themes from interviews and observation sessions.

Chapter Four

Case Study

Geographical and Historical Background of Lawrence Bay

Lawrence Bay is a small fishing community located on the South Coast of Newfoundland. It has a population of approximately eighteen hundred which has been fairly stable over the past few years. Lawrence Bay has a new multi-species fish plant which operates most of the year employing as many as three hundred workers at peak production. The fate of this plant is dictated by federal fisheries' quotas and throughout much of the year it operates with a significantly reduced workforce. This puts great economic strain on the workers and their families. Although economic uncertainty may be a reality in Lawrence Bay today, it was not always the case.

This community was once a prosperous mining town with a population well in excess of two thousand. From the early 1930's to the late 1970's Lawrence Bay was the site of a large fluorspar mine. This employed men from Lawrence Bay and surrounding communities. Throughout this period the town experienced full employment. With prosperity came all the modern amenities such as water and sewer, a modern recreation centre, curling club, three schools, a public library, police station, fire hall, bank and numerous business establishments. By all accounts this community was one of the most prosperous in Newfoundland throughout much of this period.

However, in this mining town prosperity had its price as many of the men who worked in the mine died of silicosis or miners' disease. This left many families in poverty as the wives and children were left to live on meagre compensation packages or

forced to go on welfare. Eventually, a modern ventilation system was installed in the mine and more stringent safety regulations were enforced which made the mine a safe place to work. In 1978 AICAN shut down the mine during a workers' strike. It was reactivated in the 1980's for a short time but still remains idle today.

In order to replace mining as the main industry in the town the federal and provincial governments built a fish plant in the 1980's. The plant operated seasonally for a few years before it was closed. This created a great deal of uncertainty in the town and many had no option but to leave the community in search of work. The conversion of this plant into a multi-species secondary processing facility in 1997 provided Lawrence Bay with a stable source of employment.

Significance of Education in Lawrence Bay

Throughout all the hardships and prosperity the residents of Lawrence Bay have not lost sight of the importance of education in the life of the community. The first school was established in the late 1870's and over the next one hundred years the community had four schools. The Anglican population had their school and there were three Catholic schools which consisted of an elementary school and a separate boys and girls high school. The Catholic schools were established and run by the Sisters of Mercy. These schools maintained high academic standards and graduated many prominent citizens. The emphasis on a holistic approach which focussed on the academic, spiritual, social, and emotional development of the child created an education system that was second to none in the province. Nevertheless, during the "hay day" of the mine many young people did not complete their education and chose instead to leave school and go

to work in the mine or find work in other parts of Canada and the United States.

Throughout the late 1960's and 1970's enrolments began to decline, and the five schools were merged into two separate schools; an elementary school (K to 6) and a high school (7 to 12). In the 1998-99 school year the local school board closed the elementary school and attempted to make a K to 12 one tier system in the community but parents reached an agreement with the board to enable two separate schools to co-exist under one roof. They felt the two tiered system was the best delivery system for education in the town and fought hard to see to it that it was maintained. During the consolidation process parents were not willing to move into the new building unless it contained a space for the Family Resource Centre. This proved the level of commitment for early childhood development programs in the community.

Establishment of the Family Resource Centre

The Family Resource Centre in Lawrence Bay was established in the fall of 1995. The principal at the elementary school was the person responsible for informing parents and community leaders about the tremendous benefits of this service.. He saw a need for this type of program in order to promote literacy and offer support to families in the community. In the spring of 1995 he attended a meeting hosted by Health and Welfare Canada who were encouraging local groups to organize and establish Resource Centres. They offered federal SEED money to community organizations to pay for the cost of childcare workers and provided a budget for the purchase of resources needed in the centres. Following this meeting a steering committee was formed for the region and a board of directors was later formed to oversee the establishment of centres in all major

towns throughout the region.

Lawrence Bay was one of the first communities to have a centre. This was a result of the work done by the principal of the elementary school who offered himself to sit on the board of directors for Brighter Futures, the organization in charge of setting up family resource centres. His position on the board provided him with a great deal of knowledge about early intervention programs which he took back to his school and the community. According to the principal, Mr. Smith there was tremendous support for this program right from the first time it was discussed in a public forum:

In Lawrence Bay the parents and the kindergarten teacher and all the staff supported it... There was never a question as to whether or not we were going to go with this. From the time they found out what Brighter Futures was they certainly were on board and supported it 100%. (Mr. Smith, personal communication, June 18, 1999)

This level of support was evident when the centre opened in November of 1995 as parents volunteered their time to help renovate the room and set it up in such a way that it was ready to meet the needs of children from 0 to 6 years of age. The spirit of cooperation between the parents, community and school enabled the Family Resource Centre to thrive as it began offering services to the children and parents of Lawrence Bay.

Establishment of the Pre-school Program

The pre-school program evolved at about the same time as the Family Resource Centre. In fact it was established to complement the family resource centre and help ease the transition for children in the year prior to their entering kindergarten. This point was made quite clear by Mr. Smith, the school principal at Lawrence Bay Elementary in the

following statement:

I guess pre-school was a bit of a spin off from Brighter Futures. However, it was a school initiative. We thought a year prior to coming to school where we could have them (pre-school children) in school on a regular basis we could orient them to the formal education that they would be involved with.... sort of develop some of the interests in reading and promote socialization.

Even though the pre-school program was introduced the same year as the family resource centre, the staff had been looking at this idea for a few years. In the meantime, the kindergarten teacher was offering a partial pre-school program in the year prior to it being fully implemented. Furthermore, both administrators at the school had worked in a school elsewhere in the district where a very successful pre-school program had existed for a number of years. Mrs. Adams, the kindergarten teacher, indicated that they had been reviewing research on the benefits of early intervention programs and looking at several schools in the district that had partial pre-school programs. Having both administrators with experience with pre-school programs certainly made it much easier to initiate this program since they were already sold on the idea.

The school principal was the driving force behind the family resource centre but it was the kindergarten teacher who assumed the leadership role in the initiation of the pre-school program. She was convinced of the benefits of such a program from her previous experience with kindergarten orientation and from readings she had collected on the topic: .

I did in years before have the kindergarten children in approximately three or four times and then we increased it throughout the years to having them in nine or ten times, which I found really beneficial. So we decided if we had them come in nine or ten times which was good then we figured a whole year would make the world of difference. (M. Adams, personal

communication, June 22, 1999)

The first meeting with parents of pre-kindergarten children to discuss the possibility of implementing a pre-school program was held in September of 1995. There was tremendous support from all parents who attended this meeting and they were very enthusiastic about it. Mrs. Adams told parents up front they would have to run this program. This was evident in her comments:

In fact when we started the program we told the parents that because I was a full time teacher I would not be able to do the program as such. In spare time or on different days I would get in myself so the children would know me but they would have to carry the load with help from me.

The parents fully understood the situation and there was no problem getting volunteers to run the program. From the very beginning there were a number of parents who acted as coordinators and all parents agreed to come in once a month to help the coordinators. This system has worked well over the past three years and new parents continue to come forward and volunteer their services as coordinators.

Chapter Five

Case Study: The Family Resource Centre Experience

The opening of the family resource centre in 1995 was by all accounts a turning point in the way the community perceived the importance of early childhood intervention programs. For the first time parents acknowledged the significance of providing programming for children ages zero to five prior to their entering school. This initiated a new way of looking at time frames for educating a child. Many parents realized the importance of reading to children but they never realized that the most critical ages for learning were from birth to age three. Therefore participation in early intervention programs such as the family resource centre could be very helpful in the social, emotional and intellectual development of their child. This prompted many parents to take their child to the centre and avail of this service.

In the case of any new paradigm, change does not happen overnight, it is a gradual process. The fact that the family resource centre was located at the school meant there had to be some uncertainty for school staff at the school. Three afternoons a week there was a group of children and parents coming into the school and using a room in the primary section. How did this affect the school? Did the staff feel comfortable with their presence? Would they prefer the centre be located outside the school?

Experience of School Staff

Unlike many new initiatives that are thrust onto schools this is a service that the staff felt was very worthwhile. Therefore they embraced it and looked forward to the benefits of this program. Throughout the past two and a half years I have only heard one

staff member question the need for a family resource centre in the school. All other school personnel firmly believe the school is the best location for this service. This view is summarized nicely by Mr. Smith, the principal who also rationalizes why this centre should be located in the school:

I think the school is the ideal location for these centres and services. I think the school is the ideal place because I think school should be a lifelong learning centre. I think the more partnerships we can get involved in the better we will be. So here is a very valuable partnership we have with these parents and community leaders. We can offer the school facility so that the children can get use to coming to the school and they socialize with all the children around the school.

This view accurately represents the feelings of most staff members who realize the importance of this program in promoting literacy, school readiness skills, and socialization skills. The kindergarten teacher believes that some of the skills they learn at the family resource centre help prepare them for the pre-school program. Furthermore, the principal and other staff members find that parents who have been very active at the family resource centre usually go on to become volunteers at the pre-school program and with other school-related activities.

Although the main focus for staff members is the students from K to 6 they do try to involve children from the resource centre in certain school activities. Sports day and the Halloween fair are two events where children from the centre are always invited. They are also provided with access to the gym, music room and computer lab when these rooms are available. The school staff would like to be more involved with programming at the centre; however work commitments make it difficult to achieve this goal. Nevertheless, they do offer advice to the facilitator whenever it is requested.

Thus far the experience of school staff has been very positive in regard to having the family resource centre at the school. In fact, it is a program that teachers feel very proud of, especially since it was part of a national video series on rural early childhood education. Their commitment to this program was certainly evident over the past year as they helped lobby the school board for space to establish a family resource centre in the new school building during the consolidation process.

