EARLY LITERACY INTERVENTION WITH LOW INCOME FAMILIES

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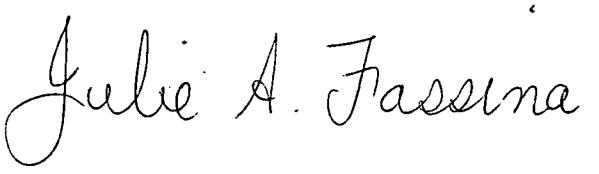
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CERTIFICATION

I certify that the work for this thesis entitled *"Early Literacy Intervention With Low Income Families"*, and submitted for the degree of Master of Education is the result of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged. Furthermore, that this thesis (or any part of it) has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Signed 

30th of September, 1995

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SYNOPSIS

RESEARCH FOCUS

This research dealt with the area of family literacy, and focused on four preschool aged children and their families in the socio-economically disadvantaged area of Elizabeth, South Australia. The study was set within a pilot early literacy intervention program called *First Start*. As a home visitor I visited four of the nine families in the program. This gave me the opportunity to collect home literacy data that was richer than was usually available to university researchers.

The investigation was exploratory, seeking to glimpse the literacy worlds of children in a particular low socio-economic suburban area north of Adelaide. It explored the parents' perceptions and understandings of literacy and school, and the home literacy experiences of the children and their parents. It also documented the responses of the family and household members to the home visiting intervention. It was not clear at the outset of the study which aspects would emerge as interesting and significant and be most valuable to concentrate on. Therefore, while the research had broad guiding areas of interest, it aimed to document whatever was observed, reported on and discussed, and to provide a base from which other researchers could work.

This intervention was offered to families who, for various reasons, were considered unlikely to participate in a formal parent education program. While the program was centred on the young children, it also worked to develop a partnership between researcher as home visitor and family members - a partnership where parental impressions and interpretations of children's emerging literacy were offered and valued. It was speculated that the

enthusiasm of the focus children might be 'caught' by other members of the household, and that they become more fully aware of the role of the family in children's literacy.

NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The research aimed to investigate and understand family and early literacy beliefs and practices. In order to obtain ecologically valid information it was important to interact with the children and their families in the most natural setting possible. The study occurred, therefore, within the natural environment of the family home. The methodology of the study was qualitative and naturalistic as it attempted to provide rich descriptions of family literacy beliefs and practices. The research was participatory in the sense that parents and other household members were encouraged to contribute information and perceptions. They were also consulted frequently regarding interpretation of their child's behaviour and family literacy patterns.

QUESTIONS FOR RESEARCH

Areas of interest fell into four main categories.

1. *What were the parents' understandings and experiences of school and literacy?*
2. *What literacy experiences were the children having in terms of the home environment and family interactions, both prior to, and during, the program?*
3. *How did the children and other household members respond to the home visits?*
4. *In what ways was home visiting useful in encouraging parental involvement in young children's emerging literacy?*

SITE, DURATION AND INFORMANTS

The research was carried out in four family homes in Elizabeth, a suburb north of Adelaide. Families were visited on a weekly basis, either on a Tuesday or Wednesday, with visits lasting between forty minutes to one hour and fifty minutes.

Research data was collected from June to the end of December 1992. There were two phases to the data collection process. The first, which began in June and continued through November was characterised by weekly visits. Following this was a phase of disengagement when visits occurred approximately every three weeks until January. Social visits and phone calls also occurred well into 1993 and in the case of one family into 1994. Analysis began during the data collection period and intensified at the end of the major collection phase. For reasons of illness, however, data analysis was picked up again and continued nearly two years later.

The key informants of the study were four family groups with preschool age children, whose ages ranged at the onset of the home visits from two years and ten months to four years and three months.

KINDS OF DATA

The primary source of data was field notes recorded during and after home visits. These included information on what the children said and did, the physical literacy environment, and comments and interpretations from informal chats with significant adults in the house.

There were also two formal discussion/interview sessions with adults during the research. The first was concerned with tapping into parents' experiences, understandings and perceptions of school and literacy, while the second set explored responses to the early literacy intervention.

FINDINGS

While the findings that have emerged from this exploration of four families can not be generalised widely, they do provide valuable insights for understanding and supporting families in disadvantage, and are therefore of interest and value to various providers of education.

The study found that:

1. *There was a wide continuum of literacy backgrounds, experiences and practices among the parents of the focus children.*
2. *The families did not appear to be aware of the significance of young children's literacy experiences prior to formal schooling.*
3. *Prior to the intervention, children had few opportunities to engage in literacy activities as well as limited exposure to demonstrations of literacy in their family homes.*
4. *The families wanted their children to succeed at school, and after an intervention, were willing to assist and support their children's literacy learning, both during school years and before formal schooling.*
5. *Families greatly appreciated and enjoyed home visits.*
6. *The families were happy for their child and themselves to be involved in an early literacy home visiting program.*
7. *Practical access to children's books before children attend school was a concern for families with limited transport and financial means.*
8. *After the home visit intervention program, the children showed a strong interest in using writing implements and spending time with books.*
9. *The interest and enjoyment demonstrated by the children in the program drew parents and other adults into literacy interaction.*
10. *Oral language was fostered by the encouragement and development of reading-like behaviour.*

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 FOCUS OF INVESTIGATION

This research explores some aspects of literacy before school for children in their home environments in Elizabeth, a socio-economically disadvantaged region north of Adelaide. It describes and illuminates the literacy experiences of four young children within the context of their family homes, and helps to develop a local perspective on emergent literacy. In addition, the research looks at the responses of household members to intervention of an early literacy support program.

1.2 THE NEED FOR THIS RESEARCH

Mitchell (1989:305) states educators need to develop a "holistic" view of each child which can be achieved by:

> *(1) formulating an understanding of the child's community and family, and (2) observing, systematically and over time, how each child makes sense of the world, especially through the use of oral and written language.*

Early childhood educators rely on relevant information about young students' literacy and home backgrounds in order to develop a 'holistic' view of each child and plan curricula responsive to each student. This is especially crucial for educators responsible for students outside the middle class mainstream. The majority of teachers do not come from low income backgrounds and may hold stereotyped or inaccurate views of such families. Relevant information about family literacy practices in low income areas is limited, and this study intends to contribute to a fuller understanding of literacy prior to school in one disadvantaged region.

There is also the need for qualitative information about home based early literacy intervention to supplement data accumulated from the expansion of

home based literacy programs both in Australia and other countries.

1.3 LIMITATIONS IN EXISTING RESEARCH

While a solid knowledge base about early literacy has been established in recent years, much of it deals with middle class children living in middle class homes. Without doubt, this research has constructed a valuable general picture of the patterns of emerging literacy, but it may not address and describe the experience of all children. Some researchers have acknowledged this gap and directed their attention to early literacy as it is constructed within various low income and minority groups.

While literacy research has been funded and accomplished in Australia, far more has been conducted overseas. A local perspective on early literacy is still developing. Australian educators need an Australian knowledge base to complement their understanding. What is relevant to urban blacks or Hispanic groups in the U.S. is not necessarily relevant enough to groups of Australians.

Clearly there is a need for research to reflect the reality of Australian children in depressed economic circumstances. Toomey, Keck and Atkinson (1987), Toomey and Allen (1991), Sloane and Toomey (1988), Toomey and Sloane (1991), Cairney and Munsie (1992), Potter (1995), Spreadbury (1994, 1995) and Williams (1990, 1991) have begun exploring early literacy in Australia, but gaps remain. A combination of factors may contribute to this. Information about literacy prior to school is difficult to access and collect, and families may understandably be reluctant to become involved. Low income families may be even less comfortable with the concept of research and therefore less likely to participate in studies into early literacy and family literacy.

1.4 THE UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION OF THIS RESEARCH

As far as is possible, this research attempts to develop a 'holistic' viewpoint about four young children and their families. It looks at emerging literacy by

collecting information about literacy practices and beliefs in the children's low socio-economic homes, and investigates the pre-school child's interaction with these.

This study has three particular features. Firstly it seeks to depict a view of early literacy that is obtainable only by spending sustained time with families. Secondly, this view is of a community characterised by high unemployment and unequal educational outcomes. Thirdly, the study is set in the context of a home based intervention program focussed on the child rather than on parents.

Literacy intervention programs mostly appear to have been aimed at parents through education sessions and usually have not taken place in the home setting. The researcher in this study was concerned a formal parent education approach might deter parents with low levels of confidence and self esteem. Some families who might, however, enjoy and benefit from the home visiting stimulus might choose not to become involved in a formal program.

The project involved the researcher working informally with a three or four year old in each home while the parents looked on. It was judged that this form of early intervention would be less threatening to parents with low levels of confidence and/or literacy. Although the home visiting did not specifically aim to teach parents about early literacy, it was hoped parents would be drawn into thinking about early literacy and interacting with their children through their own curiosity and by the enjoyment and enthusiasm demonstrated by their children during and after the sessions.

1.5 ORGANISATION OF DOCUMENT

This first chapter furnishes a brief rationale for the research study. Chapter Two is concerned with a review of relevant literature. It discusses and

examines what is known about early literacy, then specifically literacy as it is constructed in homes in low income areas. It then turns to literature on early literacy interventions.

Chapter Three provides context to the origins and development of the pilot study.

Chapter Four details the methodology used in the study.

Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight look at each focus child and family in turn, building a picture of the literacy in each home, the developing abilities of the child and effects of the intervention.

Chapter Nine, "Findings, Conclusions And Implications" pulls together common threads linking the families. It also summarises the findings of the study and discusses similarities and disparities which emerged from this study and other research. Finally, implications for providers of education and researchers are examined.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This study has two separate but connected fields of interest. These are family literacy in a low income area, and home-based intervention as a means of addressing possible disadvantage.

There are three relevant strands of literature associated with this research. The first is research concerned with the development of early literacy prior to school. The second is research that looks at early literacy and children from low income families. The third is research on intervention as a means of addressing disadvantage and research that describes a number of early literacy intervention programs.

2.2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY LITERACY

This section of the review of literature presents research which has shown that young children are interactive and constructive participants in the literacy process. It also examines the way in which thinking has changed with the concept of 'emergent literacy', and acknowledges the social context of literacy learning. The review then discusses early literacy development as the synthesis of all the above processes.

2.2.1 Emergent Literacy / The Constructive Nature Of Literacy

In recent years the belief has emerged that literacy is not something which waits for school or a definable state of readiness. Rather it is an continuous, informal learning process beginning at birth and having its foundations firmly based in the home. The term emergent literacy (first coined by Clay 1966, cited in Teale 1987; McNaughton 1995) has revealed a stark contrast between the traditional concept of 'reading readiness', and the contemporary

understanding of a gradual unfolding of literacy development. Teale and Sulzby (1986) declare that the adoption of the term emergent literacy was so significant it could be considered to mark a paradigm shift. Teale (1987) also comments that the notion of emergent literacy legitimises the early literacy behaviours of young children.

Holdaway (1979) refers to the process of emergent literacy during the preschool years, as children developing a 'literacy set'. Scollon and Scollon (1981, as quoted by W. Teale 1984) portray it as an 'orientation toward literacy'. Goodman (1984) illustrates it graphically by using the metaphor the 'roots of literacy'. Smith (1988) discusses children 'joining the literacy club'. This process is considered so vital that Mitchell describes it as "...the crucible upon which all subsequent literacy learning evolves" (1989:297).

Young children who have involvement with print are now seen as active literacy constructors and learners, exploring the world of print around them with curiosity, posing themselves questions and seeking answers and connections. Indeed, children's inquisitiveness and interest in print initiates many literacy learning events (Doake 85; Schickendanz & Sullivan 1984; Spreadbury 1994; Teale 1986).

2.2.2 The Social Context Of Early Literacy

A further dimension to the development of early literacy, that of social context, has been investigated in recent years. The social origins of cognition was perhaps first commented on by Vygotsky (1962), and the relevance to the development of literacy learning has been explored by other researchers. Teale proposed that Vygotsky's (1978) account of learning where "individual cognition emerges out of social interaction, can serve as an elegant formulation of how pre-school children's literacy development proceeds" (1982:160).

The family home is a primary literacy environment, and its social context has a fundamental influence on the development of a child's knowledge, understandings and attitudes to print. Evidence strongly suggests that children are socialised into literacy, developing an orientation to literacy through observing family members using reading and writing in functional, meaningful ways in their daily lives. The social context of the family home can legitimise and encourage children's exploration of print and help children find answers to their questions.

Cairney (1987) reflects on the social nature of literacy. He notes that the processes of reading and writing involve social relationships, and that social structures and interactions influence how children perceive the place and value of literacy in their lives, whether this is in the home environment or the classroom. The importance of the social context in literacy learning is also acknowledged by Bloome (1985), Heath (1982), Snow and Ninio (1986) and Wells (1982).

It seems clear that parents, as well as other adults and siblings, have an important role to play in children's emerging literacy. Adults model reading-writing events for children, and interact with them during print related experiences. The crucial significance of parent-child interaction in early literacy development is recognised by Morrow (1988), Teale and Sulzby (1987) and Wells (1982, 1986). According to Wells, it is not simply that parents and other literate people model reading and writing processes, either incidentally or deliberately, for their children. It is the interaction between parent and child as they engage in activities mediated by literacy which is integral to the child's development.

Shared Book Reading Events

While incidental literacy interaction in daily family life has a powerful influence

on young children, parent-child interaction with books has long been regarded as a particularly important stimulus to the development of early literacy (Mason & Allen 1986; Snow & Ninio 1986; Teale 1984; Wells 1982, 1985, 1986). Research shows that sharing books expands children's vocabulary (Elley 1989; Ninio 1980; Ninio & Bruner 1978). It also develops concepts of print (Clay 1972), and a sense of story (Britton 1970; Huck 1966; Tate 1984).

Book sharing also allows adults to use strategies which facilitate literacy development. Scaffolding is one of these constructive strategies. The term scaffolding was first used by Bruner in 1978 (cited in Snow, 1983). Teale (1981) notes that scaffolding is a support system, provided for the apprentice reader by adults, which assists the child to participate more fully in shared reading events. Adult support is gradually reduced as the child is able to assume more control of the reading situation. Gibson (1989) acknowledges the importance of this adult/child support system as well, aptly terming it the 'handover principle'.

Repeated adult-child storybook readings have been found to have particular benefits for emergent literacy development. In their 1985 study, Martinez and Roser found that rereading familiar books greatly increased the amount of child talk during the shared reading event. They also found that children develop stronger command over storying with repeated readings.

Often requested by the children themselves, repeated readings encourage the development of reading-like behaviour and the production of independent and ever closer reenactments of stories (Doake 1985, 1988; Holdaway 1979; Teale 1987). The development of reading-like behaviour is considered an important element in literacy learning. Holdaway (1979:61) states that the value of children's independent practice of books lies in its essential "self-regulated, self corrected, and self-sustaining" nature. It provides opportunities for children to practise independently what they have discovered about books in

general, and a text in particular.

2.2.3 The Recognition Of Emergent Literacy As A Constructive Process Within A Social Context

The concept of emergent literacy and the significance of the interactive, social nature of early literacy development have become intertwined and achieved wide acknowledgement (Wells 1985). McNaughton (1995:8) talks about a combination of personal and social forces which together produce the conditions for early literacy learning. According to McNaughton,

> *One force is provided by the child as an active problem solver. Under appropriate conditions children set out to solve the problem of how to do what others do or expect them to do with written language. The other force is carried in the moment to moment interactions between the child and family members, and others with whom the child interacts regularly.*

It appears that emergent literacy is inextricably linked to family literacy through the influences of social context. The interrelationship has been recognised in the literature on intergenerational and family literacy. The establishment of the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy in 1989 (Lancy and Nattiv 1992) highlights the contemporary focus on family contributions to literacy, and the importance of the relationship between school and home literacy practices.

This contemporary theme of family literacy is considered so significant that in 1991, the Board of Directors of the International Reading Association (IRA) established a group to study family literacy from the broader global perspective. This group, The Family Literacy Commission, is working to promote the significance of the crucial role of the family in the development of literacy to a wider community, to describe family literacy initiatives and also to foster further initiatives (Morrow & Neuman 1995; Morrow & Paratore 1993).

2.3 EARLY LITERACY AND CHILDREN IN LOW INCOME AREAS

This section of the review is concerned with the early literacy of children in low

income areas, and considers some factors which contribute to the lower literacy outcomes realised by these children. It discusses research which explores cultural and social class factors, then presents evidence that explains that economic disadvantage, on its own, is not a strong enough factor to ensure lower literacy levels. The strong and positive influence of the supportive family environment is then noted. Finally, a social class based myth that stereotypes low income parents as uninterested in their children's education is challenged and rejected.