Experience of Parents

Programs established by Brighter Futures are intended to improve the quality of childcare in rural areas. This goal is accomplished by offering programs to enhance opportunities for training and support for families. In Lawrence Bay this goal is being met and surpassed. This is reflected in the experiences of many parents who attend the family resource centre or drop in centre as it is affectionately named by most patrons.

Although parents may feel comfortable coming to the centre now, this was not the case especially during their first session. The following three examples of parents accounts of their first experience demonstrate how some parents were caught off guard:

The first day I walked in ... it was a little bit overwhelming, in the sense not the noise level but the activity level. I didn't know what to expect but I didn't expect quite that intensity. (J. Long, personal communication, June 26, 1999)

Brandon was a little shy when he started out and I remember the first day. I went through hell and back again because he didn't want to play with other kids, he didn't want to interact, he was really shy. (T. Connors, personal communication, May 13, 1999)

I was right shy. I wouldn't speak to nobody or nothing. (J. Hickey, personal communication, May 11, 1999)

Although these first experiences with the drop in centre were not overly pleasant, all

three parents saw the benefits of these programs and returned regularly. In fact two of the three parents went on to assume leadership roles within the centre and one of them is a member of the board of directors for Brighter Futures.

Coming to the centre may have been a little unsettling for some parents initially but for others it was a pleasant experience right from the very start. They saw immediately the tremendous benefits for their child. This is evident in the following excerpts from two parent interviews:

It was a great opportunity for children to get out and socialize with other children. It was a great idea. (M. A. Hall, personal communication, April 30, 1999)

I found that it was really good for Gillian. She started to mingle with the other kids and where we live there were no other kids available for her to play with. It was really surprising at first because there was so much there that I didn't know about. It was good. (P. Randall, personal communication, May 20, 1999)

Once parents and children become familiar with each other and the childcare worker at the centre, the experience became very satisfying and enriching. In fact a number of parents thought participating in this program brought about tremendous personal changes for them. This was evident as suggested by one parent:

I was a shy person. I wouldn't dare go up to you and say hi my name is Jenny. You would have to come up and approach me first. It was right up to Christmas before I started to mingle. Now I don't care I will talk to anybody. I'm on committees and it don't bother me now. It brought me out of my shell. (J. Hickey, personal communication, May 11, 1999)

This parent went on to attend a provincial conference in St. John's in the spring of 1998 and brought back a number of programs which she demonstrated to the parents at the centre. She is also on a planning committee for the centre and is presently one of the pre-school coordinators. Not all parents who have attended the drop-in centre over the

past three years have had such a pleasant experience as Mrs. Hickey but all parents admit it has been a positive experience. This begs the question as to why has it been such a positive experience.

This question has been answered indirectly by all parents who have participated in this study. Most parents believed the social network it provided for them was very helpful. It gave them an opportunity to meet with other parents in a location where the focus was on children. This helped get them out of the house three afternoons a week in an environment where they could relax and discuss child rearing strategies with other parents and seek input into problems they may have been having with their children. Furthermore, the childcare worker could provide them with information on various parenting issues and offer them suggestions.

A second factor which made the experience so rewarding for parents was the knowledge that they were participating in a program that was very helpful in the development of their child. This was probably the main reason why parents decided to participate in this program in the first place. Most parents want what is best for their children and they saw the family resource centre as a positive influence in preparing their child for formal schooling. This viewpoint is nicely summarized by one parent:

To me the biggest strength is that it gets them into the environment of school. Let's face it, it prepares them for the structure they are going to have up until the time they are sixteen or seventeen. It gets them into the environment at a really early age and it ingrains it in them. (J. Long, personal communication, June 26, 1999)

In addition to the structure at the centre, the skills they learned and the fact that it was located at the school made a big difference for parents who participated in the program.

The most important skill children at the drop-in centre learned was how to socialize with others. This was particularly important because today families usually consisted of one or two children and there may not be any children of similar age living close enough for a child to play with. This limits opportunities for children to practice sharing cooperation and appropriate social behaviour. The family resource centre provided companionship for these children and assisted them in the development of social skills. Parents perceived these skills as extremely important in preparing children for school. This was obvious in the following statement by one parent who regularly brought her children to the centre. "I think it is very important to have social skills because when they go to school if they don't have these skills this could lag them behind." (L. White, personal communication, May 8, 1999)

Although a great deal of emphasis was placed on social interaction, children at the drop in centre learned a number of other useful skills. They participated in craft activities which encouraged their creativity and allowed them to become familiar with using glue, finger paints, scissors, and crayons. This early exposure to these activities helped develop small motor skills in the hands and fingers which would better prepare children for the pre-school and kindergarten.

Another positive aspect of the family resource centre experience for parents was that it created a special time for the parent and child to spend quality time together in an enriching environment free from distractions such as television, radio, video games and other domestic chores. Most children who attended the centre on a regular basis soon became familiar with the weekly schedule and frequently asked their parents if they had

school that day. This became a weekly ritual for parents as well and they enjoyed coming to the centre with their children. Some found it very relaxing because they could spend this special time with their children helping them with activities, listening to stories and informally teaching them how to get along with others.

Overall the experiences of parents who have attended the family resource centre have been very positive. Once the initial adjustment for the children coming to the centre was made parents could see the benefits of this program and they continued to return. This level of commitment has increased over the past two years and the program in Lawrence Bay has one of the highest attendance rates in this region.

Parental Involvement

The success of the family resource centre in Lawrence Bay can largely be attributed to the high level of parental involvement in the program. Parental involvement can be classified into three different categories:

- 1) The actual attendance at weekly sessions.
- 2) The level of participation in daily activities at the centre.
- 3) The Level of participation in the administration of the centre.

These three categories can be placed into a pyramid of involvement with attendance falling at the bottom, participation in daily activities in the middle and administrative involvement at the top of the pyramid.

This pyramid of involvement is similar to other top down structures in the sense that only a small number of individuals make it to the top level. In order to understand how this pyramid works it is important to examine each level individually.

Level I of the pyramid is the level of involvement in which parents choose to attend sessions at the centre. They are content to go with the flow and choose not to offer suggestions for improvements or ideas for new activities. This is the safest level of involvement because the participant has no responsibility for planning or carrying out activities at the centre. All parents start out at this stage but most progress through to stage two or three. Those who choose to stay at this level do so because they may not have the time to make a deeper commitment to the program or they may lack self-confidence.

Level II of the pyramid is involvement in daily activities. At this stage parents agreed to become helpers with activities that have been planned by others. There is no preparation time required outside resource centre time to assist with these activities so most parents agree to pitch in and lend a hand when they are called upon. This level is fairly safe and additional time commitments are not necessary. At this stage parents feel more comfortable offering suggestions for future activities but they are not committed to helping plan these activities.

Level III of the pyramid is the highest level of parental involvement. There are only four or five parents that aspire to this level. They are the ones who meet after family resource centre hours to plan the monthly calendar of activities, arrange field trips, plan fund raisers, meet with the board of directors for Brighter Futures and attend workshops or seminars offered by Brighter futures. This group is very committed and go beyond the call of duty to make sure the centre provides a high quality service to the children and parents who participate in the program.

Unlike many hierarchical structures where power is willingly held in the hands of a select few, the group at the top of this structure would like all parents to be more involved and participate in the administration of the centre. In fact some of these individuals found it very frustrating that some parents choose not to be more involved. This is reflected in the comments of two parents:

Yes and it's always the same parents but we try to get others more involved. (T. Connors, personal communication, May 13, 1999)

It's kind of hard to get six or seven people to sit down and say we are going to do this when another bunch comes along and says we don't want to do that today we should do this. I think if they want to put their input in they should come to the meetings. (J. Hickey, personal communication, May 11, 1999)

Although it may be frustrating, what these parents do not realize is that not all individuals want to take on a leadership role. They are satisfied with their level of involvement and feel comfortable with it. They feel confident in the ability of the parent committee and childcare worker and do not feel the need to be more involved.

Even though the ideal may be full parental involvement in all levels of the pyramid this is not the case. Furthermore, it is probably not a realistic expectation since all individuals attending the centre come from different educational backgrounds with conflicting philosophies on childcare, work commitments, family commitments and differing levels of commitment to the family resource centre.

Experience of Child Care Worker

Coleen, the childcare worker assigned to Lawrence Bay is trained in early childhood development and has approximately five years experience. Although her official title is program facilitator she feels more comfortable with the role of support

person: "Facilitator doesn't really fit me. I like to see myself as a support person. I like to be very approachable you know. If you have a problem ask me." (C. Manning, personal communication, May 6, 1999)

Although she considers herself to be a support person, she also plays the role of a liaison between the parents and the Brighter Futures organization. These roles make her experience at the centre very different from parents and school staff.

In her role as liaison or facilitator she is expected to fulfill the mandate of the organization which is to maximize parental involvement and make the centre function with as much parental involvement as possible. This creates a situation in which she finds herself struggling to find new ways to get parents more involved. Although increased involvement is a good thing it is important to proceed cautiously. The approach Coleen prefers is indeed a cautionary one:

I think they should be more involved only if they are comfortable with it. I know the organization likes to see a heavy parental involvement but sometimes I say to them, "They are not going to be involved if they are not comfortable with their role in the first place. They are not going to be effective if they are forced into it." I kind of like to graduate them into it and 'devi out' responsibilities because I think it will all click in the end. (C. Manning, personal communication, May 6, 1999) .

This strategy has a lot of merit when one considers the pyramid of involvement discussed earlier. In fact, forcing parents who are not ready to be more involved may have the opposite effect and resulting in their not coming to the centre at all.

Coleen's approach of "graduating parents into it" seems to be working, since more parents are entering level two of the pyramid and do not mind helping out with the daily activities. She believes this graduating process can best be accomplished by working

with parents individually and getting to know them better:

I like to not really force them but to encourage them individually. I like to find out more about them and say, "OK you are really good at this particular thing, would you like to help out with this, this month. You are really strong on the computer so you may want to take a few children over there with your son." I try to build on their individual strengths and together they can work as a group.

Although this individualized approach has worked well for participation in daily activities at the centre, it has fallen short in generating interest in parenting programs such as: anger management, nutrition, and building self-esteem which could be offered to parents during evenings or on weekends. Since one of her mandates is to promote parenting skills, Coleen finds this situation disheartening. She feels these programs can be useful to all parents: "Sometimes just getting them interested is very difficult. I mean we have hundreds of programs we can offer if we could just generate the interest. I mean it is no sense in putting it off if you don't have a high enough participation level." Involving parents in these programs is one of the most challenging aspects of the childcare workers' job. This is due in large part to a number of factors outside her control such as the involvement of many parents in other activities in the night time such as volunteer groups, sports activities, family commitments, or other indulgences like bingo and darts. The level of commitment to the family resource centre has to be quite high to forgo most of these activities.

Another aspect of the experience for the childcare worker is the strains placed on her by budget cuts. In April (1999) her hours were cut back from forty hours a week to thirty five. This may not seem like much but it does have a ripple effect on the delivery of services to the three family resource centres she is responsible for. For example in a

given month this will eliminate twenty five hours that would normally be used to offer parenting programs. Thus, the expectation is to offer more parenting programs in considerably less time. Budget restraints have also taken away the flexibility that previously existed with regard to carrying over hours from week to week. This situation prompts the following reaction from Coleen:

Because of some restraints regarding budgeting they are not as flexible with their hours now. If I stayed on for a parenting program for two hours some evening, I have to take that two hours off that week. I can't carry over any time. It really puts a lot of stops on what you can and can't do.

This certainly puts added stress on her as she struggles to find ways to adapt to these budget cuts. Despite these shortcomings Coleen tries to minimize the impact to services provided to parents and children at the centre.

The role of support person is the role she enjoys most because she can see first hand the progress made by those who participate in the program. She believes the family resource centre benefits both children and parents. It is difficult to measure exactly how beneficial this program is for the individuals involved but according to Coleen it has made a tremendous impact on both parents and children:

It has been roughly four years since it has been down here and I have seen a lot of progress in the six to eight months I have been down here. It is amazing ... I have seen parents going from not talking at all to communicating very effectively with other peers. Some parents even learning a new skill and applying it to their child, speaking better to the child or finding another way to do things. It affected a lot of people very positively and I think it's going to benefit everyone in the long term.

The childcare worker believes that parents staying with the child is very beneficial to the child because the child sees the parent interacting with others and models this behaviour.

This makes it easier for the child to interact and play with other children at the centre. They also feel more secure when they see that parents are involved in the activities and spending this quality time together.

In order to ensure that the maximum benefits are acquired by all participants in the program the role of support person is crucial. Coleen believes her role as support person is multi-dimensional. These dimensions include:

- i. Resource Person
- ii. Listener
- iii. Teacher
- iv. Networker
- v. Sounding Board
- vi. Positive Reinforcer

In the first dimension Coleen provides parents with information on a variety of topics dealing with childcare. If parents have a specific problem, she tries to find information in print that may be helpful or she utilizes another dimension in her role. This information is usually provided informally from a resource file kept by Coleen.

The second dimension is listener. Being a good listener is an important aspect of being a support person. Most days parents may have a problem that is bothering them and may need someone to sit and listen while they get it off their chest. Usually sharing this with someone will make them feel better. However, once the problem has been identified, advice may be given by the childcare worker that could resolve the problem.

The third dimension, teacher is one that Coleen would like to utilize more with

parenting programs. In this dimension she would be responsible for instructing parents on a specific aspect of childcare. This service would be provided at the request of a group of parents and would not necessarily include all parents from the family resource centre.

The fourth dimension is networker. This is where the childcare worker links parents who may be having similar problems with their children. This is a very important function because parents can compare notes on strategies they have tried and develop new strategies to try with their children. Usually parents are linked up with other parents at their own centre and sometimes links can be made between centres.

The fifth dimension is that of a sounding board. In this dimension the childcare worker is used to bounce ideas around concerning issues related to programming at the centre, childcare issues or parenting strategies. In this situation the parent has already formulated an idea and seeks input from the childcare worker.

The sixth dimension is positive reinforcer. This is an important role because parenting is challenging and often stressful and everyone needs to know from time to time that they are doing a good job. This is probably one of the most rewarding dimensions of the support person and one which needs to be used frequently.

It is obvious from examining these six dimensions that the role of a support person is a very demanding one. It is hard to meet the needs of everyone and carry out a program for children as well. This is the reality for Coleen at the family resource centre each day. It is certainly quite challenging but also rewarding for her as she observes how well adjusted the children she had in her program are when they move on to pre-school

and kindergarten.

To summarize, the experience of the childcare worker at the family resource centre in Lawrence Bay has been generally very positive. She has enjoyed working with the parents and children and sees many benefits for all who participate in the program. Although she was pleased with the high attendance rate at the centre, she would like to see more interest from parents in the many programs that could be offered to them at the centre. The only major concern expressed by Coleen was the negative impact budget cuts were having on programming at the centre.

Chapter Six

Case Study: The Pre-school Experience

The pre-school program is very different from the family resource centre in its approach to meeting the needs of the children. This is due mainly to the fact that it is a school initiative with no external funding. As a result of this, it does not have the services of a trained childcare worker and is run through a network of parent volunteers. This perpetuates a completely different experience for all stakeholders involved in the program especially since parents are all expected to help run pre-school. Since it is a school initiative, there is a close connection between certain school staff members and the parents and children who participate in this early intervention program.

Experience of School Staff

Because it was the school staff who initiated the pre-school program the experience for teachers and administration has been generally positive. They realize the importance of this program in preparing children for school and provide as much support as possible to see that it is successful.

The kindergarten teacher has been actively involved in this program right from the start. Even though she has transferred into a grade one teaching position this year she continues to oversee the operation of the pre-school program. She is pleased that parents are so supportive of this program and enjoys working with them. At this point in time pre-school is well established and her main function is to meet with parents as a group to provide information and to conduct a training session for parent volunteers. The activities used in the pre-school program have been compiled into a binder and parents

are able to follow these lesson plans independently. In the past Mrs. Adams has had the pre-schoolers attend three sessions with her and the kindergarten class would not attend regular classes. This would allow the group to take in classes in music, physical education and technology.

The experience of Mrs. Adams, the kindergarten teacher, could certainly be described as very positive. She enjoys working with parents and feels the pre-school program better prepared children for kindergarten. Since pre-school has been introduced Mrs. Adams has noted that

when those kids come now I don't have this whole month of getting the children to be settled to do activities. They have already gone through all of that. They are much more attentive listeners and better workers.

The fact that the children are better adjusted to school and the teacher is familiar with all parents makes the transition to kindergarten much easier for everyone involved. This in itself is enough to make the kindergarten teacher feel good about the pre-school program.

The experience for the school administration has also been very positive. The principal of Lawrence Bay Elementary has been an advocate of early intervention programs for many years and felt a pre-school program would be extremely beneficial to the children of Lawrence Bay. He has worked closely with the kindergarten teacher and parents to make sure they have access to any school amenities that they may need to run the program. Providing access to items such as photocopy machines, video cassette recorders, laminators and telephones has enabled the program to function smoothly. Mr. Smith firmly believes in the value of creating partnerships within the community and this is one partnership that has worked well over the past four years.

In his educational leadership role at the school Mr. Smith can see first hand the benefits of the pre-school program. This makes pre-school a worthwhile experience for him and the school as a whole. "I think for a lot of children the reading aspect, communication aspect and the involvement of parents in school has been very positive." Obviously, when a program is working well and supported by the staff and parents in the community, it becomes a source of pride for the school administration. The fact that this program has been nationally recognized in a video has certainly heightened the level of satisfaction with this tremendous accomplishment. This has made the experience of the school administration very rewarding.

The involvement of other school staff in the pre-school program has been minimal; however the presence of these children in the school has also affected their daily activities. Teachers in the primary section have had to get use to an increased noise level, and an increased presence of parents in school. There has also been additional work for custodial and secretarial staff. Overall, teachers in the primary section have been very accommodating. They accept this as a necessary part of the transition process for these children. For the most part, primary teachers are very supportive of this program and occasionally offer advice to parent volunteers who run the pre-school program. The janitorial and secretarial staff have also been supportive and do not object to being called upon from time to time to assist parent volunteers running the pre-school program. In fact they think of pre-school as part of the regular school program.

Overall, the experience of the school staff at Lawrence Bay Elementary has been very positive. They have witnessed first hand the benefits of this program and wish to

see it succeed. Therefore they welcome it and support it as much as they can. The success of this program can certainly be attributed largely to the support it receives from the entire school staff.

Experience of Parents

The experience of parents involved in the pre-school program was very different from those involved in the family resource centre. At the family resource centre involvement was encouraged whereas at the pre-school program it was necessary. In order for pre-school to function, it required full parental involvement. In other words, all parents were expected to take a turn to come along and help out with the program. The only exceptions to this would be individuals who could not attend because of work commitments or other family commitments.