2.3.1 Debate About Lower Literacy Levels

There has been much debate over explanations for the lower literacy and educational outcomes achieved by children in low socio-economic areas. Explanations or blame have been located within the students, their parents, the schools, or the education system itself (Flores, Cousin & Diaz 1991; McRae 1990; Pellegrini 1991; Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman & Hemphill 1991).

Some researchers have focussed on the broad differences between low SES families and other better off families. Other researchers have looked more closely at the differences between low income families. The notion of a mismatch or incongruence between home literacy and school literacy appears as a common thread in explanations, regardless of whether low income families are viewed as members of a socio-economic group or as individual examples.

2.3.2 Social Class And/Or Cultural Differences

Researchers have investigated the effects of social class and/or cultural differences, and some see them as influential factors in determining and explaining the literacy development of low income children. Studies reveal social class and/or cultural differences in the ways families, both incidentally

and deliberately, prepare their children for school and literacy.

Social class and cultural differences were particularly apparent in the Heath (1983) study, where she compared and contrasted the practices and beliefs of the middle class "Townspeople" with the poor, black mill workers in "Trackton", and the poor whites in "Roadville". Heath documented differences in the ways literacy was both perceived and used, and discovered that the ways of the Townspeople, the highest achieving group, were most closely aligned or matched with school literacy practices. Social class differences, resulting in a poorer match between home and school ways, appeared to be a factor in the low level literacy outcomes of poor white children in Roadville. The children of the poor, black mill workers, however, found school literacy particularly difficult to come to terms with. In this case there was a serious mismatch between the ways of home literacy in Trackton and school literacy, and as a result the black children realised the lowest literacy outcomes.

Other studies did not find such clear cut cultural differences within low income populations. Teale (1986) explains that each of the communities in which Heath worked were small. The families of Trackton worked and played together as did families in Roadville, several of whom were related. Importantly, each community shared common traditions, cultural practices and ways of life which held them together. Other groups of low income families, such as those with whom Teale worked, did not constitute close, well defined communities of people with similar histories. Cultural practices, therefore, even within the various ethnic groups, were not readily apparent. Anderson and Stokes (1984:34) also found it difficult to conclude that ethnicity or cultural group membership was "a uniformly significant source of differences" in their study.

Anderson and Stokes (1984) broadened the debate about influences on literacy development of children in low income families to consider the impact

of social and institutional influences on the development and practice of literacy within the family unit. They state that the frequency and duration of experiences children have with print appear to be largely determined by the interactions of parents and other people in the home with various institutions and organisations outside the home, rather than simple membership of a cultural group. This perception is endorsed by Teale (1986).

New Zealand researchers, Nash and Harker (1992), take a strong stand on the influence of social class on literacy attainment, and draw attention to the importance of family resources, especially those associated with 'literate cultural capital'. They argue their concept is not another deficit theory, as previous social class theories have been designated, as it suggests that low income/working class families do the best they can, and that parents do have aspirations for their children.

They do suggest, however, that working class families hold lower expectations for their children when compared to professional class families, and that working class families, as a group, are far more likely to be satisfied with an average school performance than professional parents. For professional parents, "average is not good enough" (p 15), for they are aware that children need to be successful, not average, to achieve in higher education, which is recognised as the key to a professional occupation. Professional parents will take positive remedial action to improve literacy performance. Nash and Harker suggest this is because they do not need to rely on the school as a source of information, and have greater access to advice on education within their family and community circles.

Differences In Parent-Child Book Reading

Social class differences are noticeable from investigations into patterns of parent and child book reading in the home. Low income families are less likely

to read regularly with their preschool aged children, there are differences in the type of texts that are shared, and the interactions and talk that accompany book sharing also seem to differ. Although the frequency of parent-child book sharing is lower in low income families, it varies from study to study, with the lowest frequencies coming from research in the United States.

Morrow's work (1988) reveals social class differences in the incidence of parent-child book reading. She surveyed parents of children in three preschools serving poor families, and found 90% read to their children once a month or less. In other words, only ten percent or less read regularly with their children. Similarly, Teale (1986) found that only three children of the 24 in his study were read to a number of times per week. Six others had infrequent adult-child interaction with books, while 15 of the 24 children had no experience of book sharing at all.

The research of Anderson and Stokes (1984) also recognises the effects of social class on shared reading in the home. Their study presents a similar view of low income parent-child reading in the United States and demonstrates that lower SES mothers are less likely than others to participate in book reading events with their children. Come's 1992 investigation of parent-child home reading practices at a low socioeconomic innercity kindergarten in Savannah, Georgia also reveals that a substantial proportion of children were not read to on a daily basis (45%, cited in Come & Fredericks 1995). In yet another study with 'at-risk' low income urban kindergarten children, Morrow, O'Connor and Smith found that many children began kindergarten "never having seen, touched or heard a storybook" (1990:272).

Hannon & Weinberger (1995), who worked with the *Sheffield Early Literacy Development Project* in an industrial part of England, found that about half of the 20 children had daily book sharing sessions with their parents. However, another quarter of them shared books once a week or even less, while for the

others parent-child book reading was a rare occurrence.

Williams (1990) asserts the strong effect of social class on family literacy practices in Australia, although his research presents a somewhat different picture to the American situation. He investigated social class differences in home reading practices between low income and middle class mothers and their preschool age children. He studied 428 mothers and their pre- school children from ten preschools in New South Wales. Five preschools were located in middle class areas and were privately owned (the PPS group), while the other five (the DSP group) were conducted by the NSW Department of School Education. These DSP preschools were associated with their local primary schools in educationally disadvantaged areas.

Williams found that most parents in his study did indeed read to their young children, whether they lived in low income or middle class areas. 185 out of 187 mothers (98.93%) with children at privately owned preschools and 225 of 241 (93.36%) mothers from the DSP kindergartens reporting reading with their children on a regular basis. He considers this a clear indication that home reading is a common phenomenon across the wider Australian community.

This finding gains some support from another study of Australian families with preschoolers. Potter (1995) interviewed fifty mothers about their perceptions of their preschoolers literacy development (the sample was said to be reasonably representative of the wider community), and found that story reading occurred daily in 49 of the 50 families. Although this study did not have a particular focus on low income families, it suggests, nevertheless, that young Australian children from low income backgrounds may also share books regularly with their parents.

Williams did, however, note differences concerning the frequency of reading

with children at home between the private kindergartens and the government kindergartens in educationally disadvantaged areas. Whereas 89.25% of PPS mothers read three times a week or more with their young children, only 65.14% of DSP mothers read at this frequency. Such percentage differences, although significant, do not approach the disparity uncovered between low income and middle class families in the United States.

In addition, Williams, like Ninio (1980) and Snow & Ninio (1986), noted strong social class related differences with respect to the mother-child interactions that accompanied text reading. Although all mothers were concerned that the reading events were enjoyable for their children, in the case of the PPS mothers, the patterns of the talk and procedures of the text interactions were closely aligned with those of school whereas those of low income mother-child interactions were not. According to Williams, DSP mothers tried to train their children to sit quietly for the duration of the story reading and discouraged interruptions. PPS mothers, however, encouraged much more conversation during the reading event, expanded on children's responses, and formed explicit links between the world of the text and the worlds of the children. They also expected their children to engage frequently in the 'ritual display' of shared knowledge and understandings, whereas DSP mothers did this to a lesser extent.

Williams also reported differences in the range of texts children were exposed to at home. Children attending preschool in the economically disadvantaged areas were less likely to share information books with their families than were children from the privately owned preschools. (41.08% compared to 58.92%)

With the findings of his Australian based study, Williams argues vigorously for the existence of different mother-child book interaction based on economic status. He believes these differences have a bearing on differential literacy outcomes in Australian schools.

Effects Of Social Class/Culture On Other Family Literacy Practices

Social class related differences, other than parent-child book reading, are also reported on in the literature. Little literacy activity associated with the domain of work appears to spill over into the lives of low income families, unlike the situation in middle class families (Taylor 1983). This is recorded by Anderson and Stokes (1984), Heath (1983), Purcell-Gates, L'Allier and Smith (1995) and Teale (1986) as well.

Debate About The Extent To Which Print Mediates The Lives Of Low Income Families And Their Children

Different beliefs exist about the extent to which literacy mediates the lives of low income children and their families. Some researchers strongly reject the notion that low income families have limited family literacy practices when compared to middle class families. Yet other researchers believe a tendency to oversimplify the picture of literacy practices in low income family homes fails to acknowledge the significant variation that occurs between low income homes.

Researchers such as Teale (1986), Anderson and Stokes (1984), Taylor (1983) and Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) believe that literacy is certainly not absent from low income homes, and that low income children have numerous experiences with print before they start school. Anderson and Stokes (1984) assert that the family is a cradle of literacy, even in low income homes. They argue for a broader definition of literacy activities and events than story book reading and other book related experiences, and explain that a narrow definition of literate activities produces misleading information. Their study of poor urban Black American, Mexican-American and Anglo-American preschool children and their families demonstrated that such children have considerable experience with print. They investigated the extent to which low income families participated in literacy activities, and calculated that children of

low income families in San Diego, spent on average, more than 75 minutes a day participating in, or observing literacy activities. Examples of activities include, using television program guides, saying the alphabet, naming family members, paying bills, Bible reading, doing crossword puzzles and investigating rules for games.

Other researchers agree. Teale (1986) investigated the nature of literacy practices of 22 low income families, also in San Diego. His sample of families comprised Anglo, Black and Mexican American families, just as in the Anderson and Stokes (1984) study. Teale also presents evidence of a high frequency of literacy related events in many of the 22 low income homes that were observed in the study. The average exposure to literacy related activities was calculated to be 50 minutes a day, while even the least exposed child would have experienced of 50 hours of experience per year (cited in Toomey & Allen 1991). Teale found that although the low income mothers in their research, unlike middle class parents, did not engage in many book reading events, a wide variety of other print opportunities were available to their young children, including the mail, tv guides, grocery lists, newsletters, lists, Bible reading, food packet texts, reading novels and homework.

Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines found that all six low income families in their 1988 study used literacy for a wide variety of purposes, for a wide variety of audiences and in a wide variety of situations. Their research described the strengths of the Shay Avenue families as educators, and concluded also that families in low socio-economic areas are active members of our literate society.

Purcell-Gates, L'Allier and Smith (1995), however, believe it is necessary to highlight the variation in literacy practices across low income homes. They contend that the perspective detailed above fails to take literacy practices in individual family homes into account. In their study of twenty urban low

income families on the east coast of the United States, they discovered a wide variation in family literacy practices - both in the extent to which print is used and the uses for reading and writing. Families at the high end of the literacy continuum engaged in eight times more literacy events per hour than did families at the low end. In high literacy families, print was used in eight of the nine domains of family activities mediated by literacy, the exception being work, whereas in low literacy families, print was used in only four of the nine categories.

They argue that children and their families in low income areas, can not be considered an homogenous group in terms of literacy practices. The children of some low income families, therefore, have many and varied literacy experiences before school, whereas others have limited exposure to, and interaction with, literacy related experiences.

Hannon and Weinberger (1995), who worked with low income urban families in the *Sheffield Early Literacy Development Project*, agree there is considerable variation in the extent to which print permeates the lives of children in low income areas. They found distinct differences across the families in their study with respect to sharing books with adults (already detailed in the section on book sharing) and having an adult model for literacy. While all children saw their parents reading on occasions, some never saw demonstrations of writing, and only about 25% of parents deliberately involved their children in adult literacy activities.

Although, as mentioned previously, Teale contended that his study provided evidence that "virtually all children in a literate society like ours have numerous experiences with written language before school" (1986:192), he also remarked on the wide variation in the home literacy experiences between the low income families in his sample. He noted in 1986, as did Purcell-Gates,

L'Allier & Smith in 1995, that some young children have the opportunity to observe much more writing and reading in the home, interact more with parents or siblings in activities involving literacy, and read and write independently much more than others.

2.3.3 Low Income Not A Strong Enough Factor

The literature indicates therefore, that while economic disadvantage may influence literacy outcomes, it is not, on its own, the sole determinant of literacy development. Children from poor families can, and do, learn to read and write well (Edgar 1986; Harste, Woodward & Burke 1984; Snow 1991; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines 1988).

Even Nash and Harker (1992), who argue strongly for a social class based theory for differential literacy/education outcomes, believe that children from working class families "*can* do well at school". They then add, however, that school success appears to be "largely a matter of chance" (p 18). They suggest that factors such as,

> *a particularly sensitive teacher, a particularly able child, a mother, father or grandparent able to foster the child's literacy and monitor the school effectively... can make a difference and prevent them from the sharing the fate of most of their peers* (p 18).

2.3.4 The Influence Of The Supportive Family Environment

White's 1982 statement that "It may be *how* parents rear their children ... and not the parents' occupation, income, or education that really makes the difference" has gained support in the ensuing years (p471). Toomey (1989) asserts that family environment processes are a stronger influence than social class background on school achievement. See also Toomey (1984) and Rowe (1989).

Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) detail examples of low income families where supportive family processes made a difference. They worked with six

poor urban black families, all of whom had children who were perceived to be successfully learning to read and write. Despite serious economic hardship which meant neither adequate housing or food could be taken for granted, these families found other resources to support child literacy development. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines were continually amazed by the resilience of the families in their study.

Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman and Hemphill (1991), who are in accord with this view, also celebrate the positive influence of the supportive family environment, especially for low income families. Their model of a 'Resilient Family' describes how some low income families are able to survive the social and financial stresses to which they are subject, yet still provide a warm, positive and organised home/literacy environment for their children. They point out, however, that families are sometimes not able to withstand extra stress and strain. Coping strategies can eventually break down, with adverse effects on family life and children's educational outcomes.

Other researchers affirm the value of a positive family environment as well, and explain it in terms of 'social capital'. Coleman (1987, cited in Chavkin 1989) argues that children's success or otherwise in school is influenced by the social capital of their family, and defines the term as adult attention, personal interest, intense involvement, continuity, persistence and intimacy. A 1988 study by Clark found evidence of 'social capital' provided by parents to their children, and a method was developed to identify an 'effective family'. In Clark's opinion as well, low income and minority families can provide support and meaningful learning experiences for their children by using their social capital.

The Myth That Low Income Parents Are Not Interested In The Education Of Their Children

Social class stereotypes, popularly held, have been wrongly used to label low income families. One particularly durable myth, that parents in socio-economically disadvantaged areas are not interested in the education of their children, has been disputed and declared inadequate. Mavrogenes (1990), point out the need to question this assumption. Auerbach (1989) suggests, contrary to this myth, that poor and minority families often strongly value and support literacy development, as they see it as a key to a better life for their children.

Edwards (1989, 1995), Cairney and Munsie (1992), Goldenberg (1989), Snow and Barnes et al (1991) and Unwin (1995) all detail examples of low income parents with both the interest and motivation to support their children's literacy learning. Cairney and Munsie (1992, 1995), Unwin (1995) and Edwards (1995) found that most parents are willing to help with the education of their children, yet many may have little idea of how to go about it. They also say parents appreciate being shown how to help their children succeed at school.

This pervasive myth is also disputed by Lareau (1987, 1989). She explains that both low and higher social class families are interested in their children's learning, but that higher SES families possess greater resources to support their children and intervene in schooling when necessary. Lack of access to resources such as education, income, occupational status, style of work and social networks disadvantages lower SES families, not a lack of interest. This issue has been previously raised and discussed by Nash and Harker (1992). It has also been pointed out that an apparent lack of interest by disadvantaged parents may more accurately reveal feelings of insecurity and a lack of confidence in educational settings (Greenburg 1989; Moles 1982).

Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) assert convincingly that perceptions and

stereotypes of families in poverty need challenging. Taylor also states that families have a lot to teach educators about children learning literacy through using literacy for genuine purposes.

2.4 FAMILY AND EARLY LITERACY INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

This section of the literature review explains how concern about lower literacy and educational outcomes in low income groups has led to a search for solutions, and that early intervention is regarded as an important option. It briefly discusses the value of early intervention and comments on various types of initiatives. Following this, recommendations for programs and points to consider are noted and some significant programs are detailed. This final section of the literature review concludes with a succession of reflections by researchers which address the question of whether we are actually getting the interventions we need.

2.4.1 The Value Of Early Intervention

There has been vigorous interest in early literacy intervention since the 1960's, particularly in the United States. The Head Start program and its associated initiatives were hailed as a new beginning for children in poverty (Westinghouse 1969, cited in de Lacey & Ronan 1986). However, such programs fell into disrepute after research showed that supposed IQ gains at the preschool level soon dissipated (Datta 1979, in Raver & Zigler 1991; Westinghouse 1969, in de Lacey & Ronan 1986; White 1988). The value of early literacy intervention was then thrown into question. In striking contrast, follow up research in the 1970's showed that the gains achieved by Head Start children and apparently lost were regained around puberty (Berrueta-Clement, Schweinhart, Barnett, Epstein & Weikart 1984; Lazar and Darlington 1978; Schorr & Schorr 1988, cited in Chafel 1990). Benefits for attitudes, motivation and participation in schooling from the Head Start program were then

recognised and documented. Early intervention was once again considered a useful means for addressing unequal educational outcomes.

2.4.2 Literacy Initiatives and Interventions

The Commission on Family Literacy (Morrow and Paratore 1993) suggests family literacy initiatives fall into three groupings: those concerned with the partnership between home and school or preschool, intergenerational literacy programs, and those which explore uses of literacy within families.

This study is aligned with initiatives in two of the above groupings, those that explore early literacy within family units and those concerned with the home-preschool association. This review, therefore, examines early literacy programs which involve preschool children and their families, whether preschool based or through home visits.

The literature indicates much research has centred on the United States, the United Kingdom and other western countries. There is, however, a growing body of research dealing with early literacy interventions in Australia.

Recommendations And Points To Consider For Interventions And Initiatives

Many researchers have felt compelled to offer advice and recommendations for future interventions. Australian researchers Toomey, Keck and Atkinson (1987) are concerned that interventions deliberately target parents they characterise as the 'silent majority', that is, those families reluctant to visit the school but responsive to helping their child's educational development at home. These families were contrasted with another group described as the 'enthusiasts', who were typically confident in their dealings with schools and teachers, and keen to volunteer or participate in the school in some way. Toomey (1989) warns that well meaning home-school policies work to actually increase educational inequality between 'silent majority' families and

'enthusiast' families. Unfortunately, those families most in need of assistance are, therefore, least likely to receive it (Toomey and Allen 1991).

Toomey and Sloane (1991) elaborate on an essential foundation for effective literacy interventions. They emphasise the necessity to reach out and connect with low income families. This, they believe, will underpin parental involvement in their children's education.

Unwin believes the most effective way to reach parents is through intervention that is "convenient, personalized and nonthreatening" (1995:556). She believes there is enormous potential in home visits, rather than school based programs, as schools can be places of culture conflict and unhappy, threatening memories. Her study found that personal contact in the more relaxed environment of the family home allowed the visitor, parents and children to interact more comfortably.

Early Literacy Intervention Programs

This review of literature will now highlight a number of relevant programs. While all initiatives aimed to foster the literacy development of low income children by encouraging parent-child literacy interaction, a number of different approaches were used to achieve this aim. Many initiatives targetted parents through some form of direct parent education. Few focussed on the children themselves. Some interventions operated through a home visiting program. Many were based in preschools, libraries or health agencies.

Edwards and Panofsky (1989) chose a direct parent education method. They used two different approaches to introduce low income Head Start mothers to shared book reading. Both were conducted in kindergartens. One was similar to many other parent education programs. It was described as the 'importance condition', and stressed the importance of reading to preschoolers and what

children gain from literacy experiences. The other approach was called the 'modeling condition', and involved making mothers familiar with the important elements of how to share books with their children by demonstrating and emphasising the significant features of interaction. Both approaches were conducted by Edwards, one of the authors, and training consisted of three, one hour sessions. While both systems of parent education brought positive responses, the 'modeling condition' program appeared to encourage mother-child interaction more effectively.

In another intervention, *The Parents As Partners In Reading* program, Edwards (1995) worked with low income mothers and fathers in rural Louisiana. Again it was an education program directly targetted at parents in a workshop format. Concerned that the program continue when she left the area, Edwards moved on to a new phase in parent education. Four parents who had been keen participants were selected as parent leaders to run the next program in small cooperative groups. The parent leaders organised and monitored 33 other parents in a program which consisted of 28 two hour sessions involving group discussion, book reading practice and group feedback. The parent-organised program was interpreted differently to the program organised by Edwards, in ways that suited the participants. For example, they ran sessions in the cafeteria rather than in the library, and parent-child interaction occurred much earlier in the program. It was also interest driven and followed school activities less closely than had the original program. Participants appreciated being shown how to read with their children by the leaders who were their friends and neighbours. They commented they were less fearful about joining a program run by peers, and felt they too would experience success. Parents said they didn't realise book reading with their young children was so important and they were pleased to be given this information.

Parents As Teachers is another parent education program (Burger &

Landerholm 1991) which worked with fifteen low income mothers and their children aged between birth and five years old. It was a library based family literacy education program which intended to help the mothers learn effective parent-child reading interactions. There were separate but simultaneous children's and parents' sessions, followed by a shared session where parents and children did things together. They read stories to their own children, and learned fingerplays and songs. Classes were two and a half hours long and were held twice a week. Valuable changes were observed in the mothers' behaviour. They came to enjoy reading with their children, talking with their children, borrowing books from the library, and purchasing reading material for their children. The attitudes of both parents and children towards reading stories and library borrowing were said to become "very comfortable and positive" (p 42).

McCormick and Mason (1986, 1989), however, targetted the young children themselves. They instituted a program based in preschools in low income areas. They read very short books to the children in a procedure they called 'Book Recitation'. The simple texts were read and reread until the children could recite them with the teacher. Packages of these books were then sent home for the parent to read to the children. The children in the experimental group developed higher levels of reading competence than the control group when they started school. It was a successful initiative enjoyed by the children and parents alike.

The *La Trobe Parents and Reading Project* (Toomey, Keck and Atkinson 1987) used a home visiting system. The researchers wanted to encourage the beneficial practice of parents reading with their preschoolers in a low socio-economic locality in Melbourne. In this study, Toomey, Keck and Atkinson deliberately targetted the 'silent majority' parents as well as the 'enthusiasts'. Families were visited regularly in their homes by trained

volunteer teachers. In this parent education program, the focus was on working with parents rather than children. Literacy activities and strategies were recommended and explained to parents, and children's literacy development was discussed. The home visitors also exchanged the children's books, organised group discussions for parents, arranged visits to the local library and showed a video entitled "Reading Together". Toomey et al conclude that the enthusiasm, enjoyment and tangible literacy development shown by the children increased both the confidence and level of participation by the parents. They also comment that despite being committed to the successful education of their children, parents might be unaware of how they can help at home or that they can be an important resource for literacy development.

A home visiting approach was also used by Unwin (1995) in her work with eight families in a west Georgia city. Families were referred by teachers and were visited for about an hour a week for a period of nine months. The aim was to work together to develop home environments based on Cambourne's conditions for learning. Unwin found that families derived pleasure and satisfaction in reading and writing when ideas and resources were made available to them, and furthermore that families developed valuable literacy partnerships during the intervention.

The *Sheffield Early Literacy Development Project*, which ran from 1988 to 1990, worked with parents of 20 pre-school children in the industrial city of Sheffield, in the north of England. It was part of the European Commission Action Research Programme in the Prevention of Illiteracy and was linked to other projects in the other twelve member states. The project aimed to promote young children's early literacy development and tried two ways of working with parents, home visiting and parent meetings (Hannon & Weinberger 1995). While parent meetings were useful, home visits by trained pre-school teachers were considered particularly valuable, and were well

received by parents. They were said to increase the confidence and involvement of parents, and to lead to greater parent-child interaction with literacy.

Hannon & Weinberger believe the success of home visits was due to a number of factors. Parents felt their role in literacy development was valued when professionals took the time and effort to visit them at home, that home visits allowed much needed flexibility as the content and process of visits was tailored to the needs of the individual family, that parents had control over timing of visits and who was present, and that each family's literacy materials could be made use of during visits. They felt it was also important to the success of the program that children and parents were in their familiar home environment, and they felt more comfortable talking personally with the home visitor than when speaking out in parent meetings.

The *West Heidelberg Early Literacy Project* (Sloane and Toomey 1988), based in a low income suburb of Melbourne, is another example of a home visiting intervention. It too was a valuable project, but the cost of home visits were considered too expensive to continue. Another program was then organised (Toomey and Sloane, 1991) which was very similar to the McCormick and Mason (1986) program. Four pre-schools in low income areas were visited over a six month period, and the researchers read regularly to the children. This included reading to individuals and small groups as well as reading to the entire group of children. Once the stories were familiar, copies of the books were sent home with the children. This intervention also appears to have been successful in developing emergent literacy in low income children, this time in an Australian context.

Beginning With Books (Friedberg 1989; Segal & Friedberg 1991), was a two year pilot parent education project in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania which was

offered to disadvantaged families through the Allegheny County Health Department. It was a successful family literacy program which then expanded into providing other successful programs. It reached one thousand families who were enrolled in the baby clinics. A clinic social worker talked with parents about the importance of reading with children, asked parents' help in completing a questionnaire and then gave each family with a child between one and five years of age a packet of four paperback books. Included in the packet was a sheet of tips for successful book sharing and information about local library programs. A small library was also established in each clinic, and the worker would read with the children when possible. Another questionnaire was filled in by each family about six months later during a clinic visit. Analysis of the questionnaires indicated that an average of six other people appreciated each packet of books, including parents, grandparents, relatives, siblings and family friends. There were substantial increases in the number of parents reporting daily reading with their children, and in the time children spent in individual reading.

The *Beginning With Books* program was considered to be so effective that it became affiliated with the Carnegie Public Library, and was adapted and renamed the *Gift Book Program.* Many other local government agencies then participated including a food bank, day care centres, women's shelters, programs for adolescent pregnant women and single mothers, hospital outreach clinics etc. This literacy initiative endeavoured to bring the families into libraries. The packet from the *Gift Book Program* contained three children's books and a coupon for another free book which could be redeemed from a library. In 1990, over 6,000 families received the book packets (Segal and Friedberg 1991).

Another two programs grew out of the *Gift Book Program. Read Together* enabled parents with low level literacy skills to receive tutoring while their children had read aloud sessions with volunteers in the library. The *Beginning*

With Books program also organised parent education sessions for Head Start parents called *Read-Aloud Parent Clubs* which meet in libraries. These encourage family literacy with weekly meetings where parents receive a free book. Time is spent in discussion about reading to children and there is modelling of each new book. This initiative also significantly increased parent-child reading and library borrowing among the families.

2.4.3 Are We Getting The Interventions We Need?

Despite the ready acceptance of intervention programs, some researchers alert us to possible pitfalls. Auerbach (1989), in an analysis of family literacy programmes, contends that they are not based on current understandings from research. She states that they tend to ignore the strengths of families as educators and focus on teaching parents to do school like activities in the home. Her argument is that this stance works to promulgate a new version of the 'deficit hypothesis', and assumes that parents lack the essential skills and knowledge to promote success at school for their children.

Smith-Burke (1989) takes a similar position to Auerbach. She asserts also that interventions are not based on current research understandings, and points out that they are not specifically founded on adequate, relevant knowledge and understanding of literacy within low income communities. Smith-Burke contends the literacy community is unaware of what minority and low SES parents believe and value about literacy and literacy instruction for their children. She then challenges the literacy community to discover and build on the firmer foundations of what low income and minority parents actually believe and value about literacy and literacy instruction for their children.

Auerbach characterises many intervention programmes as belonging to the "Transmission of School Practices" model. The source of the problem is seen to be a lack of appropriate literacy practices in the family home, and the

solution to this problem is the carrying out of interventions which directly teach parents about mainstream ways of relating to print, and specific school literacy tasks which they can do with their children.

She argues that interventions based upon this model suffer from a number of inaccurate assumptions. She discusses and dismisses the notion that the home literacy environments of low income families are literacy impoverished or that these families do not value or support literacy development. Auerbach then questions assumptions that the 'natural' direction of literacy learning is from parent to child. Hence, interventions based on simple parent to child transmission may be less effective than expected. She warns as well, that this model with its focus on parental inadequacies is dangerous, as it tends to ignore the significance of school factors in literacy development, and obscures the complicated social contexts in which families live.

Cairney (1994), like Auerbach, questions initiatives based on transmitting school appropriate literacy practices to parents. He believes it is more effective to develop ways to help schools recognise the literacy practices of the families they serve and forge closer relationships and communication between home and school.

Anderson and Stokes (1984:36) also suggest the need for a quite different approach to home intervention, that,

> *if we want to reach children in their homes in a manner that will facilitate the development of literacy practice, we would be well advised to focus on the social institutions that serve as the origins of the literate practices they observe.*

They propose it would be more effective to introduce interventions through the social institutions where so much of the print in family homes arises. They do not, however, offer any suggestions about how this could be achieved.

Erickson (1989:xiv) warns the educational and research communities about

"highly intrusive interventions to foster early literacy acquisition". He is concerned about disrespectful and culturally inappropriate interventions that advocate training for parents with the aim of teaching them lessons. This opinion is also reflected by Tizard and Hughes (1984) who question the need for parent educating through home visiting schemes. Although they acknowledge that parents may want and appreciate advice, information and help in educating their children, they are concerned by the assumption that professionals and organisation know how parents should interact with their children. They believe it is time to "shift the emphasis away from what parents should learn from professionals, and towards what professionals can learn from studying parents and children at home" (p 267).

2.5 SUMMARY

This chapter sought to provide a review of the literature dealing firstly with the development of emergent literacy, and then the knowledge, information and understandings concerning early literacy and children who live in low income areas. Finally, the review turned to the field of early literacy intervention. The programs reviewed varied considerably, yet all were considered to be successful and worthwhile. The insights gleaned from these literacy initiatives, and the perspectives contributed on family literacy in low income areas contributed greatly to the design and framework of this study.

The following chapter provides the background information necessary to place the research study in its proper context. It describes the area in which the research was carried out, and the recognition of a need for early intervention. Chapter Three then discusses the sometimes frustrating process of turning talk about intervention into action, and finally details the identification and contact with families interested in participating in the program.

CHAPTER THREE: CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

3.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE AREA

The combined local government areas of Elizabeth and Munno Para on the northern fringe of Adelaide, were one of the ten regions around Australia identified in 1990 by the Commonwealth Government as areas of locational disadvantage. This disadvantage is said to be due chiefly to geographic location, difficulty in gaining access to employment and training, community health and education services, public transport and other physical infrastructure. In a 1991 study "Social Justice Local Area Research Study; Elizabeth and Munno Para Local Government Areas, South Australia", Radoslovich noted a high level of unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, a concentration of low income earners, a high percentage of single parent families with many headed by teenage women as the sole caregiver, and a heavy reliance on public housing. Furthermore, this region is characterised by low levels of adult literacy, and relatively poor levels of educational achievement (Radoslovich 1991) where twenty seven of the thirty four schools qualify for assistance under the national Disadvantaged Schools Program.

Numbers of immigrants are high with a large number of different ethnic groups represented in the area. Although many are English speaking, people from various non English speaking backgrounds are scattered across the area. In addition there is a substantial Aboriginal community in the area. In fact, Elizabeth-Munno Para has a higher concentration of people from Aboriginal backgrounds than any other urban area in South Australia. While students and adults in this area are considered to have a lower overall education achievement status in relation to the wider population, this is even more apparent for the Aboriginal community. I have not dealt with the issue of early

literacy in the Aboriginal community in this research, for as a white person I would be considered an outsider to the families. However the broader project, of which I was part, included two Aboriginal families from the total of nine involved, with an Aboriginal Early Childhood Worker as their home visitor.

The Elizabeth-Munno Para Project, of which this study was part, is a social justice initiative, sponsored jointly by the Commonwealth Government, the Government of South Australia, the relevant local councils, private enterprise and local community groups. A group of local regional heads of government agencies met to formulate plans to address needs arising from the identified locational disadvantage. They consulted, initiated, supported and coordinated a number of projects of benefit to the community.

3.2 CONSIDERATION OF NEED FOR EARLY LITERACY INTERVENTION

Interest in some form of early literacy intervention for the Elizabeth-Munno Para region was initially raised in the second half of 1991 by Ewa Swiecieka, then Director of the Northern Metropolitan Children's Services Office (CSO). The Elizabeth-Munno Para Project in general, and Ewa in particular, as the Children's Services Office representative, were clearly aware that the literacy skills of both adults and children were considered critical issues for education and employment.

The concept of early literacy intervention was then discussed in September 1991 by myself and Priscilla Henderson, then a Regional Coordinator for the Northern Metropolitan Children's Services Office. She was aware I was searching for a thesis topic which would be practical in nature and contribute in some way to disadvantaged students. We had shared a common teaching background in disadvantaged schools (which attract extra Federal Government funding) and both viewed it as an exciting opportunity to support educational social justice issues in a grass roots way.

3.3 TALK INTO ACTION

In November 1991, a proposal that an interagency approach be developed to address the preschool literacy development of 0-5 year olds was put before a reference group comprising the Education Department of South Australia, Children's Services Office, Child Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Child And Family Health Services (CAFHS), Care Link, TAFE Adult Literacy Programs, the Northern Area Development Board, Elizabeth TAFE, Aboriginal Health and Education Services, local junior primary schools, local preschools, playgroups, Family Day Care, Child Care Centres, Children's Services Office Mobile Toy Library, Lift Off Outreach, Family And Community Services (FACS), and Anglican Family Services.