Although some parents may have been a little hesitant in the beginning, most of them found pre-school to be a very rewarding experience. This was especially the case for those who volunteered to be coordinators. Unlike the other parents who had to attend four sessions a year, the coordinators attended all sessions. Therefore, they could see the tremendous changes that took place in some children over the year. One example of this was cited by a coordinator who had volunteered with the pre-school program since it began four years ago. "I had one little boy for instance that would not listen to anything. He wouldn't do anything that you told him to do. By the time the end of the year came he was the best little fellow we had. (S. Tilley, personal communication, July 10, 1999) This coordinator also took great pride in the fact that pre-school played such a significant role in helping children adjust to kindergarten. After the kindergarten graduation in the

spring of 1999 she could not believe the difference in those children from the time she had them in pre-school. Shannon felt the process of going through the pre-school graduation ceremony really helped to prepare them for their kindergarten graduation.

In addition to the coordinators noticing a difference in the children most parents also noticed a difference in their child. One parent noted the change in her child after attending the pre-school program. "Last year Gillian wouldn't even pick up a pencil. She had no interest in finding out colours. I'd show her a Colour and she would not have any interest at all. But now she knows all her colours. She is prepared now to go to school. (P. Randall, personal communication, May 20, 1999)

This sense of satisfaction with the progress of the children was a common thread which tied the experiences of all parents who had participated in the program. Although most children may have entered pre-school at different cognitive, social, emotional and fine motor development stages, according to their parents, they all seem to have come away with something positive from the pre-school experience. This was one element of pre-school which made the experience worthwhile for parents.

Another aspect of the pre-school experience which was very beneficial for parents was that it provided them with the opportunity to become familiar with the parents, school staff, students and the school environment in general. The contact parents had with each other and the children every week allowed them to get to know each other a little better which in turn made them feel more comfortable working together. They also had the opportunity to meet some of the school staff and become familiar with the physical layout of the building. In their role as parent volunteers they became familiar

with the school routine and got a little taste of what was expected of their children when they entered kindergarten. This helped ease some of the anxiety they may have faced the following year when their children went to school.

One of the most interesting aspects of the parental experience with the pre-school program was the incredible sense of satisfaction and fulfilment it gave certain parents. Some parents loved working with children. Pre-school provided them with another opportunity to work closely with children in a more structured setting. Some parents were already involved with the scouting movement, so volunteering as a coordinator was a natural progression. Having access to craft activities from the scout movement made it easier to expand the types of activities in the pre-school program.

All three coordinators that were interviewed emphasized how much they enjoyed working with children. Recently in discussions with the three new coordinators running the program this year, the same sentiments were expressed. Having individuals like this involved in pre-school has certainly enhanced the quality of the program.

In summary, parental experience with the pre-school program has been very positive. Most parents see a big difference in their children and believed it helped get their child ready for school. The results of the parent survey that was completed by present grade one parents certainly supported this view. One hundred percent of the respondents said this program prepared their child for school and eighty-eight percent concluded it was very beneficial to their children's success in kindergarten. In addition to getting the child ready for school it also familiarized parents with the school environment and relieved some of the anxiety they may have experienced about sending

their child to school. In their role as volunteers parents derived a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment when working with children and were very proud of the accomplishments of the children they worked with. Since parent volunteers ran the pre-school program it was important that their experience be a positive one. This is what made the program continue to grow and prosper.

Connection Between Family Resource Centre and Pre-school Experience

In the beginning of this chapter the differences between the family resource centre and pre-school programs were briefly discussed. The most obvious difference was the way both programs were structured and run. Pre-school was a school initiated program which was run by parent volunteers. It was very structured and its main purpose was to prepare children for formal schooling. The family resource centre on the other hand was a federally funded program with a qualified childcare worker and was set up to serve the needs of both children and parents. There was very little structure to this program with the exception of having designated times for play, eating lunch, completing craft activities, and clean up time. Although both parents and the childcare worker acknowledged this program was helpful in preparing children for school, this was not its main function. It was more of a support system for families in the community with the intent of improving the quality of childcare for all caregivers.

Although both programs had a number of differences, they were closely connected and seemed to work well together. In fact, both programs were intended to work together with the pre-school program being the bridge between these two early intervention programs and kindergarten. There appeared to be five major strands that

connected these two programs together: 1) the development of a core group of parent volunteers; 2) introduction of parents and children to the school environment; 3) the development of socialization and communication skills; 4) developing independence and self help skills for children; and 5) the implementation of school readiness skills. Each of these five strands were set up on a continuum from very low to very high and those who participate in both early intervention programs progress through this continuum at different rates.

Diagram 1

| | | | | |
|-----------------|------------|-----------------|-------------|------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Very Low | Low | Moderate | High | Very High |



The first strand, the development of a core of parent volunteers is a very significant connection between the two programs. In fact, Mr. Smith the school principal believes a lot of the volunteers for the pre-school program are those same parents who have volunteered for the brighter futures program. The data from the grade one parent survey confirms this assumption. All parents in the survey who reported being very involved in planning or carrying out activities at the family resource centre also reported being very involved in volunteering at the pre-school program. Most of them started on the far left of the continuum when they first came to the family resource centre and were

hesitant about volunteering for anything. However, spending two or three years with the centre increased their willingness to volunteer from low to moderate or high levels. This made it much easier to recruit volunteers for the pre-school program. On the other hand, the expectation that all parents should volunteer for the pre-school sessions forced parents who may not have surpassed the low level of volunteering at the family resource centre to become more involved. The survey identifies three parents who did not participate in the program at the family resource centre. One of them reported being very involved as a volunteer for the pre-school program and the other two were somewhat involved. Four parents who were somewhat involved as volunteers at the family resource centre continued to be somewhat involved with the pre-school program.

Although the data from the survey is not conclusive, there seems to be a close correlation between the level of involvement in both programs. The family resource centre encourages parents to volunteer. This helps train a group of parents that go on to become volunteers for the pre-school program.

The second strand is the introduction of the children and parents to the school environment. Upon entry, the family resource centre parents and children are introduced the physical layout of the building and receive some exposure to the type of routines they will experience when they come to school. Even though all parents attended school at some point in time they have forgotten the experience of attending school. The children on the other hand are not accustomed to sharing one room filled with toys with so many others. Thus for most parents and children their familiarity with the school environment starts out very low and increases as they continue to come to the centre.

The children and parents who enter the pre-school program have been oriented into the school environment which makes the transition much easier. At the end of the pre-school program the participants reach very high levels of familiarity with the school environment. Both children and parents are familiar with a daily school schedule, appropriate behaviour, and homework; they know most of their teachers and can find their way around the building reasonably well. One could argue the pre-school program is primarily responsible for orienting children into the school environment. However, parents who volunteer at the pre-school program have noted that children who participated in the family resource centre adjusted much quicker to pre-school and parents did not have to stay as long with these children. Therefore, participation in the family resource centre seems to help most children become familiar with the idea of coming to school. This is an indication of how both programs worked together to prepare children for the physical and psychological adjustment to the school environment.

The development of socialization and communication skills is the fourth strand which links the two programs together. This is probably one of the most significant benefits for both programs. One hundred percent of parents surveyed identified this as a significant benefit of both programs.

Many parents bring their children to the family resource centre so they can learn to socialize with other children their age. In the beginning social and communication skills are at a very low level as the children have a difficult time learning to get along with others. Children tend to stay close to the parent first when they come to the centre.

However, as time progresses, they learn to take turns and share toys with others. They also get to know the other children and become close friends. The children who have attended the family resource centre program tend to have little problems adjusting to the social and communication aspects of pre-school because they have become familiar with some of their classmates at the centre. They transfer the social skills they learned and further develop them at pre-school. On the other hand, children who did not attend the family resource centre may have a difficult time as they have to learn appropriate social behaviour and communication skills. This makes the experience a little unsettling for the children during the first few sessions.

A fourth strand in the link between the family resource centre and pre-school program is the development of increased levels of independence in children. Children who attend the family resource centre for the first time are usually very dependent on parents and will not venture far from their sides. However, after the children become familiar with other children, the childcare worker and the parents, they tend to stray further away from their parents and will eventually stay with the childcare worker or another parent in the room if their parents have to leave for a short time. This movement along the continuum from a low level of independence to moderate or high levels helps prepare them for pre-school, because parents are not supposed to stay with the children after the first session. The pre-school program can benefit a great deal if children have been gradually taught to be more independent. This reduces the length of time parents have to stay with children at pre-school and increases the ability of children to complete assigned tasks independently with little assistance from parent volunteers. Once again,

the family resource centre can play an important role in bringing a child along the path of independence which helps strengthen the pre-school program.

The final strand in the link between the family resource centre and pre-school program is the implementation of school readiness skills. There is no deliberate attempt to follow a program at the family resource centre that will teach school readiness skills to the children. However, children who attend the centre participate in activities that expose them to colours, numbers, and shapes. They also have story time, paint, use scissors, glue and crayons and assemble pictures that promote creativity and sequencing. These skills all go a long way when children enter pre-school. Unfortunately, some children who come to pre-school are not able to hold a pencil and cannot manipulate a pair of scissors. This puts them at a disadvantage in pre-school, but fortunately they have a whole year to learn these skills before they enter kindergarten. The progression of skills acquired by the children in both these programs provides them with the skills they needs to succeed in kindergarten.

In summary, one can see how the family resource centre and pre-school program are connected. They both work together in progression to provide children with: exposure to the school environment, social and communication skills, school readiness skills, and increased independence for children. It also established a core of parent volunteers that made both programs function effectively. Although there is no formal tie between the two, they both work hand in hand to provide a high quality service to the children and parents of Lawrence Bay.