Interested parties were informed of the suggested elements of the project, and feedback was invited at a meeting organised by the Regional Director of the CSO. The Regional Director, other CSO staff and I attended this meeting to give further detail and explanation of the proposed intervention. However, some school and preschool teachers and directors warned that the intervention might sour relations between families and local education providers. We respected this concern and acknowledged that sensitivity to families, and consideration of their rights, dignity and self-esteem were of paramount importance in working within the community. Assurances were given at the meeting that these issues were a top priority and would be carefully addressed during the preparation of home visitors and the design of the program.

After this meeting a plan was agreed upon to prepare by the end of December 1991, a submission to the Van Leer Foundation. Substantial funding would be necessary to cover the costs of staffing, training and resources for the original proposal of six Early Childhood Workers to work with sixty families. It was

necessary to apply overseas as funds for children under five do not fit under any federal government funding umbrella. However, the submission was not prepared; there was a Education Department reshuffle and the person who had undertaken this responsibility was transferred to another position.

This left any early literacy intervention languishing in a period of limbo. By the middle of February 1992, the Children's Services Office organised to do it alone, irrespective of support from the Education Department. They decided to employ a project officer in order that the submission be written. Naturally, this added to the delay of the home visiting project as positions had to be advertised and interviewing applicants was time consuming.

Although it had been originally envisaged that my research would be set within the large scale project, I soon realised this would not be feasible within my time constraints. Priscilla Henderson and I both felt a small study would be a worthwhile alternative and this was suggested to the Regional Director.

Eventually, it was considered unnecessary to wait for the preparation of the submission and anticipated receipt of funding. Rather, it would be valuable to organise a small scale study working with a small number of families and preschool children in their homes. The information gained from this practical experience would actually bolster the chances of the submission being funded, as well as provide an opportunity for the researcher to put the thesis proposal into action.

A Project Officer was appointed in April and the project developed rapidly. I formally presented my now modified thesis proposal for involvement in the pilot study to the Children's Services Office Regional Director and it was accepted.

3.4 RESOURCES FOR THE PILOT INTERVENTION

It was clear the pilot would need to be run very inexpensively. I offered my

services as an unpaid volunteer, and two Early Childhood Workers from local kindergartens, Mobile Kindergarten and Mobile Toy Library were invited to use some spare work time to take part in this study. This meant the only extra salary to be met was that of the Project Officer. Literacy resources were organised from whatever source possible. Enough money was found in the CSO budget to provide some basic writing materials for each child and craft materials. As it was not possible for me to bulk borrow from the Elizabeth Library, I used my own collection of children's books, as did the Project Officer. The Early Childhood Workers had ready access to literature from the kindergartens to which they were attached. A collaborative atmosphere developed between the four home visitors as we shared personal resources and ideas. Later during the project resources were supplemented by donations of books from book companies.

It was envisaged that approximately ten volunteer families would be selected from the population of families using Mobile Toy Library facilities, and that at least two families would be Aboriginal. However, nine families turned out to be the maximum extent to which time and resources could stretch.

After a series of meetings concerned with refining the aims and goals of both the larger program and the pilot intervention the groundwork was laid. The pilot was named The *First Start* Program to continue the theme of the Children's Services Office (CSO) logo, Bright Start Bright Future. The deliberate avoidance of literacy terms in the pilot name would present the intervention as low key and non threatening to possible participating families.

3.5 SELECTION OF FAMILIES

While family selection largely involved those families who were using the services of the Mobile Toy Library, there was also a commitment in this literacy pilot to work with a range of families - Aboriginal families as well as

other Australian families, and one parent as well as two parent families. Selection of families then, was not a totally random process; it had a purposeful edge.

Selection of and initial approach to families was coordinated through Early Childhood Workers familiar to families. Seven of the nine families were contacted by Early Childhood Workers from the Mobile Toy Library service. This gave the project a conduit to some families who were not receiving other CSO services.

The two other families came into the program in different ways. After a talk by the Project Officer about reading with children at a local kindergarten a mother expressed a wish to be involved, and in the other case a kindergarten teacher mentioned the program to a mother who also indicated enthusiasm for it.

Two information sheets giving brief details, stating it involved a home visiting program of approximately a half hour per week of stories, books and fun, were given to and discussed with families. (See appendix A and appendix B.) Those indicating interest were invited to arrange a time for a home visitor and the early childhood worker to call in together and chat about the details of the program to decide if they wished to join.

During the initial discussion between families and home visitors it was made clear that even if they chose to become involved in the program, they were able to withdraw any time they wished. Home visitors also expressed the philosophy of the program that they as parents are their children's first educators, that we would be working together as a team and their knowledge, understandings, ideas and opinions were important.

Furthermore, families were informed that we would be collecting information about the children and literacy but that confidentiality would be respected and

no identifying information would be released. Families were also asked to contribute basic information about their children, their interests and health history and sign a consent form. All initially interested families decided to join the early literacy pilot program.

As researcher, I had time to visit four of the nine families. My selection criterion was to visit the four oldest non Aboriginal children. Firstly, I felt comfortable working with older children, and that we would probably be able to talk and share literacy experiences. Secondly, as a white person, I realised that I would be an unacceptable outsider to Aboriginal families.

Home visiting began on June 3rd 1992 and in the case of the researcher, regular contact was maintained through to the end of January 1993. Phone calls and further irregular visits continued through 1993, and in the case of one family into 1994.

CHAPTER FOUR : METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The social justice aim of ensuring equal educational opportunities and outcomes for all members of society is a major challenge for educators. An adequate command of literacy is acknowledged as a crucial factor in meeting this challenge. Information about children's literacy environments and interactions at home and at school will strengthen the foundation of knowledge and understanding for a more equal society. Teale believes that a "firm understanding of the context" provided by the family home is needed to more fully understand the links between literacy practices and emergent literacy (1986:174).

As a researcher and a junior primary teacher with a number of years experience working in schools in low income areas I was aware that educational and literacy outcomes tend to be lower in such regions. Any information or understandings, therefore, that I could contribute to the jigsaw puzzle of how literacy is constructed by young children and their families, would be valuable both to myself as an educator of junior primary children, and to other educators and researchers with an interest in family literacy and social justice.

This chapter describes the goals and nature of the research, and my role as researcher. It also considers the influences on methodological decisions. It then gives information about the research sites, informants and duration of the study. Following this are details of data sources and methods of collection, and the format of the home visits. Next are descriptions of data analysis, ethical considerations, the researcher's role and trustworthiness. Finally, limitations and strengths of the research are considered.

4.2 GOAL OF RESEARCH

The research was proposed and designed with two major thrusts in mind. Firstly, my aim was to explore the home literacy experiences of a small number of children in Elizabeth before formal school age. This exploration, grounded in the lives of families would help construct a new understanding of early literacy in one disadvantaged area.

Secondly, I aimed to implement a modest early literacy intervention project. This would enable me to gather responses and interpretations from all participants concerned - parents and other household members, the preschool children themselves, and the researcher as home visitor. This would also inform the organisation and planning for a larger scale project awaiting funding.

Four areas of general exploratory interest would be addressed. These were:-

1. The parents' understandings and experiences of school and literacy.
2. The literacy experiences the children were having in terms of the home environment and family interactions, both prior to and during, the program.
3. The responses of children and other family members to the home visits, and their interpretations of their child's emerging literacy.
4. The value of home visiting as an option to encourage parent involvement in young children's emerging literacy.

4.3 NATURE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

In order to gain a sense of the literacy worlds experienced by young children living in the Elizabeth area, it was crucial that the research be carried out in non-contrived environments. This research could not be accomplished effectively in a setting removed from the family home but needed to be centred at this hub of family literacy. To complement the spirit of ethnographic inquiry

guiding the study, the methodology employed naturalistic and qualitative approaches that provided rich descriptive data about the contexts, activities and beliefs of the participants. Teale (1986:174) suggests that naturalistic inquiry is useful for gathering data on home literacy background and allows a researcher to comprehensively "document what is actually occurring in the home".

Anderson (1990:155) notes that ethnographic research studies situations not studied before which "give rise to tentative hypotheses and conclusions". This research, in fact, raises as many questions as it provides answers.

There was also a participative aspect to the study. Parents and other relevant adults were encouraged to contribute, reflect upon and discuss their interpretations of what was happening with the children. Generally this involved adults living in the home (whether related to the child or not), but sometimes another adult not residing in the home had a contribution to offer. Such participation was a valuable element of the research plan as it added to a broader picture of the children. It either confirmed or threw into question my emerging conceptions. A routine of two-way feedback was enjoyed and cultivated, and developed into a valuable shared learning process for both parents and myself.

The study was an exploratory piece of research where flexibility of approach and openness of mind were essential. At the beginning of the research it was unclear which facets would emerge as significant and require particular focus. Therefore the study aimed to describe what was observed and discussed.

A case study approach was used as it allowed the research to show family literacy in more depth. This method of research, as explained by Bissex (1987:12);

> *...allows individuals to be seen as actors and as interactors with their normal environment; it lets us view learners as in control of their own learning - as self-directed or interactive.*

Donmeyer (1990:192) states that a case study approach can provide us with vicarious experience because case studies, "can take us to places where most of us would not have an opportunity to go". Case study can also "penetrate aspects which are not readily accessible by methods which rely on large numbers" (Nisbet and Watt 1982:5). Furthermore, case study and ethnography are both research methods which are "... process-oriented, flexible and adaptable to changes in circumstances and an evolving context" (Anderson 1990:157).

Although new resources and behaviours were introduced into these family homes thereby changing to some extent 'the normal environment' described by Bissex, I felt a case study approach would be a valid and useful way to frame the interactions of family members within the home literacy environment.

4.4 ROLE OF RESEARCHER

In this study the researcher was the main instrument of research, as detailed by Guba and Lincoln (1985). It was a complex role combining the work and responsibilities of home visitor with that of literacy researcher. I acted in the capacity of participant observer, albeit with a high degree of participation.

There were both limitations and benefits inherent in the researcher-home visitor role. A limitation of my role was the restricted opportunity for observing direct adult-child literacy interactions. These often had to be inferred from discussions with the adults about the books and activities the child had explored and enjoyed since the previous visit. Despite this restriction, I believe the active involvement did result in significant benefits. Being viewed by parents as someone happy to help their children, as indeed I was, gave me

supportive and accepting access to children and other household members. This worked positively for the research, made it easier to collect data and I feel also increased the quality of the information and perspective obtained.

4.5 INFLUENCES ON METHODOLOGY

Three researchers had a significant influence upon my thinking. The work of Shirley Brice Heath, Denny Taylor and Catherine Dorsey-Gaines was inspiring. Taylor (1986:140) described a pressing need to find better ways to develop "natural histories of family literacy", a concern shared by Heath and myself. Heath demonstrated that literacy is a social and cultural construction, and the development of each child's literacy is an integral part of their family and community life. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines illuminated the literacy experiences of black urban low income families (among others) and appreciated their uniqueness.

In particular, I applaud their clear and shining respect for the people with whom they interacted during research. These researchers did not hold themselves aloof from the people in their studies. They behaved as real people and treated others as real people. A sense of humanity emerges clearly from their writings which portray a rich three dimensional picture by using the informants' own words and by giving them a voice.

These researchers did not participate with a 'deficit' framework in mind. They opened themselves to the possibilities of the contexts, to see and experience a broad view of family literacy.

Two important messages were received from Taylor, Dorsey-Gaines and Heath. They pointed out the need to be sensitive to different values and expectations, to respect that families have valid alternative ways of organising their lives and educating role. Secondly, they suggested that ethnographic methods were valuable for research with literacy and families. These were

foundations for my fieldwork. The insights afforded by Heath's landmark "Ways With Words" (1983) and Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines "Growing Up Literate: Learning from Inner-City Families" (1988) cultivated an appreciation for the value of ethnography, and the potential richness in the reconstructions of beliefs and practices generated by this methodology.

However, time and personal constraints made such an indepth approach impossible. This research then is not pure ethnography although it applies some ethnographic methods, and aspires to ethnographic intent.

4.6 THE RESEARCH SITES

The research sites were four family homes in various parts of Elizabeth. All were low rental homes, provided and maintained by the Housing Trust of South Australia. Visits were most often centred on the kitchen table or the lounge. They often involved visits to the children's bedrooms and backyard areas to appreciate their treasures and pets.

4.7 INFORMANTS FOR THE STUDY

The major informants for the research came from four households. There were the four focus children aged between two years and ten months and four years three months at the beginning of the study, parents and step parents, and other household members such as friends who were boarding. Other people who contributed perspective were a grandmother and a kindergarten teacher. None of the adults were in employment at the time of the study and all felt they were unlikely to find a job in a time of recession.

Visits to a fifth family with a two and a half year old were discontinued by the researcher as it became difficult to coincide home visits with the free time of the family. This young boy and his family then happily agreed to visits by the Project Officer on another day. Nevertheless, a keen interest in this child and

his family was maintained and followed up in frequent discussions, conversations and field notes with the Project Officer.

4.8 VISITS TO THE LOCAL AREA : THE PRELIMINARY PHASE

The preliminary phase which occurred from April to June involved participants of the planning group, including the Project Officer, the researcher and various other Children's Services Office staff (Regional Coordinators and the Regional Director for the northern Metropolitan Region) who met regularly to discuss and plan the proposed larger scale intervention and pilot.

During this time I deliberately organised myself to spend time within the local community. This was as simple as doing grocery and other shopping and having lunch or coffee breaks at various local shopping centres, visiting and talking with early childhood personnel involved in the mobile/static toy library and kindergarten services in the immediate area. It was a valuable time for getting the feel of the community, a pattern I continued through the rest of the year.

Two other home visitors were chosen and resources were also organised during this preliminary phase. Then in preparation for the program *First Start*, a brief inservice program followed. Though limited, it was as thorough as time and resources allowed. There were sessions focussing on early literacy and working with children and their families. Time was also spent with a social worker from Anglican Family Services Carelink exploring our expectations of the families and visits, and counselling about possible home visiting situations.

4.9 HOME VISITS AND DURATION OF THE STUDY

The first phase of home visits commenced in June 1992 and continued through November 1992. Where possible visits were made on a weekly basis. Day and time of visits were negotiated with each family. The duration of visits was flexible, according to circumstances and ranged from forty minutes to one

hour and fifty minutes.

This was followed by a period of disengagement through to the end of January when visits were at about three week intervals. In all I made between fifteen and twenty visits to each family home.

The families and I had built genuine relationships which no one wanted to sever. However, they realised I was returning to teaching in 1993 and would have limited spare time in the new school year. Nonetheless, social phone calls and further irregular visits continued in 1993 and into 1994 with one family.

4.10 VISITS TO THE SITES : METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The approach to data gathering was qualitative, and principally utilised field work. Field notes were recorded for all contact with the families from June to the end of January. There were two primary sources of data in this study: field notes recorded during and after home visits or phone conversations, and field note records of the discussion/interview sessions with adults living in the home, some of which were audio taped. Some written/drawn artefacts were also collected.

Researcher reflections were written up in the field notes, and a separate reflections book built a record of my feelings and questions about emerging interpretations.

4.10.1 Field Notes

Field notes included observations of:

* children's spontaneous behaviour with a large cube of books brought into the home for each visit

* the way writing materials were handled and used
* children's responses during book sharing times
* responses to literacy activities planned by the researcher
* the physical literacy environment of the home
* interactions between the focus child and the other members of the household with respect to literacy

Field notes also included comments, observations and remarks from the members of the household concerning the focus child's involvement with the books and writing materials. These notes were initially written up immediately after the visit, sometimes in the car or in the Children's Services Office by hand and then typed into the computer. However, families soon felt comfortable with me recording notes during the home visit itself. This was not a planned development; it seemed to arise naturally. The notes were then entered into the computer either immediately after the visit, or that same day.

4.10.2 Discussion/Interview Sessions

Discussions and interview situations with available adults were also arranged on two separate occasions with each family. The timing of discussion sessions could not be decided before the pilot began, and in fact differed slightly from family to family depending on when I believed the adults were sufficiently comfortable with me to discuss issues with a literacy focus.

Parents were asked if we could set aside some time perhaps at a subsequent visit for discussion, and all responded positively to the request. These sessions were slightly more formalised, with the researcher having specific areas of interest and questions to address. Nevertheless, the discussion sessions were approached as friendly chat rather than a pre-set list of formal questions.