Chapter Seven

Benefits and Shortcomings of Early Intervention Programs in Rural Communities

Introduction

It is difficult to measure the benefits and shortcomings of early intervention programs in rural communities. These programs impact different families in different ways and can have varying degrees of benefit. There are so many other factors that may influence the progress of a child prior to their entry into school that it may be difficult to prove that involvement in early intervention was the most significant factor. Nevertheless, it is important to consider the benefits and shortcomings of these programs in rural areas so that we have a data base to draw from to help determine if these programs are useful.

Benefits

There is no doubt early intervention programs are very beneficial to rural communities such as Lawrence Bay. However, it is extremely difficult to measure the degree of benefit for most aspects of these programs. Nevertheless, examining the positive impact of these programs from a number of different perspectives provides us with several insights into the far reaching contributions they can bring to a rural community.

Geographical Perspective

The physical or geographical location of Lawrence Bay is a good place to start in trying to determine how beneficial early intervention programs are in rural communities. Lawrence Bay is approximately four hours drive from St. John's, the major centre for

this region. As a result, it does not have access to the many daycare services, family resource centres, women's centres, shopping malls, museums, and other urban amenities. There are also no established support groups for parents or opportunities to learn new parenting strategies. The family resource centre and pre-school program go a long way in filling this void in the community. Parents now have a well equipped resource centre for their children which offers programming for children from birth to six years of age and the services of a highly qualified childcare worker who acts as a support person for parents. The pre-school program works with the family resource centre to provide parents with enhanced opportunities to work with children and build upon their repertoire of strategies for working effectively with children.

From a geographical perspective, these programs provide services that equalize educational opportunities for children in rural versus urban communities. In fact, one could easily argue that children who participate in quality pre-school programs such as the one at Lawrence Bay, enter school with a much stronger background than children who do not participate in any type of early intervention programs.. One parent who participated in the survey moved from St. John's to Lawrence Bay half way through the year prior to her child entering kindergarten. Improving school readiness is a major benefit if we consider the fact that children in rural areas generally tend to score lower on standardized tests than those in urban areas. Early intervention programs may be one way to help reverse this trend as children become better prepared for school.

Child Development Perspective

It is widely known that the most critical time in a child's development is the first

three years. Therefore, there are numerous benefits as a result of early intervention programs from a child development perspective. Some of these benefits include:

- 1) increased opportunities for language development;
- 2) development of social skills;
- 3) learning to share and work cooperatively with others;
- 4) development of fine motor skills;
- 5) early detection of children who may have physical disabilities, learning disabilities or behavioural problems;
- 6) early exposure to reading.

These are just a few of the many benefits that have a tremendous impact on the development of a child from birth to six years. The services provided in Lawrence Bay address all six of these benefits and parents who have children with deficiencies in speech or language development have been referred to the resource centre. Thus, medical and health professionals in the area recognize the importance of these programs and believe they can help children with specific speech and language problems.

School Perspective

The school staff can see first hand the benefits of the two early intervention programs at Lawrence Bay. They have experienced school life before and after the two early intervention programs were introduced. There is no doubt the children coming to school today are much better prepared.

The school staff can notice a big change in the students starting kindergarten. They no longer are scared and seldom cry when they come to school; they have all been

shapes, and they are used to completing activities in a certain period of time. This level of readiness puts most of these children approximately one month ahead in the kindergarten program.

In addition to it being beneficial for the child, it is also beneficial to the parents who have become accustomed to coming to school for two or three years. As a result a relationship with the staff is established even before their child enters kindergarten. This positive interaction is very beneficial to the school because it instills in parents the significance of education in the lives of their children at an early age which increases their sense of commitment on behalf of their children. Having a high level of participation in these two programs also provides parents with some sense of ownership in the education of their children which will probably carry through as long as their children are in school. This will go a long way in strengthening the partnership between parents and school.

Personal Development

The personal development of many of the parents who participate in these programs is a major benefit. Parenting is often challenging at the best of times especially if it is a single parent family or if one spouse is away from home much of the time with work commitments. In order to ease the burden it is nice to sit and talk to other parents and discuss problems. In doing this caregivers do not feel a sense of isolation and pick up valuable strategies from each other. They can also observe positive parenting techniques by watching others interact with their children at the centre. A small number of parents attending the centre also participate in personal development programs after

resource centre hours.

Community Leadership

The personal development that takes place in the two early intervention programs is also very beneficial to the community as a whole. Parents who take on leadership roles in these programs usually go on to assume leadership roles within the community. For example, two of the parent volunteers interviewed in this study were leaders in the scouting movement and other have recently become involved in a variety of other community organizations. The long term benefits for the community will not be known for a number of years but early indications are very positive. Anything that helps bring out leadership qualities in people will strengthen the community and create a high level of commitment to maintaining a quality education system within the community.

Economic Perspective

In order to assess the true economic benefits of early intervention programs we need to conduct longitudinal studies similar to those discussed earlier in the literature review. Since both programs are not yet past their fourth year of operation it is difficult to measure the economic benefits of these programs. However, if we accept the findings in Cleveland's (1998) study which suggests, that every dollar spent on childcare saves two, the benefits will be tremendous.

In more practical terms, the fact that children are coming to school better prepared should prevent many of them from requiring the services of a special needs teacher. This is a big saving for the provincial government in times of economic restraint. Furthermore, promoting positive parenting skills and stressing the importance of

education within the community should prompt more students to stay in school and finish their education. This will help to create a society of highly educated individuals. Numerous studies have linked education levels with economic prosperity. Improved opportunities for secondary education and eventually increased employment levels will reduce the amount spent on social services and employment insurance which again will save the government huge amounts of money. These are just a few of the economic benefits that could result from the implementation of early intervention programs in communities like Lawrence Bay. And of course there is indeed a positive ripple effect on the national economy.

Shortcomings

Although the two early intervention programs at Lawrence Bay are very effective, there are a number of shortcomings that quickly become very obvious. The most worrisome one is the fact that a number of young single parent mothers are not taking advantage of this service. They could benefit tremendously from the support of this program but for some reason have chosen not to participate, despite efforts by Brighter Futures to promote the centre at meeting held with expecting mothers. This is a difficult problem to address and one with no easy solution. Hopefully the attempts by the parent committee to increase community awareness of the family resource centre will encourage this group to avail of this service.

Another shortcoming of the family resource centre program is that parents do not usually bring along their children until they are two or three years of age. Data from the survey of grade one parents indicated that parents usually brought their children to the

centre when they were three. Only one parent reported taking a child to the centre before the age of three years. Unfortunately, the program is not reaching the children early enough. There are more children taking advantage of this program at an earlier age than there were two years ago but most parents do not take children from birth to two years of age. Children need to come to the centre from the time they are babies so that they can receive the additional stimulation to assist them in the critical years of childhood development. This may be difficult for parents but the time spent at the centre will make the experience well worth the effort.

There was an attempt to implement a toddlers program at the centre but there really was not a big enough demand for this program. The childcare worker would like to implement a program for these children and parents but budget cuts may make it difficult to find the time to schedule it in.

A third shortcoming with both programs is the low level of parental involvement in more administrative areas. This was noted by all members of the parent committee responsible for the family resource centre and coordinators for the pre-school program. They felt more parents should be involved in the planning of activities for both programs. This was especially the case for parents who attended the family resource centre because they did not have a set curriculum put in place like the pre-school program. There is a lot more planning involved at the centre and usually only half the parents help out in any capacity with the planning process. This is certainly a drawback for Brighter Futures since they encourage full parental involvement.

This was not as prevalent with the pre-school program. The biggest problem is

some parents not showing up when they are supposed to. Two of the three coordinators mentioned this and were disappointed that some parents chose not to become more involved. It was not widespread and is more of an irritant than a serious issue.

A shortcoming which applies primarily to the family resource centre is the low level of involvement in parenting programs. The childcare worker has many programs she could offer to the parents but she has a difficult time generating enough parent interest. This is very unfortunate because parents can learn so much from them and use these strategies they learn on their own children. In time as this program becomes more established and parents realize that services at the centre are not exclusively for the children, this problem may resolve itself. However, in the meantime there has to be an increased effort put forth to let parents know what programs are available to them. Pauline, one of the parents who regularly attends the centre, noted this as one of the improvements she would like to see at the centre. "We don't know all the programs that could be offered. If we were made more aware of what could be offered that could be an improvement." (P. Randall, personal communication, May 20, 1999)

If this example is any indication, it would appear that parents are now ready to look at some of the programming that is available.

A final shortcoming which has affected both programs is inadequate support from both provincial and federal governments. The provincial government has not offered any type of support to either of these programs. This is ironic since studies show the tremendous impact early intervention programs have on education which is a provincial jurisdiction. The federal government on the other hand provided funding for the

establishment of the family resource through Health and Welfare Canada. However, now that the centre is growing and the demands on the childcare worker has increased they are beginning to withdraw funding. This concern is expressed by Mr. Smith, the school principal:

Once these centres are up and running, they like the parents and communities to take ownership and carry them forward. You find every year the budgets are shrinking. You are expected to do more with less from a monetary perspective. Here in Lawrence Bay our centre has been set up for three years. This is not a long time. Just as the centres are sort of growing they say you need to take some of the responsibilities. In communities that is a major, major problem.

This shows a lot of short sightedness on the part of Health and Welfare Canada. By cutting back funding they are stifling the progress that has been made with this program over the past three years.

School staff and parents feel the pre-school program should also be entitled to the services of a highly trained childcare worker. Shannon, one of the parent coordinators, believes "that they should have at least one person on the payroll who can help."

The same views are shared by the kindergarten teacher who is a strong advocate of the pre-school program.

I think the government should pay to have one coordinator that would be university or early childhood trained to be constantly there and help out with the program. To make sure it is going the way it should. Government should offer that within every community.

This person could make a valuable contribution to the program and ease the burden placed on the parent volunteers.

It seems society is well aware of the benefits of early intervention programs but the governments have not made an effort to offer the necessary support to see that these

programs are properly implemented and maintained in rural areas. This is a problem which will have to be addressed in a political forum as rural communities such as Lawrence Bay struggle to make it a priority for both levels of government.

In order to maximize the success of both these programs these problems will have to be addressed. These challenges will require cooperation from all stakeholders as innovative solutions allow both programs to better meet the needs of the entire community.

Conclusion

One can certainly see how early intervention programs can benefit rural communities. In this case study it is obvious they fill a huge void in the community. They offer a service that would not otherwise exist and in turn go a long way in equalizing the educational opportunities for children in rural communities. They are not perfect, nor do they profess to be. There are areas in need of improvement; however the will is there to address these problems at a community level. Together the community of Lawrence Bay will support, promote and nurture these programs so that it will continue to be a source of pride for the community.

Chapter Eight

Summary and Conclusions

To have hope is the right of every individual, family and community. Hope flourishes in an environment where each person is a learning and health resource to self and others (MacIsaac 1998).

This is a very profound but true statement and one which certainly applies to the two programs described in this study. In fact, one could argue that hope was and still is the motivator for parents, school staff, childcare workers and community leaders who participate in early intervention programs. The hope is that our children, parents, school and community will benefit from these programs and that it may create a more positive outlook, especially in the difficult economic times we face today.

Although the family resource centre and pre-school programs may not be as effective as they would like to be in accomplishing this goal, they have certainly made a tremendous contribution to the community. This chapter will provide an overview of both programs and discuss some areas where further research is needed.

Summary of Family Resource Centre Intervention Program

The family resource centre was established in 1995. The school principal and a determined group of parents lobbied for this service because they felt it would be very beneficial to the children and parents of Lawrence Bay. Fortunately, Health and Welfare Canada provided funding which was administered through Brighter Futures and Lawrence Bay had one of the first centres established in this region. It was located in the primary section of the school in a room that was formally used for kindergarten orientation.

From the very beginning there was a close connection between the family resource centre and the school. Teachers offered advice to the facilitator and parents and they were permitted to use the school photocopier and other services. Children from the centre were invited to participate in school activities such as the Halloween fair and sports day. This connection between the school and the centre enabled both children and parents to become familiar with the school environment and some of the school staff. Both parents and school staff acknowledge the significance of this in preparing small children for formal schooling.

Children who attend the centre benefit tremendously from the program. One of the most significant benefits is the opportunity they get to socialize with others. This is important because they learn to share, cooperate, and develop friendships with children their own age. They also improve communication skills by conversing with others and being exposed to new experiences. Finally, they are introduced to art and craft activities that assist in the development of fine motor skills and recognition of letters, colours and numbers.

Parents who attend the centre also find it very beneficial. They enjoy meeting other parents to discuss childcare issues, they share strategies they have used with their children and they enjoy learning new ways to handle situations at home. They also discuss any concerns they have with the child care worker who gives them advice or provides them with print material that may be useful to them. This is a critical component of this program because it enables parents to become better caregivers.

Coming to the centre is also beneficial to parents because it gets them away from the stresses of home life for a few hours and gives them a chance to relax. It also becomes a special time when parents can spend quality time with their children with no distractions such as television, radio or video games. Most parents mentioned this as being one of the main reasons why they like coming to the centre.

The mission of Brighter Futures is to increase parental involvement and have them take ownership of the program. This has enabled a number of parents to take on leadership roles at the centre. Becoming involved in the program allowed some parents to become more assertive and improved their self-esteem. This is very significant because it has developed a group of parents who are motivated and who show initiative in getting involved in other programs and organizations at school and in the community in general.

The school staff at Lawrence Bay Elementary realize how important early intervention programs are for child development. Therefore they fully support the operation of the family resource centre in the school. In fact, most teachers felt that school was the ideal location for this program because it introduced the children to the idea of coming to school at a very early age. They also felt the socialization and communication skills would be helpful to the children when they entered pre-school and kindergarten. Another contribution made by the family resource centre is that it encouraged parents to become more involved in programming at the centre. This produced a group of parent volunteers who were committed to their children's learning and would probably continue to volunteer once their children entered pre-school and

kindergarten. Finally, one of the most significant benefits of this program from a school perspective is the promotion of literacy for these children at a very early age. Numerous studies have demonstrated the importance of reading to children and such a program reaches out to parents and reinforces this idea.

Parents and school staff have a very different experience at the family resource centre as compared to the childcare worker who is hired to run the centre. She has to perform a number of different roles which makes her job very challenging. Her Brighter Futures role involves her trying to increase parental involvement at the centre and trying to compensate for budget shortfalls. This is probably her most frustrating task because she is expected to do more with less from a monetary perspective. It is difficult to meet the needs of an expanding clientele at the centre when working hours have been cut and flexibility in scheduling has been eliminated.

Another one of her roles is that of a support person, which is perhaps the most satisfying aspect of her work. She enjoys working with parents and feels she can make a difference for those who participate in the program. In this role she likes to work with parents individually in order to find out their strengths and weaknesses. This enables her to use a variety of strategies in offering advice to parents and helping them build on their arsenal of parenting techniques. Getting to know parents better also makes it easier for her to encourage them to become more involved in activities at the centre.

Another significant role she performs is that of caregiver to children that attend the centre. She spends most of her time working with the children in a variety of activities. Although a parent committee plans the activities, she has to make sure that

these activities are running smoothly. She enjoys spending time with children and likes working one on one with them. It is difficult on days when a lot of children attend the sessions but she makes an effort to have contact with each and every child during each session.

In summary, the family resource centre has made a significant contribution to the community of Lawrence Bay. The partnership created between the school and Brighter Futures is an example of how two organizations can work together to build a program that meets the needs of all stakeholders and improves the lot of children in rural areas. One can only hope that this level of commitment and cooperation will continue and the family resource centre will build upon the solid foundation that has been laid over the past four years.

Summary of Pre-school Intervention Program

Pre-school is a school initiative and one which is a spinoff from the Brighter Futures Program. It evolved at about the same time as Brighter Futures but this program had a very different focus. Pre-school is much more structured than the family resource centre and is intended to provide children with the skills they need in order to enter kindergarten. There is an unwritten understanding between the school and parents that attendance at pre-school is mandatory. In many ways pre-school is meant to emulate the experience of kindergarten. Children who attend pre-school have role call, recess, work in various learning centres, attend classes in physical education, music and computers and have homework assignments.

The fact that pre-school is run during school hours makes it impossible for

teachers to run the program. Therefore, all parents are asked to take a turn helping out with the program. In effect the program is run by parent volunteers who are lead by three program coordinators. The kindergarten teacher tries to get in once a month and offers assistance whenever possible, but her schedule does not permit her to be more involved. Thus, once the program is up and running, the parents take on a leadership role and keep the program running smoothly.

Although this may seem like an awesome responsibility, those who volunteer seem to enjoy it. This is particularly true for the coordinators who attend most of the sessions. They derive great pleasure out of seeing the children progress throughout the year. It also gives them a good feeling knowing that they have made a difference in the lives of these children.

Volunteering with the pre-school program gives parents an opportunity to become familiar with the physical layout of the school and helps them get to know the school staff. This helps orient parents into school life prior to their children entering formal schooling which should reduce the level of anxiety for parents and children.

The pre-school program has been a very positive experience for the school staff. They have seen a tremendous improvement in the level of readiness for children entering kindergarten. Children who participate in the program seem to be better socially, emotionally, and academically prepared for formal schooling. This makes the job of the kindergarten teacher considerably easier as children do not spend as much time adjusting to the regular school routine. In fact, most children come to school at least one month ahead in the kindergarten program as a result of pre-school.

In summary, the pre-school program has contributed to an increased level of readiness for children entering school at Lawrence Bay Elementary. Both teachers and parents have noted the difference they see in the children since the program began four years ago. Programs like this are important in building a solid base for children when they come to school and they strengthen ties between parents and the school. This partnership will enable the school system in Lawrence Bay to thrive as this group of parents becomes more involved in their community school.

Conclusions

The education system in Newfoundland has undergone sweeping changes over the past five years. Unfortunately, the main focus has been making the system more cost efficient. This has resulted in a great deal of upheaval as the government systematically dismantled the denominational system and replaced it with a government-controlled institution. This in turn has resulted in a reduction in teacher allocations and the closure of many schools throughout the province.

The fall out from restructuring has negatively impacted most regions but none have been so hard hit as rural areas. The new teacher allocation formula has forced school boards to close many small schools and many that remain open are understaffed. The formula seems to work better for larger schools so the "big is better" mentality seems to be the order of the day.

The sad reality with this trend is that in some small schools tremendous progress is being made despite the challenges faced by most small schools. Communities are getting behind their schools and promoting new initiatives that attempt to equalize educational

benefits for children in rural areas. Will government policy eventually kill this progress in its tracks? The answer is probably yes, unless they sit up and take notice of progress that is being made in rural schools.

One area where rural Newfoundland is certainly leading the way is the development of early intervention programs. Not surprisingly, the provincial government has contributed little if anything to the creation of these programs. They are mainly run by community schools and supported by a group of dedicated community volunteers.

Parents and teachers in rural communities such as Lawrence Bay are a little surprised that the provincial government has not become more involved in early intervention programs. In fact, one would suspect early intervention programs to be on the top of the list for education reform. After all, in order to have a good house you need a solid foundation. Would it not be logical to begin rebuilding at the bottom first? Well, apparently not if it is going to cost additional money. This is evident since the idea for full day kindergarten got shelved quickly once the government realized they would need additional teaching units. How then do we start restructuring from the bottom up? A good place to start is to look at successful early intervention programs such as the ones at Lawrence Bay.