The first set of informal interviews occurred after a number of visits to the

family homes. This allowed time for all involved to become familiar and at ease with each other. The discussion concerned possibly sensitive questions about their education/literacy background and experiences, current literacy practices, expectations and aspirations for the focus child. A sense of rapport was crucial for uninhibited communication. Sessions were not taped as I felt it could interfere with our developing rapport. However, extensive and often verbatim notes were taken during the discussion time and checked with participants. These were rewritten after the visit and included the actual quotes that had been noted.

Questions included:-

1. What was school like for you?
2. Level of education completed.
3. How would you describe your reading & writing abilities?
4. What do you remember about being taught/learning to read and write?
5. What helped or didn't help you learn to read and write?
6. Do you like to read and write? Why or why not?
7. What do you like to read? What do you like to write?
   What other sorts of reading and writing do you need to do?
8. When do you like to read? When do you like to write?
9. How do you think (child) will learn to read and write?
10. How do you see your role in (child) learning to read/write?
11. How do you see the role of the teacher and school?
12. How do you believe (child) will progress in school?
13. What sort of future do you hope for (child)?
14. What sort of future do you expect for (child)?

The second set of discussions was carried out at the end of the major period of data collection for each family, and on these occasions were audio recorded and transcribed. (I felt the presence of an audio-cassette recorder would no

longer impair our communication.) These discussions were concerned with perceptions and opinions about the home visiting program, and responses of the preschool child and other family members. Often topics and questions covered were specific to a particular family and child, and arose from observations and chats during field work. The questions were preceded by referring to and refreshing our minds about an incident or behaviour. Therefore the following summary of questions is a rough guide only.

Areas of general interest included:-

1. Would you recommend this program to other people?
   Who and why or why not?
2. What do you think (child) has got from the visits?
3. Have you found anything interesting or useful from the program?
4. Who reads with (child)? How often?
5. Tell me about (child's) interest in books in the beginning and the interest now?
6. Tell me about her interest in writing now and before? And her writing behaviour?
7. Which activities and sorts of books has (child) enjoyed?
8. Which materials from the box were useful and should be included in another program?
9. Who reads with (child)? Tell me about how it happens.
   Who starts it, and when? How often ?
10. Tell me about what happens when (child) reads on her own.
    When? For how long? Her reading-like behaviour?
    Do you think she sees herself as a reader now?
11. I'm interested in the times you and (child) share books together.
    Can you tell me about these times? Has there been any changes in the way you read together?
12. What are you going to do for books now the program is ending?
13. Would you be more or less likely to buy books for (child) now?

Why or why not?

It needs to be stated that discussions were flexible, that questions were not necessarily followed in this order, and that discussions would veer off in different directions following the interests of the adult.

4.11 FORMAT OF HOME VISITS

As an understanding of the nature of the field work carried out is essential background to a consideration of the methodology, a 'typical' description of home visits is necessary. The format was flexible, depending on the child's interests and needs, and often varied slightly from visit to visit. However visits generally included similar elements.

On arrival at the family home there was often an initial chat time with child and adults. Cups of tea were offered during this time. It was an excellent opportunity to talk about what had been going on in both my life and their lives since the previous week. While the adults and I were talking, the children usually seized upon the cube full of books and had a browsing time. The child and/or adults would show me any recent drawings or writing and chat about the child's response to the books left behind and the writing/drawing materials. Initially, these comments were solicited by the researcher, but rapidly parents and others came to offer them during visits. In this way, parents came to see themselves as contributors to, and keen observers of, the literacy development of their children.

Books from the previous visit were returned and marked off. This procedure developed in an interesting way. Initially, it was something done by me, of which the children took very little notice. So for the next few weeks I explained what I was doing and why. Then after drawing their attention to it, I suggested they colour in or mark the square next to the title of the book. This focussed

attention on using writing instruments for a real purpose. The children delighted in making their particular squiggles and looked forward to this routine each visit. In one case, after a child had learned to write the first letter of her name she chose to record the return of her books with this letter.

Next, I shared with the child the special literacy activities I had planned. These might include such things as: a story with finger puppets or vinyl story magnets, following a recipe to make play dough, singing and doing the actions for fingerplays, making a welcome card for a new baby sister, craft activities to accompany a story, singing nursery rhymes and songs or acting out a story. This was usually followed by a cosy time when the child chose books to share with me. Sometimes the books they chose were new to them and at other times they were familiar books from previous sessions. On most occasions, parents and other household adults were close by during visits, and enjoyed watching and contributing to the fun. This was encouraged and parents were drawn into the fun of participation.

After a range of literacy related activities, the child was invited to finalise her selection of books. This was usually an ongoing process throughout the visit. The children had the process of book selection in mind from the beginning of the session. Chosen books were recorded in my exercise book, and then after packing up and more chat with the family, we would say our goodbyes, with family members coming out to the car to wave me off.

4.12 DATA ANALYSIS AND REVIEW

Observing, Recording And Reflecting

The first phase of analysis was an ongoing process of thinking, speculating and considering what had been heard and observed during each home visit. The writing of field notes was a valuable stimulus as it also led to the recording of reflections. In turn, these reflections guided me to further explore specific aspects in subsequent visits. It was a continuing cycle of observing, recording

and reflecting, with one part of the process informing the next part. Significant information from the visits was summarised in written form which helped me from being overwhelmed by the mass of detail available.

Process Of Checking: With Family Members

Informal discussions with parents and other household members reviewed observations and impressions of what was happening with regard to early literacy and the family. Discussion about the significance and meanings of the actions and responses of the child and other household members enabled emerging interpretations to be checked. This process of "member checking" (Lincoln and Guba 1985, 1990) contributed to a more complete literacy picture of the child and the family than I could gain independently. Sometimes I was even able to check interpretations with the children themselves during the visits.

Process Of Checking: With Peers

This involved a process of collaborative review where the Project Officer and I accessed each other's field notes, and raised queries and possible alternatives for interpretations. There were also sharing sessions with the other home visitors where emerging interpretations were discussed. This process of 'peer debriefing' is said to increase credibility (Guba and Lincoln 1985). I learned not to jump to hasty conclusions, but rather to wait for confirming or disconfirming evidence from further observation or discussion with parents and peers.

These two checking processes led to further, more focussed data collection. In subsequent home visits specific questions were addressed in addition to the general data collection.

Analysis After The Field

Analysis intensified after field work was completed (Bogdan & Biklen 1982). Again, interpretation of data and tentative findings were discussed with the Project Officer and my home visitor colleagues.

However, this was only a brief period of analysis in late 1992 and early 1993. Due to a lengthy illness, further work on data analysis was left for almost two years. This delay presented some problems. Families had assured me at the end of 1992 that if I needed to ask them further questions, it was fine to visit or to ring them. While phone calls and irregular visits continued for some time, they were social occasions, a chance to keep in touch with each other's lives. I wasn't well enough to devote time to my thesis. When I continued with the analysis and the writing up towards the end of 1994, contact had ceased and I was not able to follow up on a few specific details. However, the delay also had some positive effects. I returned to the data with renewed energy and a clear mind, and the comprehensiveness and detail of the fieldnotes provided an opportunity to consider the analysis from a fresh perspective.

Once analysis resumed, I read and reread the collections of data for each family. The four focus questions were a guiding influence for the analysis, and significant parts of the field notes were highlighted. This included records of observations, reflections and quotes. Comments were noted in the margin. As the data was reread, similar patterns emerged for each family and ideas for relevant categories were explored. These were then reviewed with my supervisor. (See appendix C for a note on 'browsing', which was eventually included in the section on Developing Interest In Books And Reading, under the subsection heading of Borrowing And Choosing Books.)

A tentative framework was developed as a basis for organising the data. Subsequent discussions with my supervisor helped me clarify both the categories of information and the ways in which the case studies could be

organised. It was important that they preserve the distinctiveness and uniqueness of each family while, at the same time, presenting the commonalities between them.

Firm categories were assigned to the significant information and a coding system was worked out. With this workable way of organising the data, I again read the collection of data for each family and this time wrote codes, categories and the approximate chapter numbering system in the margin next to the field notes. (See appendix D for an example of highlighting and coding.) The now firm categories were used as headings and sub headings in the case studies.

The following outline summarises the process of data analysis after the field.

Stage One

* Repeated examination of all field notes with the four focus questions in mind.

  What were the parents' understandings and experiences of school and literacy?

  What literacy experiences were the children having in terms of the home environment and family interactions, both prior to, and during, the program?

  How did the children and other household members respond to the home visits?

  In what ways was home visiting useful in encouraging parental involvement in young children's emerging literacy?

* Highlighting of information relevant to focus questions. Comments in margin.
* Patterns and possible categories considered, then reviewed with supervisor

Stage Two

* A possible framework of categories and a system of chapter organisation developed, then discussed and clarified with supervisor.

Stage Three

* Firm categories assigned to data.
* A coding system organised.
* Rereading of all field notes, with codes, categories and chapter numbering system noted in the margin.

The seven month involvement in the lives of the families through the regular home visits and telephone calls allows a satisfactory measure of internal validity to be claimed for the study. Parents, other adults and children accepted me as a friendly presence and did not appear to be on their best behaviour. The prolonged engagement meant that I was able to consider information from a variety of sources and on a number of occasions. This enabled a form of triangulation to be used in the data analysis.

The resulting set of descriptive case studies attempts to catch the richness of the data and portray early and family literacy in depth. All four case studies follow a similar system of discussion, and yet each child and her family constitute a unique literacy environment.

4.13 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study could have been a serious intrusion on the lives of the four families. However, as the next section describes the researcher became a welcomed friend of the family over the period of seven months of regular home visits.

It was made clear to the families that information would be reported in such a way that families could not be identified. Furthermore, in the process of writing much data was eliminated on the grounds that it might intrude on family

privacy.

4.14 RESEARCHER'S ROLE AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

As a home visitor I was quickly accepted by both adults and children as non threatening. Families appreciated my role of organising and providing literacy experiences for children and looking at what children were doing in terms of literacy. They were aware the Children's Services Office (CSO) and I were interested in the sorts of things they and their children understood about early literacy and that confidential records would be kept and written up. This was explained at the time they agreed to become part of the pilot program, and they were required to sign a consent form. Furthermore, it was also clearly explained they had the right of withdrawal at any time and to decline to comment if they so chose.

My role as a teacher with a particular interest in early literacy development caused no concern at all, as a satisfying rapport rapidly developed between the families and myself. I did not initially disclose to families that I was trained as a teacher but this emerged easily and naturally in a brief time. The CSO believed this information may have been threatening to some families, although it did not prove to be the case.

Children would rush out to the car when I arrived and give me a hug, and parents and other household members would come to help me carry in my heavy cube of books etc. I often heard reports from parents that the children would nag them about when I was coming back to see them and that the children missed me if for some reason the visit had been postponed. Three of the four families had silent phone numbers and soon felt free to advise me of these. I subsequently gave them my home phone number in case they needed to contact me.

After the second taped discussions were completed and I visited less frequently, I was assured by parents that if there was something I had forgotten to ask I could ring them any time. In this disengagement phase, families sometimes phoned to check when I was coming or advise me of necessary changes to our plans. This indicated to me a high degree of acceptance of my dual role with families. Furthermore, when I commented to families that I would probably need to bring my two children along with me to the visit organised for just before Christmas, they all insisted I do so. They knew about parts of my home life as I did about theirs.

Parents and other household members also felt free to confide personal information in me. Some related to literacy but other comments indicated a degree of trust with which I felt uncomfortable and I refrained from commenting on matters which were serious and private concerns between partners.

4.15 LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS OF THE RESEARCH

There were both limitations and strengths in the research. Working with these four families was an enlightening and wonderful experience. However, the four case studies are not a large or necessarily representative sample of families in the Elizabeth-Munno Para region. Indeed, each family study is unique and context specific.

A further limitation of the investigation could be that it was conducted with four focus children who were, quite by accident, all girls. This was not planned, they just happened to be the older children of the pilot group and their families were available on the two days a week I was able to travel to Elizabeth. A boy was one of my original focus children, however the days I was available did not suit his family and he was transferred to the Project Officer. There were also a number of boys working with the other home visitors. Clearly these considerations limit the extent to which generalisations and assumptions about the findings of the study can be made. However, the research does have

some contribution to make to the picture of family literacy in Elizabeth Munno Para.

It must also be acknowledged that an early literacy home visiting intervention such as this is a time consuming and expensive option. However, *First Start* is considered a valuable early literacy strategy by the South Australian Department for Education and Children's Services and resources continue to be committed to the program. After the 1992 pilot intervention with nine families it was extended to 25 families in 1993. *First Start* has since spread to other low income South Australian communities such as Hackham West. The issue of cost effectiveness may be addressed by carefully targetting families eligible to participate in the home visiting program.

As previously mentioned, the relatively few opportunities to observe adult-child literacy interaction in the home meant it was necessary to rely on information from the adults and children. Without doubt the quality of this information was dependent upon the level of trust and rapport built up between each individual and myself as researcher. Fortunately, the engagement period of more than seven months was sufficient time for the development of good relationships. The period of engagement also allowed me to review the congruence or otherwise of information. It was possible to consider information from a variety of sources and on different occasions.

In one case, I felt a male parent was perhaps giving the information he thought I wanted, or exaggerating the information in order to be seen in a more positive light. This was a minor matter, however, and his partner humorously corrected the impression. I believe adults did not see themselves as being examined as my role emphasised helping their children. They were keen to contribute information about their literacy backgrounds and experiences, and for some adults it gave them the opportunity to express the anger and bitterness they

felt about their teachers, school experiences, and/or their own parents' lack of support for their education. It also allowed these adults to disclose the fears they have for their children's school lives. This must be seen as a strength of the research for it would not be often that people would feel able to express such opinions.

Another strength was the enjoyment it brought to the four young children and the pleasure and satisfaction experienced by the families. A new world was opened to these children. They became aware of the delights in books, rhymes, fingerplays, cards, letters, and the post-it notes from me to them. They found delight in exploring books independently and sharing them with others, activities they did not do before. The parents were delighted their children were developing a love of literacy and were drawn into literacy interaction with them.

Parents also came to initiate literacy events such as book sharing, scribing of print and shared writing times. And so a family literacy cycle was set in motion, with children contributing the personal forces and adults contributing the social forces to create the "learning and development system" described by McNaughton (1995:8). These dual family literacy forces then further stimulated each other in a continuation of the cycle.

CHAPTER FIVE : THE "CREAN" FAMILY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Five is the first of four chapters which detail information gained through working with families. They look at the literacy experiences of each child within her family home, both prior to and during the early literacy pilot program. They furnish contextual information crucial to a fuller understanding of early literacy in these homes. Parents' personal and literacy/school backgrounds provide a frame for understanding responses to the home visiting and how literacy is constructed within the family and household unit. In this chapter and following chapters, all names are protected by pseudonyms.

This chapter provides a portrayal of the first focus child, "Marie Crean", members of her immediate family, and other people residing in the household. It allows a glimpse of the complex interplay of family life, highlights changes in Marie's attitudes and behaviours towards reading and writing, and documents how all members of the household were drawn into literacy activities with Marie.

5.2 BACKGROUND AND FAMILY INFORMATION

The home visiting pilot program was recommended to the mother "Karen" by the Director of the kindergarten which Marie attended three afternoons a week. Another day a week she attended daycare provided by Care Providers Association at the Adelaide Children's Hospital where she had speech therapy for delayed speech development.

5.2.1 Members Of The Household

I met the Crean family and other household members one morning in June 1992. The focus child, Marie, was four years two months old at the beginning

of home visiting. She lived with her mother and step father in a Housing Trust home in Elizabeth. Her older brother, "Michael", lived in a nearby suburb with their father "Steven" and came for an overnight visit every two weeks. In addition, there were visits from Marie's stepfather's three children on a regular basis. For the majority of the contact time there was also a friend and her boyfriend boarding in the house. All adult members of the household were unemployed throughout the duration of home visiting.

Marie's mother, Karen, was probably in her early twenties, and was dressed in stirrup pants, a hand knitted jumper and slippers. She greeted me at the door with a smile and a hello, and asked whether we should stay in the lounge or go to the kitchen. She then answered her own inquiry when she commented that the lounge room would be better as she "... could look after her [Marie] better in here". Marie's difficult behaviour was a significant and continuing problem for her mother and other members of the household, and was often a challenge for me as a visitor to the family home.

She then introduced me to her friend, "Helen", who was boarding in the house, and a little later I met Karen's new husband, "Anthony". Both greeted me in a friendly way. Anthony, Marie's stepfather, was a thin, quiet man with long fair hair. It was mentioned quietly that he suffered from Crohn's disease and was going to the hospital the next weekend for a bowel operation. Further home visits revealed that Anthony's condition was most worrying for them, as were the disruptions of doctor's visits and periodic stays in hospital.

There was a further source of worry which affected the household. Karen was apprehensive about the welfare of her son, who lived with the father. She told me of Family and Community Services' concern about the cleanliness of the house in which the father and son lived, and how they had organised for it to be cleaned on a number of occasions. Karen was attempting to gain full custody of the son.

I said hello to Marie and that I was happy to meet her. She nodded towards me but seemed unaware of who I was. I gave her some books to look at while I was chatting with her mother. She then decided to help herself to the materials in my large storage cube. I commented to Karen that Marie had appeared surprised to meet me, and inquired whether the letter I sent specially to Marie had been delivered. Apparently the letter had arrived but she had not shown it to her. She said she would show it to her later.

As there wasn't a spare chair close by, I sat next to Karen on the floor of the lounge room while we chatted about the philosophy and practice of the project. She was keen and very supportive, and commented that "... the kids around this way can do with some help". She had no hesitation about filling in the enrolment form straight away.

5.2.2 Marie's Interests, Health And Behaviour

During the first information visit Karen offered information about Marie's behaviour and health. She said Marie enjoyed colouring in and playing chase the dog, that she did not like books or television but loved "The Book Place", a morning children's television show in which stories were featured and read aloud.

Marie, Karen said, was a premature baby, hyperactive, and sensitive to food colouring. She also had asthma and used a nebuliser four times each day for breathing relief.

Marie's behaviour became a strong point of interest for her mother and me. Often she was quite out of control, jumping on books, standing on them, throwing them around the room, even hiding them away. She even hit me on the head with a book (visit 9). On one occasion (visit seven), I said I was concerned that the visits were perhaps making things difficult for Karen and

Marie and that I would understand if she wanted the visits to stop. She and Helen just laughed and responded that I wasn't making anything worse- it was often like this. Perhaps it should be made clear, this type of behaviour was not saved specifically for books, it was a reflection of her general behaviour.

Marie was often restless, difficult to get along with, prone to temper tantrums and unable to settle to anything for long. Apparently she slept only four hours a night and ran around the rest of the time. Her behaviour and sleep routines imposed a great deal of stress on the household as well as on herself. Often when I arrived for a visit at about 10.30am, they were just out of bed and having a morning cup of tea. Helen and her boyfriend were forced to put a lock on their bedroom door to stop Marie disturbing them in the middle of the night. However this didn't stop Marie from banging on their door and screaming. Karen visited the local doctor frequently, in attempt to get some form of relief for Marie as well as everyone else.

Despite her penchant for difficult behaviour, Marie also had a delightful side to her personality, especially when on medication. She was affectionate and loved a cuddle with me. For example, on one occasion she sat on my lap and lay back in my arms so I could kiss her on the chin and neck. I then copied this behaviour so Marie could kiss me. It was a game she played with her mother at night time, and one I was honoured to be included in (visit 9).

5.3 PARENTS' UNDERSTANDINGS OF SCHOOL AND LITERACY

The following information, unless otherwise indicated, is taken from an interview conducted in two parts, on the 4th and 11th of August 1992.

5.3.1 Karen's Experiences Of School

Karen's father had been in the navy and the family was required to shift from base to base. As a result, she attended a number of different schools in

Nowra N.S.W., Perth, Sydney, Port Moresby and then finally Adelaide. Despite these challenges, Karen generally liked school and said changing schools "didn't bother" her, even when she was "put back a year (in Adelaide) because school in Port Moresby didn't cover enough subjects". She didn't find school hard and "did well at science, got A's, but flunked typing". Karen completed and passed year 10, then left school and married when pregnant with Marie's older brother. She also stated that she "had enough of school anyway" and that she "wasn't able to go on further".

5.3.2 Karen's Experience Of Reading

Karen characterised herself as a "good" reader and writer and recalled that she found learning to read and write "easy". She added that her mother had sometimes read stories to the four children in her family. She remembered there were books to read by herself at school, and that they showed her "how to start it off and away you went". Also the teacher "only showed one word at a time.. this was good, made it easier.. made you concentrate on the word".

She said she didn't enjoy reading "so much" now and had "got out of the habit". However, she added, "If I find a good book I'll read it". Friends' recommendations of good books were, she said, the starting point for her leisure reading. Horror, mystery stories and true stories were her preferences and she mentioned Stephen King as a favourite author. Karen commented "If there is nothing on t.v. I'll open a book". On a later occasion (8-9-92), while repacking the container of books, I came across a couple of novels another mother had borrowed from me. When I offered them to Karen and Helen, both declined, explaining they didn't like "romances". Helen (Karen's friend) went to her room and came back with the book she was reading at that time. It was a Stephen King book of short stories. I promised to have a look for similar novels at home as my husband also enjoyed them. I followed this up and offered them a couple of novels from my house but they had read them

already.

Other forms of reading included reading with her son for his homework, the local free paper the Messenger, the Weekly Trader (which she bought); the Sunday Mail newspaper for the t.v. book, personal mail, pamphlets, and Marie's books. She specifically mentioned that she never bought magazines to read as they were too expensive, as was a daily newspaper.

5.3.3 Karen's Experience Of Writing

Karen believed the moving and travelling helped her when a student as it gave her "lots of interesting things to write about". Other people were especially interested in the time she lived in Port Moresby. Karen also kept a diary for years when younger. Furthermore, she wrote regularly to her grandmother in order to maintain contact as her family transferred from one naval base to another.

She still enjoyed writing letters regularly to family members who lived in different parts of Australia and got much pleasure from reading the letters she received in return. Puzzles and crosswords were additional types of leisure writing she did (interview 29/9/92). Other sorts of writing she did involved functional forms such as taking telephone messages, putting notes on doors, reminder notes, food shopping lists on pay day, bills to be paid, and filling in various forms. "You sign your life away!", she told me.

Karen preferred to write later at night "when there's nothing on t.v.". In a later interview (29-9-92), when I asked Karen whether Marie ever watched her when she was writing, she answered "Ah, well I don't really write... much. Ah, I like doing me puzzles and that and she sits there and watches and tries to, you know, help. But mother doesn't want the help." She went on to explain that when she wrote letters or shopping lists Marie was not normally up. She said "I do things like that at night time. At least then I can sit down and

concentrate on what I got to write down".

5.3.4 Marie's Father's And Brother's Experiences Of School And Literacy

Marie's natural father apparently "didn't find school easy and didn't like it.....he used to skip school". Karen commented that her ex-husband was "very poor in reading" and unable to help their older child, who lived with him, with his school work. Their son, Michael, however, "[loved] school..[was] bored in the school holidays..[was] good at maths, sports".

5.3.5 Karen's Beliefs About Marie's Future

Karen believed Marie would learn to read and write but it would take "..lots of people's patience". She saw it as a gradual process of Marie "picking things up as she [went] along" through speech therapy, kindergarten and "watching the other kids". Karen believed her daughter would make slow progress in school and that "her temper [would] get her into a lot of trouble". She was concerned Marie would be "worse at school than at kindy" because "the kindy doesn't tie her down like school will". She also worried that Marie's short concentration span meant "she [would] get bored too quick", but she expected Marie would "be good at outside things like sport".

It was Karen's hope Marie's future would be "better than her mother's" and that her daughter would "get as much education as she [could]". It was particularly important to Karen that Marie would not "fall pregnant" at an early age, as she regretted she had herself. She wanted Marie to experience a "better" lifestyle than she had. Karen explained life had "always been a struggle" for her, that she was "always broke" and "sitting on the dole", and that "hubby (first husband) didn't bother to go to work". Since remarried, she was much happier than when living in the first young marriage, yet Tony's health problems cast a shadow over their future.

Karen and her friend Helen, who was with us during these interview sessions, both expressed concern about the future and how things would be in fifteen years time. They wondered what sort of opportunities would be available then for the next generation. Yet despite this, Karen told me she believed Marie would have a better future and that Marie's "determination [would] help her get it". She felt Marie would "be a boss of something" but hadn't given "any hints" as she "didn't settle to anything". She expected her daughter to complete year twelve. Karen mused that perhaps Marie could be "a vet" as she liked animals and babies.

5.3.6 How Karen Envisaged Her Role In Marie's Literacy Development

This section details a significant change in Karen's perception of her role in Marie's emerging literacy. Initially, she thought it wasn't necessary for her to be involved before Marie was at school, but this changed. Karen then saw an evolving role for herself in the preparation for Marie's future. As a support and help to her educational development and as an advocate for her as she went through the school system.

Karen said she had not read stories with Marie before the home visiting as her daughter hadn't been interested in them. Prior to home visiting Karen did not see a place for herself in laying foundations for Marie's literacy development. She believed there would be time for that when her daughter was of school age. Part way through the contact time though (29-9-92), there was a change in her understanding. She stated her role in helping Marie learn to read and write would involve getting "her to sit down.. to persist and try to get her to read with me". Any assistance she could give would be "a helping hand for later". Karen was particularly concerned that "if [Marie] didn't get help now, she would be behind when she [got] to school".

When Marie started school Karen envisaged her role would comprise two important functions, firstly, continuing her responsibility as helper to her daughter, and secondly, taking on an advocacy role for her. She saw her role as making sure she played her part, and that the teachers and school did the same. She told me she planned to "be involved with helping her with schoolwork", to "encourage her", and "make sure they (the school and teacher) [were] not letting her lag behind". Schools, she said, must "make sure the children get their education".

5.4 MARIE'S LITERACY EXPERIENCES AND INTERACTIONS PRIOR TO HOME VISITING

Information about Marie's literacy interactions and behaviours prior to the home visits and the home literacy environment, provide a necessary baseline for guaging and describing change.

5.4.1 Writing

Karen told me she always had to carefully watch Marie with writing implements as she had an unfortunate tendency of drawing on the walls. For this reason, Marie's access to pens, pencils and textas was restricted to the few occasions when her mother could keep her under close observation.

Karen explained Marie sometimes liked to colour in, but was not very good at it. She had also observed Marie to do writing-like behaviour, circular formations which were repeated usually across a page, although sometimes written down the page. She thought Marie might have picked this up from children at kindergarten or from watching the teacher. Marie may have been "doing circles or something like that and thought that's the way to write".

5.4.2 Interest In Print Around Her

According to Karen, Marie had not shown any interest in, or awareness of,

environmental print. There was a home made cardboard sign on Marie's bedroom door which announced "Marie Crean's Bedroom". It was decorated with a pink heart and was made by her mother. When I carried her over to it (visit 8) and asked her what it said, she appeared to have no idea and pointed to the colours and labelled them wrongly. Later I asked her mother whether she thought Marie knew what the sign said. Karen replied she didn't think Marie knew what it said and that it had been there "a long time".

5.4.3 Interest In Television Literacy

However, even before the home visiting began, Marie was interested in a daily, half hour children's television show called "The Book Place". It featured a talking caterpillar and two humans reading stories in a book shop. Karen reported this was the only television show Marie enjoyed, and that she was not able to sit down and concentrate on any other program (visit 1).

5.4.4 Interest In Book Print

Despite Marie's liking for stories read on the television, she had apparently not transferred this interest to books. Karen explained that Marie had shown "very little" interest in books prior to the home visiting program. She had given her some of her own books she had saved from when was a young child. These were kept on a cupboard in Marie's bedroom, yet Karen remarked that she'd never seen Marie look at them independently. Nor had she wanted her mother or anyone else to read them with her.

Karen recalled another anecdote about Marie and books to illustrate her lack of interest in books. When younger, Marie had gone with adults to the local library. Karen recalled her running up, down and around in the children's and adults' sections calling out "more books", rather than exploring any texts. The library visit was arranged for an adult purpose and no books were borrowed for Marie. Going back and forth to the local library was difficult without a car and was a very infrequent literacy activity.

As a result of her own observations, Karen formed the impression Marie was more interested in outdoor play and not yet ready for books. Perhaps, not surprisingly, she had not considered reading with Marie a relevant activity. Her kindergarten teacher also remarked that Marie did not choose to spend time with books.

5.4.5 Print Around The Home

There was always a television programme guidebook in the lounge, and the local paper was usually folded in the kitchen. The adults in the household kept any novels they were reading in their bedrooms, safely away from Marie. The refrigerator was a centre for print in this home. It usually had notes and reminders on it for members of the household.

5.4.6 Discussion

Literacy was part of this family's daily life. They needed to keep track of appointments, information from government departments, kindergartens, speech therapists, advertising material, and messages to each other, in addition to reading and writing leisure activities.

Marie's mother could specify a long list of reading and writing which she either chose to do as a leisure interest, or needed to do to organise their daily lives. However, much of it was done later at night when Marie was in bed. The only forms of reading and writing that Karen remembered doing when Marie was around were using the t.v. book, taking telephone messages, reading with Michael for his homework while on an access visit, and doing puzzles and crosswords. Although Marie was sometimes around when Karen worked on crosswords and other puzzles, Marie was discouraged from joining in. This meant that Marie was therefore unable to observe or interact with her mother during many everyday literacy activities. Literacy activities, therefore, were an integral part of family life, yet, they were substantially removed from Marie's

view.

5.5 HOW MARIE CHANGED

There were some intriguing changes in Marie's behaviours and attitudes towards reading and writing over the duration of home visiting.

5.5.1 Developing Interest In Books And Reading

Over the months of the pilot program, Marie developed quite a love of books and grew to enjoy sharing books with me, her mother and other people. By the third visit, Karen and Helen commented on how much Marie "[loved] books". Karen declared in an interview (29-9-92), "Oh God! She liked the books". This was a significant change in Marie's interest in books.
Marie liked to involve herself in books and she demonstrated quite a flair for this. I read *Dear Zoo,* a lift-the flap book, to her (visit 2). It was a big hit. She enjoyed lifting the flaps and joined in with the story, even though she didn't know the word for camel or giraffe. I was fascinated when she then chose to personalise the story. Marie became the main character in the story. As we shared the book, she substituted her own name for the name of the boy character, insisting that it was Marie who sent the animals back to the zoo as they weren't appropriate pets. Sometimes Marie didn't want me to read to her, instead she just wanted to have a discussion about a particular book (eg. visit 4, *Possum in the House*).

Reading With Her Mother

Karen said that at the beginning Marie had found it difficult to even sit down and look at any books with her because "she had no concentration span". Marie "[looked] at the pictures and that would be about it"....and wouldn't sit still long enough...to get the storyline" (interview 29-9-92). Marie's restless behaviour and short concentration span was aggravating to her mother and a reason why they had not shared books in the past. Nevertheless, Karen continued trying to share books with her young daughter.

Even on the fifth visit Karen commented to me that she had tried to share some books when Marie had asked her to, but that she gave up half way through, tired of reading while her daughter wandered around the house paying little attention. Nevertheless, Karen persevered, and told me on the next visit that Marie stayed with her and a book longer, but she still wasn't able to complete reading it. Once again (visit eight), Karen reported to me that she "[got] halfway through the story and Marie said I don't want to do that any more". On another occasion (interview 29-9-92), Karen told me that when Marie had had enough halfway, "she closes it on you. So you wait until she comes back with the same book...and ah, that's where I'm up to, and then I read the rest of it. So yeah I outsmart her there". I wondered whether book sharing had become something of a game between mother and daughter.

Towards the end of the project, however, Karen reported that Marie "definitely" had more interest in books and was now often able "to sit there (with her) for a full length". Karen also reported that Marie organised her, and other adults, to read with her. "She [brought] out the books..[sat] next to you and [said] Here you are Mum, book". Karen told me about the limited mother-child interaction that went on during book sharing. Apparently, Marie didn't ask her mother any questions while they were reading, and became "stroppy" and "moody" when Karen asked her questions.

Reading With Other Members Of The Household

Karen, Anthony, Helen, the boyfriend Peter, and her grandmother often read to her. Marie was said to be very keen to have books read to her (visit seven). She would demand, "Read me this one.. this one.. this one". In fact, sometimes, they would be fed up with Marie's constant requests for stories, particularly when she wanted a favourite over and over again. Helen explained to me that she didn't mind reading with Marie, as her own reading was not good and that she saw it as useful practice. Once (visit 9), I asked

Marie if she had been reading her books. She nodded and replied, "Yes I have. I read..Tony's me". This was backed up by her mother.

Reading With Me

In the beginning, it was a challenge to keep Marie's attention for an entire book. I found it necessary to cut the story short to bring her attention back or perhaps to abandon the story reading. During the second visit, when I patted my lap and gestured for her to sit on my lap, Marie was happy to share a story with me. At some stage in every visit from then on, she would say she wanted me to read to her and she would often join in. During visit five I shared a musical and pop-up version of *Old McDonald Had A Farm* with her, and allowed her to turn the music on and off. Marie already knew this song reasonably well and she watched as we sang and I pointed to the words. She was pleased with herself when she realised she could locate the 'Ee I Ee I O' part of the song/story on the pages. I would also gesture for her to come and share or invite her to sit on my lap and have a story. At other times during visits she would decide to read independently or read to me instead.