Both programs in Lawrence Bay do not cost a great deal of money to run. They are set up in the community school, so there is little overhead costs for these programs. Therefore the only financial cost incurred once the centre has been established is the salary of a childcare worker who can be shared among three communities and a small

amount for operating costs. The benefits of these programs certainly outweigh the costs. If we look at Gordon Cleveland's (1998) analogy that for every dollar spent on early childhood development programs two will be saved by the government, the most obvious question is why not.

The two intervention programs at Lawrence Bay have increased the level of involvement of parents and the community in the education system. This was one of the main recommendations in the Williams' (1992) Royal Commission Report. A large section of this report dealt with the creation of school councils which were designed to give parents a voice in the way the school system is run in their community. Early intervention programs not only gives them a voice but it encourages them to become active participants in their community school.

One aspect of early intervention programs that give rural schools an advantage over more urban centres is the size of the school. It is much easier to run these programs in smaller schools because the number of children are more manageable and there is more flexibility with scheduling to provide spaces for these programs. For example, in pre-school at Lawrence Bay this year there are twenty five children. There is only one class of kindergarten in the morning, so the pre-schoolers use the kindergarten room in the afternoon. In a larger school where there are two classes of kindergartens this space would not be available. The increased number of children in larger areas would also be hard to accommodate. This might explain why school-based early intervention programs have been slow to develop in urban centres.

In Lawrence Bay the two intervention programs are designed to meet the needs of

all who choose to participate. They are both free with the exception of a five dollar paper fee for the pre-school program. This gives everyone an opportunity to participate which is important because it puts everyone on an equal footing. In a recent study by the National Council on Welfare (1999) the cost of quality childcare and early intervention programs was identified as an impediment to the normal development of children living in poor families. Lawrence Bay may not be a prosperous community economically but all families have access to high quality early childhood intervention programs.

Upon completion of my fieldwork and a review of the most up to date literature on early intervention programs I have reached the following conclusions concerning early intervention programs in rural areas:

- 1) Early intervention programs play a significant role in preparing children for their entry into the school environment. This is especially the case for children who come from economically deprived homes where there is a limited number of books and toys. The structure incorporated in intervention programs and having them operate in a school setting helps children adjust to school life when they enter kindergarten.
- 2) Early intervention programs are critical in developing social and communication skills in children prior to their entering school. In society today most families consist of two children which limits social contact. Having children come together at a resource centre provides an opportunity for them to meet other children and learn to interact with them. This interaction promotes sharing, cooperation and helps develop communication skills.

- 3) Early intervention programs provide a badly needed social outlet for parents of pre-school children. Having a Family Resource Centre in the community provides parents with a place to bring their children and facilitates their socializing with other parents. This is important because it gets them out of the house a few times a week which helps relieve some of the stress associated with the isolation of parenting. It also provides them with a social network which can be very useful in sharing ideas concerning parenting strategies.
- 4) Early intervention programs help enhance parenting skills for those who participate. This is accomplished in three ways. The first method is through participation in specific parenting programs. They are offered after hours at the centre or at regional conferences. The second method is through observing other parents who are very competent in dealing with their children. This is very indirect and may not be obvious to those present but it happens regularly. The third method is through the exchange of ideas and information between the childcare worker and parents or the exchange of parenting techniques through social networks.
- 5) Early intervention programs provide parents with an opportunity to become involved in their child's education at a very early age. This is important because it helps them realize that learning is a developmental process that actually begins at birth and continues throughout an individual's life. Parents who participate in these programs realize how important their role is in assisting in this development. Parental involvement in a voluntary role in early intervention programs also helps

them develop into active members of the school community before their child enters kindergarten.

- 6) Early intervention programs are inadequately funded and need to be expanded. A great deal of research exists worldwide to support the benefits of early intervention programs. At the national level, almost every province has acknowledged the need to improve early childhood education opportunities. However, very little progress has been made with the exception of the provinces of Quebec and British Columbia. In Newfoundland family resource centres have been established through grants from Health and Welfare Canada. Pre-school programs at the school level receive little or no funding. School boards and the provincial Department of Education should examine the tremendous benefits of having pre-school programs in their school and help support these programs.

Recommendations For Further Study

The impact of early intervention programs in Newfoundland is an area that needs to be researched and documented. There is very little information available on this topic especially for rural areas. The following are a list of recommendations for further study on the topic of early intervention programs:

- 1) A coordinated effort is needed to outline the types of early intervention programs that are presently in place and the benefits and drawbacks of each one. It would be worthwhile to highlight some of the success stories so that other communities wishing to establish early intervention programs could have a model on which to develop their program.

- 2) In order to assess the long term benefits of early intervention programs in rural areas there needs to be a longitudinal study conducted similar to the ones conducted in the United States. This is the only way to measure the benefits of such programs. If the benefits were proven to have long lasting effects on the development of the individuals involved, it would help to justify the expenditure of badly needed money for early intervention programs.
- 3) An area of research that is closely connected to this study is how the level of parent involvement in school affects a child's level of achievement. This would be a worthwhile study in rural communities where the size of the school makes parent volunteers more visible to the student body.

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APPENDIX A

(Letter of Consent)

Robert G. Tarrant
P.O. Box 640
St. Lawrence, NF.
AOE 2VO

November 16, 1999

Dear Parent/Teacher/ Child Care Worker:

I am requesting your participation in an in-depth study of pre-school intervention programs at Marian Elementary School. Any parent, teacher or child care worker who has been involved in; 1) Pre-school and 3) the family drop In centre are invited to participate. Although your assistance would be greatly appreciated, participation in this study is voluntary and participants may refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time. Furthermore, no individuals will be identified within the study and confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained at all times. Tapes, tape transcripts, photos or any other materials collected will be securely stored during the collection process and items will be destroyed or returned to the owners upon completion of this research project.

This study is part of the requirement for my Masters of Education thesis at Memorial University of Newfoundland. It has been approved by the Ethics Review Committee and the project will be supervised by Dr. Jerome Delaney with additional input from Dr. Bruce Sheppard, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies. If participants have any questions they would like addressed by Dr. Delaney he can be contacted at the following number; 488 2828.

One of the principle data collection techniques used in this study is the informal interview. These interviews will be conducted at the school or arrangements can be made for an alternate location. They should not take more than forty-five minutes to complete. In order to ensure that all information in the interviews is properly documented a tape recorder will be used. If some participants are not comfortable with this devise, a notepad will be used to record their responses.

If you would like to participate in this study please complete the consent form below and drop it in the suggestion box that I have placed in the Family Resource Centre or contact me at 873 2096 or 873 2240. If you have any questions or concerns about this project please contact me at any time. Your participation in this project will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Robert G. Tarrant

=====

I _____ agree to participate in the study on early intervention programs.
The telephone number I can be contacted for an interview time is _____.

Do you agree to having the interview tape recorded? Yes ____
No ____

Letter of Permission to Conduct Study (Director of Burin Peninsula School Board)

Robert G. Tarrant
P O. Box 640
St. Lawrence, NF.
AOE 2VO

November 16, 1999

Dear Mr. Sisco:

I am requesting your permission to conduct an in-depth study of the experiences of parents, teachers, and child care workers involved in early intervention programs at Marian Elementary School.

I have a keen interest in early intervention programs and would like to learn more about their function in our education system. The main focus of this study is to analyse how the major stake holders in these programs perceive their roles and how effective these programs are in preparing children for school. I feel this study will contribute a great deal to our understanding of early intervention programs and should provide a model that could be used anywhere in the district.

This study is part of the requirement for my Masters of Education thesis at Memorial University of Newfoundland. It has been approved by the Ethics Review Committee and the project will be supervised by Dr. Jerome Delaney with additional input from Dr. Bruce Sheppard, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies. If you have any questions you would like addressed by Dr. Delaney he can be reached at 488 2828.

In my role as a researcher I will ensure that:

- Participation in this study is voluntary.
- Participants can refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time.
- Individuals will not be identified within the study and confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained at all times.
- Tapes, tape transcripts, photos or any other materials collected will be securely stored during the collection process and items will be destroyed or returned to the owners upon completion of this research project.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please feel free to contact me if you have any further question.

Sincerely,

Robert G. Tarrant

Letter of Permission to Conduct Study (Principal Marian Elementary School)

Robert G. Tarrant
P.O. Box 640
St. Lawrence, NF.
AOE 2VO

November 16, 1999

Dear Mr. Bonnell:

I am requesting your permission to conduct an in-depth study of the experiences of parents, teachers, and child care workers involved in early intervention programs at Marian Elementary School.

I have a keen interest in early intervention programs and would like to learn more about their function in our education system. The main focus of this study is to analyse how the major stake holders in these programs perceive their roles and how effective these programs are in preparing children for school. I feel this study will contribute a great deal to our understanding of early intervention programs and should provide a model that could be used anywhere in the district.

This study is part of the requirement for my Masters of Education thesis at Memorial University of Newfoundland. It has been approved by the Ethics Review Committee and the project will be supervised by Dr. Jerome Delaney with additional input from Dr. Bruce Sheppard, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies. If you have any questions you would like addressed by Dr. Delaney his telephone number is 488 2828.

In my role as a researcher I will ensure that:

- Participation in this study is voluntary.
- Participants can refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time.
- Individuals will not be identified within the study and confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained at all times.
- Tapes, tape transcripts, photos or any other materials collected will be securely stored during the collection process and items will be destroyed or returned to the owners upon

completion of this research project.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please feel free to contact me if you have any further question.