Reading-Like Behaviour

Marie quickly developed reading-like behaviour. I inquired (visit 3) whether Marie had looked at the books she had borrowed from me the week before. Karen answered that she had spent time with the books on a number of occasions by herself in her bedroom. As the weeks went by, household members commented on the long periods of time she would spend by herself reading books in her bedroom.

When I mentioned to Karen the value of reading-like behaviour in early reading development (visit 3), she replied it was already occurring. She had heard Marie reading the books aloud to herself. Later the same visit after we had shared *Patrick and the Hungry Puppy* a number of times, I was thrilled when she chose to 'read' the story to me. And then she 'read' another story to me

that she had borrowed the previous visit.

This reading-like behaviour was then shared with other members of the household. Karen mentioned she had noticed Marie "reading" to her stepfather during their book sharing times. Marie had been making up her own versions of the stories that had been shared with her, and Karen commented, "It's a start I suppose". During the second interview (29-9-92), Karen explained how Marie would read to them, that Marie would bring out her books from her bedroom and either ask for a story or sit next to you and say, "Here you are, mum". When Karen replied she was too tired to read, Marie would say "I'll read to you mum". Karen said she would answer, "Oh thanks darling".

Marie developed quite complex reading-like behaviour (visit 8). She had chosen the book *Just Me and My Dad,* a story not heard before, and was able to construct a story with a reasonable sequence of events. She said, as she turned the pages, "The gate opens. Open the fence. Open the snake. Ow he bites me. Good night". Although her 'reading' bore no relation whatsoever to the actual text, she picked some clues from the illustrations and wove together a simple story with a series of events with a typical child-like conclusion.

Another interesting literacy event happened during this same home visit. Marie was sitting on the floor looking at some books. She opened one called *The Birthday Cake* and said something like "Once upon a time". While her speech wasn't perfectly clear and we weren't able to get her to repeat it, neither her mother nor I were in any doubt about the intent of her speech. Marie was aware it was a traditional way for stories to begin, and it was a deliberate choice as a story starter to the book she was browsing through. It was something she had never said before, and her mother and I were surprised and pleased by this use of book language. Where she gained this concept from is impossible to say, although she was an avid viewer of the "The

Book Place" television program, and had by now developed quite an interest in books.

The reading-like behaviour seemed to move to a higher level of awareness during visit eleven. A story titled *Dog In, Cat Out* had been a firm favourite that week and shared frequently. Karen explained that as there were only four words in the text, Marie could 'read' it all by herself. Marie then proceeded to 'read' it to me. She was most serious about this performance, she examined the illustrations for picture cues and then read the text. She actually looked at the words as she read. Even though it is a long book, Marie read it to the very end. She was obviously pleased with herself and so were the rest of us. It was a deliberate and conscious reading act rather than merely turning the pages and telling a story from the pictures alone.

Independent Reading

Marie had developed independent reading behaviour early in the home visiting program, as previously noted. She spent considerable lengths of time on her own in her bedroom, going through the books she had borrowed. Karen told me these sessions occurred quite a few times every week.

I was intrigued by the following example of independent reading (visit 9). Marie and her mother went into her bedroom to bring out the books borrowed the week before. Then Marie came over, sat on my lap and looked through them all. She picked up *A Walk In The Park* and said, "I'll read it". Marie then turned the pages slowly while looking carefully at each page. I expected her to 'read' the story aloud to me but she didn't, instead she focussed on the book with such concentration that I just watched her face. I knew her stepfather had been reading these books with her all week and the story was familiar to her. When she finished, I asked her if she had been reading the story to herself in her head. Marie looked up at me very seriously and nodded. Although I can not be absolutely sure this was in fact the case, interaction with Marie had

made me aware of her forthright nature. She would have readily told me if I was on the wrong track. Her mother explained that they had also enjoyed this book together during the week.

Choosing And Borrowing Books

On the first visit, I left the books I had shared with Marie. Following this, she promptly assumed responsibility for book borrowing. She usually spent considerable time each visit browsing through the container of books I had brought along. Marie was always quite definite about which books she wanted to borrow and she didn't like me to help her. For example (visit 11), she declared "I want this one", referring to *Spot Goes To School.* Once (visit 4), when I wrongly assumed she would like to have the books I had read during the session, she corrected me and said she wanted "big books". She then took the books I had selected and put them back in my storage cube. Apparently, smaller books were unsuitable, perhaps she considered them 'baby' books. She also took little or no notice of recommendations from her mother or Helen the boarder. Marie was strong about making her own choices and wanted everyone else to be quite clear about her right to choose.

Often she chose books she had previously borrowed or ones read to her to which she wanted to return. Sometimes three of the four books borrowed were favourites. When a book was a favourite she would even search systematically through the entire container of books to find it (visit 12).

Marie wanted to borrow as many books as possible and often attempted to keep extras. At the end of visit six, when Marie had already chosen four books, she wanted the entire container of books and tried to take more to add to the others. I explained to her that I needed to have lots of books for the other children to choose from, but Marie always wanted her own way. On my way out the front door Karen noticed she had put three more books in her

room and returned them to me. Marie was not amused and let us know about it.

The final choice of books for the coming week also signalled to Marie that the visit was coming to an end and I would be taking the rest of the books and other literacy adjuncts away. When I suggested to Marie (end of visit 7) that it was time to choose her books, she was most annoyed. She sat on the floor and pulled everything out from the cube. Karen told her to put them back, she refused and swished them around with her hands on the floor. I asked her to choose four books, but this had no effect either. She cried and screamed, so Helen and I started packing them away. Marie threw herself on top of the pile so we couldn't reach them, but Helen pulled them out from under her. I organised myself and left some books for her. At this point, however, Marie decided she was ready to choose! I said I was sorry, but it was time for me to go, and she could choose some books next week. This set her off crying again and she went into her bedroom. Her mother followed her in and took away an extra book she had managed to grab. My impression was that Marie was unhappy about the visit ending and wanted to keep all the books. Karen also believed this was the likely interpretation.

5.5.2 Writing Behaviour

Marie became keenly interested in observing demonstrations of writing during the intervention. I had labelled all Marie's literacy materials, for example, pencils, crayons, textas and her container to hold it all with her name. She commented on one of the letters in her name she noticed on a label (visit 2) and instructed me to write her name, my name, her mother's name, Anthony's name and the number four which has been special to her since her birthday earlier in the year. Her mother noted that Marie also became much more interested in writing herself during the intervention.

I fostered her interest in print and wrote for her any chance I could during the

visits. For example, after collaborative chalkboard drawings or drawings on paper, I would encourage her to make up a brief story or a comment/label and I would write it down, point to the words, and read it out to her while pointing to the words. Marie and I drew a cat together on the chalkboard in visit six. We talked about a cat she knew and she decided on her Nan's. I suggested different ways of starting the story and she settled on, 'Once there was a cat who lived at Nan's house'. Then she added, 'She liked to bite Marie' to the story. On another occasion (visit 3), Marie wanted me to draw her some flowers, which I did, and we had a conversation about the different colours. I then encouraged her to make a short book with me which we called 'Flowers' by Marie. The text was short and simple. It followed a repeating pattern, 'I like red flowers', 'I like orange flowers' etc. Sometimes after these writing drawing events Marie would read with me and sometimes she didn't want to but the important thing was her interest in the writing demonstrations.

The Importance Of Post-it Notes

Each visit I wrote notes for Marie on yellow post-it notes and stuck them on the refrigerator or her bedroom door. On the tenth visit Marie found the pad of notes in the container. She brought it to me and said she wanted me to write on it. I asked her what she wanted me to write and on the first one she requested, "For Marie, kindy", while on a second she wanted "Anthony and Mum. Doctor Holmes". (her favourite doctor). Her mum said to her, "You like Doctor Holmes, don't you", and Marie nodded her head. Then she took both notes and stuck them on the refrigerator and stood there and admired them for a while.

Then I wrote a note to Marie from me but I wouldn't tell her what it said. It read, "I like Marie. Love Julie" and I drew lots of hugs and kisses symbols on it as well. I stuck it on the refrigerator with the other two notes. Marie went over to take another look at it, and I said her mother could read it to her later. She

was indeed amused and intrigued and wanted me to read it to her straight away, but I didn't. Children love a little mystery.

The Recording Of Books Borrowed

Over the series of home visits, Marie also came to carefully observe the recording of chosen books in my exercise book. Marie brought in the books she had borrowed the previous week (visit 8), and I asked her to do the job of ticking them off for me. I showed her what to do and she chose to make a circular squiggle next to each book title. Marie enjoyed this new responsibility and was flattered she had been asked to do such an important job in my book.

During visit ten, Marie changed the way she marked off the books she returned. This time she drew dots instead of open circular marks. I wondered whether this was because she had been observing my recording of books borrowed carefully. In the space immediately before each title I drew a solid dot and I felt she was copying this. Later that visit when I was recording the titles she had chosen in my exercise book, Marie picked up a biro, said "write dots" and proceeded to write on my page. It appeared that whatever I wrote was considered to be important by Marie and that she wanted to do it as well.

Marie developed a fascination with demonstrations of writing and would stop whatever she was doing to investigate the process. She picked up *Dog In, Cat Out* and went to Helen with it (visit eleven). As Helen was heartily sick of this particular story after repeated readings, she declined to read it yet again. So Marie decided that she would read it to Helen instead. While I was busy noting her literacy behaviours in my exercise book, Marie looked at me and thought she would explore what I was doing. She came over, had a look, and began drawing on my exercise book. Both Karen and Helen then commented that Marie wanted to write whenever she saw me writing. Marie was quickly using up all the space on my double page so I told her I would need the room left on the page and that we could find her something else to use. Her mother went

to a kitchen drawer and found a partly used exercise book, but this wasn't considered suitable by Marie. Then I remembered I was still carrying some large 1992 diaries in the boot of my car and told her to wait a minute as I had the perfect thing for her, but I had to go get it. She wanted to come with me but as she had no shoes on we said she had better stay inside away from the puddles.

I brought the diary in, showed her the places she could write and the special page where her name and other details were meant to be written. Marie took it to her mother and asked her to write in it. While she sat on Karen's lap, Karen took her hand and wrote Marie's name. Marie giggled. Karen told her to relax her hand, Marie went on giggling and everyone laughed with her. She insisted her mother do it again and they went on in this fashion, and recorded the address. "Do again", Marie commanded, and they did some more writing in their tandem way. "There you go" said Karen, and Marie replied "Thank you". Next Marie went to Helen and asked her for her help. Firstly, Helen said no but Karen said, "She asked you so nicely", referring to the please in Marie's request. Helen gave in graciously. Together they filled in the section on Dates to Remember. They recorded birthdays; Karen's, Helen's, Anthony's, Peter's and those of other family or friends. Then Karen asked Marie who else's birthday she wanted, and Marie asked for mine and her brother Michael's etc. Interestingly, all the time she was being helped to write, Marie was not watching the text that was produced. She was looking up in the air and seemed to be concentrating on the physical experience.

Next there was a section in the diary for telephone numbers. Marie and her mother recorded some family ones and then Karen asked her who else's number she wanted. She replied "Doctor Holmes" and it was recorded. Then her mother asked her about the number of her boyfriend at kindy and Marie said "no". There was a fun teasing discussion about who her boyfriend was,

and it was eventually decided that Russell was the lucky boy. When I asked Marie why he was her boyfriend, she explained to me that "He's playing me".

Once the information pages of the diary were filled in to everyone's satisfaction, Marie turned to another page and declared, "I can write frog and fish". Strangely, she didn't produce any writing, and sat on her mother's lap only for a short time. Then she went to choose her books for borrowing. Perhaps she felt this was a more pressing matter. Once chosen she brought the books to me and when I started to write the titles in my book Marie insisted I also write them in her new diary. I thought this was an excellent idea. She sat on my lap, watching intently as I wrote, and she echoed the titles of the books. She then stated, "That's mine" referring to the list of books in her own diary. Clearly, she was feeling pleased with herself and happy to have her own copy of the books borrowed.

When I arrived for the twelfth visit with Marie and her family, the borrowed books were already out neatly on the kitchen table. With the mention of the word "book", Marie went straight away into the lounge room and came out with her diary given to her last visit. She went through it looking for the place we had recorded the books from last week. Although both her mother and stepfather were away on doctors' visits, Helen was home and she and helped Marie to find the relevant page. She was ready and keen to mark off the returned books so I read out the title of each, pointed to the correct spot and she coloured in the square. She then went immediately to the container of books and brought a handful of books she said she wanted this week. Helen asked her if she was sure they were the ones she wanted and she nodded. Helen then reminded her, "There is a box full of books to choose from". It seemed clear to Helen and myself that Marie was in a hurry to choose her books so I could record the titles in her diary. Her diary and her job in helping to record and mark off the books she borrowed from me had become important to her.

5.6 HOW THE FAMILY HELPED

The family and other members of the household were responsive to Marie and helped her in a number of ways.

5.6.1 Doing Literacy Activities Together

The family became drawn into the literacy activities during the project. All members of the household became regular reading partners for Marie, and an audience for her reading-like behaviour. They also participated in songs, finger plays etc.

Karen continued activities Marie and I had not been able to finish during our time together. On the second visit I told Marie the story of *The Enormous Turnip* by using a set of vinyl story magnets on the refrigerator. Marie wanted to do it again and again, and eagerly joined in the story telling. Then we acted out the pulling of the turnip and dramatised the development of the turnip from seed to a mature plant. When I then suggested she tell her own version of the story with the people in her family as characters, she was delighted. Although her language was not in complete sentences, she repeated significant phrases such as "pull and pull" and "would not come out". Then I read her the book my young son and I had made at home together called *The Enormous Weed* which was an innovation on *The Enormous Turnip.* Together Marie and I began writing another version, *Marie And The Enormous Carrot.* We were about half way through and she became restless, so we left it for another time. I suggested to Karen they could go on with it during the week if they had a chance, and was pleased on the next visit when Marie showed me she and her mother had finished it together.

Karen and the other adults, especially Helen, responded to Marie's interest in books, rhymes and games. When browsing (visit 9), Marie chose *Spot Goes To School.* She then wanted to firstly share with me and then with her mother

and Helen. We then played *Round And Round The Garden,* the fingerplay I had introduced the visit before. This was great fun for all of us. Marie and I took it in turns to do it to each other, and we laughed and giggled. Karen and Helen also appreciated the sense of fun and joined in the play with Marie. During the eighth visit Marie was delighted to find a version of *Ten In The Bed* which we had read and sung together the previous week. Helen informed me that this story/song had been featured on "The Book Place" that very morning and that both she and Marie had sung it together.

Another example of Karen's response to Marie's developing literacy was noted by me on the 29th of September. There was adult writing on some pages of Marie's diary and I asked Karen about it. She was encouraging Marie's interest in writing and drawing activities by scribing for her.

5.6.2 Scaffolding

Instances of Karen scaffolding for her daughter occurred during the home visits. Whenever this happened I sat back quietly so they could enjoy their interaction. For example, following the literacy event of *Ten In The Bed* shared by Marie and Helen the morning of visit eight, Marie sat with the copy of this book attempting to independently read/sing it to herself. Then Karen joined in just reminding her of the pattern of the story. Marie made use of this help to produce a more complete rendition. Both Mother and daughter really enjoyed themselves- a wonderful change as book reading events had often been frustrating for Karen.

Another instance occurred in visit nine. While browsing through the container of books, Marie found the finger puppets and book of *The Little Red Hen* which we shared at our first meeting. She then organised us all with a puppet each and started us off on an approximate oral rendition of the story. Her mother Karen helped her fill out the storyline by supplying forgotten structural elements of the story. Marie responded to this help by then including the extra

bits and pieces in her oral storying. For example, after Karen had introduced the idea of 'helping' to the conversation, Marie went on to say "You Red Hen, you want help?". Karen went on to adapt the story theme of helping/not helping and the resulting consequences to the home life example of having to help if you want to be fed at home. It was a hilarious interaction and we were all laughing as Marie is not known to be a tidy child. In fact some days there is no way you can find a clear spot either on her bed or on the floor as it is totally covered with toys and clothes. Karen had not realised that the scaffolding she had been doing would facilitate Marie's development and was pleased when I pointed it out to her (interview, 29-9-92).

5.7 RESPONSES TO HOME VISITS

These comments, unless otherwise indicated, come from an interview with Karen on 29-9-92.