Sincerely,

Robert G. Tarrant

Appendix B

Interview Question Guide

Parents

1. What were your first impressions after you attended your first session at the Drop In Centre and first pre-school parent meeting?
2. Why did you decide to participate in each of these programs?
3. Do you feel parents should be more involved in planning activities or participating in programs at the Family Resource Centre? If so how could they be more involved?
4. Why do you think some parents choose not to get involved in early intervention programs such as pre-school and Family Drop in Centre?
5. Do parents who participate in early intervention programs feel comfortable with these programs being offered at the school? Do they feel welcome at the school?
6. Do parents feel teachers and administration at the school are supportive of early intervention programs? Explain?
7. Do you think teachers should be more involved in early intervention programs? If so, how could they be more involved?
8. Does the school make an effort to involve children at the Family Resource Centre in school activities whenever possible?
9. Do you feel the child care worker assigned to the St. Lawrence Family Resource Centre does a good job of offering support to parents and children at the centre? How could she be more supportive to individual parents and children?
10. What do you feel are some of the strengths in the way the Family Resource Centre is run?
11. What are some ways you think this program could be improved?
12. Are there certain programs or services they you would like to be offered at the Family Resource Centre?
13. How important do you think early intervention programs are in preparing children for school?

14. Can you visualize what it would be like if no early intervention programs were offered at Marian Elementary? How would you feel about this loss? How would your child be affected?

Teacher/School Administrator

1. Where did the idea come from to introduce a pre-school program and operate a Family Resource Centre in your school?
2. What was your role in initiating these programs?
3. How did you feel when you first learned your school would be hosting a pre-school program and the Family Resource Centre?
4. Did you have any input into the decision to host any of these programs? If so, how much? If not, why not?
5. How do you feel about parents and pre-school children using the school to run these programs?
6. Do you play any role in the administration of these programs? Would you like to have a more active role? If so, in what capacity?
7. Do you think early intervention programs help prepare children for school? If so, how are they helpful?
8. Have you noticed an improvement in students since these programs have been implemented? If so, could you explain how and why students have improved?
9. Do you think early intervention programs are more beneficial to children of a certain sex, socio-economic status, and family status (single parent or dual parent / only child or other siblings in the family)?
10. What are some things you like about the two early intervention programs presently at Marian Elementary School?
11. How could these programs be improved?
12. How would you feel if a decision was made to close out these two programs next week? Do you think it would have a detrimental affect on children entering school? Explain?

Early Childhood Development Worker (Family Resource Centre)

1. How long have you been employed as a child care worker at the St. Lawrence Family Resource Centre?
2. How did you find out about this position?
3. What type of training did you receive in early childhood development?
4. Have you been provided with the opportunity to do additional training from the agency sponsoring this program since you started this position? If so, what types of workshops have you attended?
5. Has the federal agency funding this program provided adequate funding to provide a high quality program at St. Lawrence? What are some areas of the program that need additional financial support?
6. Do you feel the federal agency should be more involved in the implementation of programming and evaluation of the Family Resource Centres?
7. Are you part of any professional early childhood development organizations or discussion groups?
8. Are you responsible for providing programs for any Family Resource Centres besides the one in St. Lawrence?
9. Do you feel the Family Resource Centre plays a significant role in the lives of the children and parents who participate in this program in St. Lawrence?
10. Why is it so important?
11. What do you perceive your role to be in the operation of the Family Resource Centre in St. Lawrence? Would you like to be more involved in the program? Or Less?
12. Do you feel parents should be more involved? If so, how should they be more involved?
13. Are most parents who participate in the program at the Family Resource Centre supportive of you in completing the objectives of the program?
14. Do you feel the staff and administration of Marian Elementary is supportive of the Family Resource Centre? Are they cooperative and easy to work with?

15. Does the school make an effort to involve the children at the Family Resource Centre in school activities whenever possible? Explain?
16. Should the school be doing more to support this program?
17. What do you feel are some of the strengths in the way the Family Resource Centre program is being run in St. Lawrence?
18. What are some ways you feel this program could be improved?
19. Do you think parents believe activities at the Family Resource Centre help prepare their children for school? Is this the most significant factor influencing their decision to participate in the program?
20. Why do you feel some parents choose not to participate in Family Resource Centre activities?
21. Do you feel as facilitator of this program there is anything you can do to get more parents involved?

Appendix C

Grade One Parent Survey: Family Resource Centre and Pre-school

1. Prior to your child attending kindergarten did he/she attend sessions at the
 _____ Drop in Centre _____ Pre-school Program

DROP IN CENTRE

2. How old was your child when you started bringing them to the drop in centre?
 a) 0 to 1 b) 1 to 2 c) 2 to 3 d) 3 to 4 e) 4 to 5 f) 5 to 6
3. How did you find out about the drop-in centre?
 a) a friend or family member told you about it.
 b) a staff member from the school told you about it.
 c) I read about it on a poster that was displayed in a public building.
 d) Other _____
4. How often did you attend the drop-in centre?
 a) All the time. (3 times a week). b) Most of the time. (Once or twice a week)
 c) Sometimes. (Once every two weeks) d) Seldom. (Once a month)
5. Before you started taking your child to the drop-in centre what were the most likely reasons for not participate in this program?
 _____ I didn't know about the program.
 _____ I was a little uncertain about what to expect at the drop-in centre.

- ☐ I didn't realize the benefits this program would have for my child.
- ☐ I had another child and it was too difficult to watch two children at the centre.
- ☐ I had work commitments and was not able to attend.

6. On the first day you attended the drop-in centre which of the following statements reflects how you felt about your experience?

- ☐ I was a little uncomfortable with the number of children but I decided to return again.
- ☐ I didn't mind the other children and enjoyed mingling with the other parents.
- ☐ I was overwhelmed with the noise level but decided to return again.
- ☐ I was very impressed with the centre and decided to return again.
- ☐ I was overwhelmed with the noise and level of activity and decided not to return.

Other _____

7. How would you rate your level of satisfaction with the program being offered at the centre?

a) Very satisfied b) Satisfied c) Slightly dis-satisfied d) Very dis-satisfied

8. How would you rate your level of satisfaction with the child care worker assigned to the Drop-in Centre in St. Lawrence?

a) Very satisfied b) Satisfied c) Slightly dis-satisfied d) Very dis-satisfied

9. How would you rate your level of involvement in the planning of activities at the Drop-in Centre?
- a) Very involved b) Somewhat involved c) Seldom involved d) Never
10. How would you rate your level of involvement in helping out with daily activities at the Drop-in Centre? (Assisting with crafts, games, and clean up).
- a) Very involved b) Somewhat involved c) Seldom involved d) Never
11. Which of the following factors affected your level of involvement?
- a) I did not have the time. b) I wasn't asked. c) I didn't feel comfortable.
- d) I felt more relaxed not getting involved.
12. Do you feel the drop-in centre helped prepare your child for school? __
- ___ Yes ___ No.
13. Which of the following statements reflect how the drop-in centre was beneficial to your child?
- ___ It gave my child an opportunity to mingle or socialize with other children.
- ___ It taught my child the importance of sharing and cooperating with other children.
- ___ It provided my child with an opportunity to become familiar with the school setting before they went to kindergarten.
- ___ My child got to know some of the children they would be going to school with.
- ___ It helped my child become familiar with colors, shapes and numbers.
- ___ My child learned to use a pencil, scissors, paint and glue.

___ It helped my child become more independent.

14. Now that your child has completed kindergarten how beneficial do you think the Drop-in Centre was to the success of your child?

a) Very Beneficial b) Beneficial c) No Benefit at all.

15. Do you have any suggestions as to how the Drop-in Centre could be improved?

PRE-SCHOOL PROGRAM

16. How did you find out about the Pre-school program?

a) a friend or family member told you about it.

b) a staff member from the school told you about it.

c) I read about it on a poster that was displayed in a public building.

d) Other _____

17. How often did your child attend the Pre-school program?

a) All the time. b) Most of the time. c) Sometimes. d) Seldom.

18. What were the most likely reasons for your child not attending Pre-school?

a) Other commitments by parents. b) Sickness.

c) Lack of interest by the child. d) Dis-satisfaction with the program.

19. How long was it before your child was willing to stay at pre-school without you having to stay with your child?
- a) 1 week b) 2 weeks c) 3 weeks d) 4 weeks e) More than 4 weeks
20. How would you rate your level of involvement in volunteering to help out with the Pre-school program?
- a) Very involved b) Somewhat involved c) Seldom involved d) Never
21. Which of the following factors affected your level of involvement?
- a) I did not have the time. b) I wasn't asked. c) I didn't feel comfortable.
d) I felt more relaxed not getting involved. e) Pre-school time was not convenient
22. Do you feel Pre-school helped prepare your child for school? ____ Yes ____ No.
23. Which of the following statements reflect how the Pre-school program was beneficial to your child?
- ____ It gave my child an opportunity to mingle or socialize with other children.
- ____ It taught my child the importance of sharing and cooperating with other children.
- ____ It provided my child with an opportunity to become familiar with the school setting before they went to kindergarten.
- ____ My child got to know most of the children they would be going to school with.
- ____ It helped my child become familiar with colors, shapes and numbers.
- ____ My child learned to use a pencil, scissors, paint and glue.
- ____ It helped my child become more independent.

___ It allowed my child to become familiar with the regular routines of schools such as; Attendance, school rules, appropriate classroom behavior, gym, music and other school activities.

___ It encouraged children to read stories every night.

___ It allowed them to become familiar with completing homework.

24. Now that your child has completed kindergarten how beneficial do you think Pre-school was to the success of your child?

a) Very Beneficial b) Beneficial c) No Benefit at all.

25. Do you have any suggestions as to how Pre-school could be improved?