Karen felt the home visiting program had been valuable for her daughter. She told me that she would recommend the *First Start* program to anyone because the program "helped" Marie learn, was "entertaining" and that Marie enjoyed it. She noted that reading the different books and the other activities encouraged Marie's delayed speech, which improved from just "the few words" she had at the start of the home visiting. She also stated that it encouraged her concentration span, and that she was not able to sit for a story or watch television at the start of the program, but could now. Karen also mentioned that Marie was a difficult child to entertain and the program had given her ideas of fun things she could do with Marie.

Karen explained that while Marie had very little interest in books and book sharing at the beginning of the home visits, she has "definitely" developed greater interest. She said, "You couldn't get nowhere reading with her" at the start, but that now, "Oh God, she liked the books". Marie seemed to look

forward to the visits. Sometimes, she would say to Karen, "Julie's coming, Julie's coming. Books" when she realised it was Tuesday, my visiting day.

There was also an increased interest in writing observed by Karen, which she responded to and deliberately attempted to support. She told me that Marie would sit with a piece of paper, start writing and then would "natter on" about what it said. Marie, she said, firmly believed she was doing writing. Karen said she had to be quick enough to catch what Marie said the first time so it could be written down, because "by the time you've turned around to say, 'Well what was it?', she won't repeat it".

Karen had bought some books for Marie at a book sale (visit 9) and said she would buy more books for Marie now she liked them. However, she was still reluctant to take Marie to the local library, even though I assured her that library people were very used to young children and it would be okay if they went there.

Helen also offered her opinions about the program (22-9-92) and they corresponded with Karen's. She said it was a "good idea" especially as what the visitor does "depends on the child". This comment referred to the much needed flexibility to follow the child's, eg. Marie's interests and take the child from where they are. She also felt that Marie was more interested in print and was willing to sit and share books or read to them.

5.8 DISCUSSION

The informal home visits were a valuable literacy interaction stimulus for the Crean family. Karen and the other adults soon became aware of Marie's newly demonstrated interest in print, responded positively to her enthusiasm and were drawn into literacy interaction with her.

5.8.1 Factors That Helped Make A Difference

Marie's Personality And Nature

Marie's personal characteristics were an important factor in her literacy development. She had a strong, independent and forthright nature. She demanded attention and was not one to take no for an answer. Marie requested, and indeed, insisted upon interaction with the adults around her. She organised everyone in the house to have a turn and sit down to read with her. When an adult protested they were tired or didn't want to read a particular book yet again, Marie would take the initiative and read it to them. She loved having an audience for her reading. Marie even arranged the adults in the house to take the parts of finger puppet characters so stories could be enacted. Her confidence and independence also allowed her to dive into reading-like behaviour with both familiar and unfamiliar books.

Marie's innate curiosity also promoted her literacy development. Whenever I wrote, she wanted to know what I was doing. She watched carefully as I wrote post-it notes, recorded the books she borrowed or jotted down observations during home visits. Whenever she saw me write, Marie would write as well. She then turned to her mother and the adults in the house for input about writing, an interaction that had not previously been encouraged by her mother.

Marie's Enjoyment of And Enthusiasm for Literacy Activities

Marie's robust interest in books and print fostered adult-child literacy interaction, particularly between her mother and herself. A cycle/spiral was set up whereby the adults responded to her interest and enjoyment, which then encouraged Marie's interest even more.

Karen's Changing Perception Of Her Role In Marie's Literacy Development

During the home visits, Karen's perception of her role as a supportive parent

changed. It expanded to include the time before Marie formally entered the school system. While she initially thought that there was nothing she needed to do, or could do before Marie started school, Karen came to realise she could be a tremendous help to her daughter right then and there. This meant that she was pleased to share books and other experiences with Marie.

Interesting Literacy Materials

Although there were no literacy materials provided by the *First Start* program (other than the basic writing/colouring implements given to the focus children) for use during home visits, the children's books and story aids I had used with my own two children proved very useful. Marie was fascinated by the lift-the-flap stories such as the Spot series of books, and loved books of songs/rhymes that she could sing. Marie also delighted in the various sets of felt finger puppets I had to accompany such traditional stories as *Red Riding Hood, The Little Red Hen* and *The Three Little Pigs* etc. The vinyl story magnet characters and scenery props were certainly popular with Marie and another stimulus to her development of storying.

Fingerplay activities and action rhymes were other winners with Marie and allowed her inventive nature to come to the fore. She experimented with different ways to clap when we shared the action rhyme *Clap, Clap Hands*, and taught them to me (visit 9).

The pads of post-it notes were another inducement to Marie's interest in both reading and writing. She loved having messages left for her on her bedroom door or the refrigerator.

The Stimulus Of The Home Visitor

I believe Marie benefited from having my attention focussed on her during the weekly home visits. Although she was not able at first to settle down for a

whole story, she enjoyed the close contact of the shared reading time. I knew she would be all right after the second home visit when she happily came up on my lap to share a book with me. After that occasion, Marie gradually extended her shared reading behaviour to include everybody in the household and thrived on the attention and affection. She benefited also from having someone new like me, an outsider to the family with a particular interest in early literacy to interact with. I suppose my experience developed through teaching 5-8 year olds, the professional development courses I have completed, and through interacting with my own two children as emergent literacy learners provided a good foundation for positive interaction with Marie.

5.8.2 Constraints

The home visits were certainly not all smooth sailing; some constraints were in operation. Marie's difficult behaviour and poor sleeping habits meant that the people in the household were quite often tired. This wore down everybody's tolerance for Marie and they were not always able to interact in a positive way. Sometimes she strained my patience too, and I was thankful that I didn't have to live with her. I don't believe she was always able to control her behaviour. On many days she was hyped up and overtired. I feel she would have possibly come along even further if she had more often been able to behave calmly as she did while on medication.

Visits with Marie were always interesting, if somewhat unpredictable. I never knew quite what she would enjoy, and it was useful to have a few alternative ideas for activities prepared. However, the songs, action rhymes, fingerplays, pop-up and musical books were always welcomed by her and provided a lot of fun. Although the home visits with Marie were always a challenge, it was one I also enjoyed and gained much satisfaction from.

CHAPTER SIX : THE "DOBBS" FAMILY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Six presents a second focus child and her family. The home visits describe how "Jamie Dobbs" and her mother "Dianne" made a joint endeavour with literacy. Dianne had unhappy experiences with literacy, both at school and at home. She felt no one had supported her learning, and she was determined to help her young daughter as much as she could.

6.2 BACKGROUND AND FAMILY INFORMATION

"Dianne" and "Trevor Dobbs" became interested in the *First Start* home visiting program after receiving information from an Early Childhood Worker with the Mobile Toy Library Service.

This set of home visits was conducted under unusual family circumstances. The focus child did not, at that time, live at home with her mother and step father. Jamie, as the result of a court order, had been removed from the family home and placed in the care of a local foster family. She visited home for two hours, three times a week, accompanied by a volunteer for Family And Community Services. I visited the family during one of the three weekly visits. These circumstances were vastly different from the family life of other program participants. Nevertheless, the home visits offered another perspective on a relevant, and ultimately hopeful, study in family literacy.

6.2.1 Members Of The Household

Jamie was the youngest of the four children with whom I worked. She was a small, dainty child with shiny dark hair and dark brown eyes. She was about two years and ten months at the beginning of home visits, and had lived most of her life in the semi-detached Housing Trust home in Elizabeth. Jamie's

mother, Dianne, a woman in her twenties with short dark brown hair was 26 weeks pregnant when we first met. Trevor Dobbs had fair short hair and was also in his twenties. He was Jamie's step father, but considered her his own child.

On that first visit, and for most visits after that, there was a grandmotherly woman present in the home. She was the Family And Community Services (FACS) volunteer who was required to accompany Jamie on access visits. She often sat knitting baby clothes for the Dobbs' new baby.

The Dobbs had a complicated life. They had continuing trouble with neighbours. It was said to be due to the child abuse case against Dianne. There were abusive phone calls, vandalism and even bullet holes through the back fence. Eventually, at the end of 1992, the Housing Trust organised a house for them in a different suburb of Adelaide.

6.2.2 Jamie's Interests, Health And Behaviour

Dianne told me Jamie liked to help around the house, and that she always wanted to help with the dishes and hang out the clothes. She also enjoyed jigsaw puzzles. Dianne described Jamie as a child who liked to play by herself for a long time. Jamie also enjoyed children's television programs such as "Play School", "Sesame Street", "Ninja Turtles". Television advertisements also caught her attention.

The first home visit with this family began awkwardly. I was unaware of the family background, and the child abuse case. I went with an Early Childhood Worker (E.C.W.) from the Mobile Toy Library Service who was familiar to the family. We all went into a sparely furnished kitchen. I wasn't asked to sit down. As there weren't enough chairs for everyone, I hesitated to take a seat. After a few uncertain moments, I asked whether it was all right to use the chair at the end of the table. Trevor then went into another room and returned with

a chair for himself that had the back missing. I moved my chair around a little closer to Dianne.

The step father, Trevor, was keen for the visits to go ahead. He explained to Dianne it would be good for them to be involved, especially with the custody case coming up. Dianne, however, seemed uncomfortable. I gave them the sheet of information about the *First Start* program, and outlined the sorts of activities we might do and why. She appeared even more uncomfortable when I talked about how we believed parents were the first teachers of their children; that it was our role to support them. I also commented that they, as parents, had an understanding of their children we could not hope to have, and that we could learn from each other during the program.

Whereas other parents were secure with these comments, Dianne was not. Her parenting was already under question, and I felt she was worried I might be there to keep an eye on her. I attempted to ease her mind by reminding her they need not make their decision immediately. Furthermore, they could change their mind and stop the visits any time they wished. Trevor again encouraged Dianne to fill out the enrolment form, and they both contributed information about Jamie.

The first half of that initial home visit was nothing if unpredictable. At one stage, Trevor came back into the kitchen with a photograph of a baby girl. Dianne reproached him, but he continued. He asked me, "Do you think I could [have] murdered this baby?". I searched desperately for an appropriate response to this unexpected announcement. Then I gave up and replied, "I wouldn't have a clue". He replied, "That's what they said I did". Later, I discovered from the E.C.W. that the baby had died of cot death at seven months of age. They were to be supplied with a breathing monitor when the new baby arrived.

Fortunately, the visit ended on a positive note. Jamie and I shared books, rhymes and finger puppets together. Dianne watched closely and quietly sang the nursery rhyme with us. They all came out to say goodbye and Dianne stated, "That was good".

6.3 PARENTS' UNDERSTANDINGS OF SCHOOL AND LITERACY

The following information, unless otherwise indicated, is from an interview on the 24th of August 1992. This interview with Dianne was conducted over the telephone. Her baby was due and a phone call was convenient for both Dianne and myself.

Dianne and I had many chats over the phone in previous weeks. I endeavoured to maintain contact although home visits were temporarily discontinued while the custody/access situation was supposedly reorganised. The telephone conversations were appreciated by Dianne and Trevor, and allowed us to keep in touch. There was an added benefit in doing this interview over the telephone. Dianne was often more talkative over the telephone than in face to face discussions.

After seven weeks, the social worker finally contacted me, and explained the case would take further time, and that home visits should resume.

6.3.1 Dianne's Experiences Of School

Dianne asserted that she hated school. She explained that she "kept flunking it ... because the work was too hard for [her]. She said, "That's why I can't read and write properly".

Dianne had formed adverse opinions of the teachers she encountered. She said, "My teachers never had time for me .. never had time for anyone". She

felt that her teachers had not spent enough time with her, helping her overcome her literacy and other educational problems. She was placed in a special class, but she said, "I didn't get shown much. Nobody sat down and learned me how to read properly and showed me how to write properly". On another occasion, she told me that she could not do maths either (visit 3).

Dianne was also bitter about her parents' role in her education. She felt let down, especially by her mother, whom she said wouldn't help her with her work.

Dianne finished year ten at a special high school. She was sent to work at a sheltered workshop when she left school. Dianne felt she was discriminated against in employment. She recalled being sacked from a job, not because she couldn't do the work, but because they said she was "slow". The company needed to cut back on staff and Dianne believed she was a convenient scapegoat. She also told me she had lost another job in a factory where she hurt her back and could no longer lift the heavy rolls of vinyl.

Dianne felt her education was unfinished and talked about going back to school when the new baby started school. Later in the home visits (visit 4), she mentioned that she wanted to learn to read. Both the FACS volunteer and I assured her that many parents improve their reading while sharing children's stories with their children and when children go to school. I told her how this had happened while I was teaching. She wanted me to teach her how to read, but I did not have the time and lived too far away to visit her on an ongoing basis. I told her I could help her with reading some of the books for Jamie, that if she attempted them, I would help her learn strategies for difficult parts. Any finger plays or rhymes I did with Jamie, I always read through with her, so she had some practice before she read it with Jamie. I attempted to follow up further the interest in improving her literacy skills. As Dianne had no means of

transport and was uncomfortable about attending a local TAFE course, I investigated the possibilities of a "Literacy In The Community" scheme. This would have been perfect for her. A trained tutor would have either visited her in her home or they could have met for sessions at the community centre. I knew about "Literacy In The Community" as I had been a volunteer tutor for two years. Unfortunately for Dianne, it did not run in the Elizabeth area, and the TAFE option was too daunting and inconvenient for her with the imminent arrival of the baby.

6.3.2 Dianne's Experiences Of Reading

Dianne characterised her reading ability as "very poor". Dianne told me that she enjoyed magazines and the local free paper, but that magazines were too expensive to buy so she didn't get to see them very often. She said that she tried to read Women's Weekly magazines, but got stuck on them. She explained (visit 3) that she and Trevor didn't need to use a library as they didn't read books. Dianne commented that she also was required to read official information such as "court reports, the Housing Trust Review".

She stated that she did not remember much about being taught or learning to read or write, because she "was backwards at the time". Dianne did remember, however, being given "kiddies books" to read, although she was too old for them. She also described having a teacher or another adult who sat beside her and read the books to her. She added that she'd had trouble following the words.

6.3.3 Dianne's Experiences Of Writing

Dianne's experiences of writing were no more positive than her experiences of reading. Again she described her ability as "very poor". She said she tried to write, "but I [got] real frustrated. I [got] stuck on spelling". Dianne told me she liked to write letters to her foster parents at Port Pirie, but that she didn't do it often. She reported that she often had to write "forms" for various agencies.

6.3.4 Trevor's Experiences Of School And Literacy

Unless otherwise indicated, this information is from an interview conducted in two parts at the family home on the 26th of August and the 2nd of September, 1992. During the home visit, Trevor reminded me we had arranged this time for his interview.

Trevor attended three different primary schools and was also placed in special classes. However, he had more positive experiences of school and his education than Dianne. He said, "When I was at school, I got taught really good". He particularly enjoyed history lessons. He recalled his teachers as being attentive and helpful to him, although he struggled to achieve minimum standards. He described his reading as "pretty poor", and said, "some words I do get messed up with". He explained that he tried to split difficult words into syllables and then pronounce them, but it didn't work that well.

Trevor did little reading. When I brought my copy of the daily newspaper for them, Trevor wasn't interested. He told me he did not like reading (visit 3). However, he recalled that while at school he had been exposed to some poetry he'd enjoyed. He recalled reading Australian poems. Trevor was not able to name the poet, or the title of the poems, but I identified it from his description of a cricket match. When I mentioned Banjo Patterson and Henry Lawson he recognised their names as Australian poets.

Trevor's writing ability was also a problem for him. Dianne would write his letters for him. He told me got "real jitters" when he had to sign cheques and fill in application forms.

Trevor was also resentful about his parents' lack of support for his learning. He said "My mother never even taught me, nor did dad". He was also angry

with his parents that he'd been "pulled out of school for a job that paid a lousy fifteen dollars a week". He attended high school until Year 9, but said he had wanted to get more education.

He described himself as a "little ratbag" in his younger years. At one stage he was placed in an orphanage run by nuns. Trevor recalled happy memories of that time. He remembered coming home after school, having a snack, and then sitting around a table while the nuns helped him with his home work. He had maintained some contact with a couple of the nuns through infrequent letters (visit 7).

6.3.5 Dianne's And Trevor's Beliefs About Jamie's Future

School had left deep scars on Dianne, and she was concerned that Jamie would also have a difficult time at school. She stated, "I don't want Jamie to go through what I went through". She hoped Jamie's progress at school would be better than her own, and that her daughter would "[get] teached a bit more than I [did]".

Dianne had no grand plans for Jamie's future. She hoped for "a really good life" for her daughter. She wanted Jamie to be "happy" and "bright at doing her work", but didn't aspire to high educational achievement. Perhaps it seemed an unattainable dream to her.

Dianne wanted Jamie to marry and settle down, but was concerned about her becoming pregnant at an early age. She commented to me, "I'll make sure she picks the right guy". Dianne believed she had made some poor relationship choices in the past, and wanted to prevent Jamie from doing the same.

Trevor wanted to "make sure" Jamie had a good future, "a good life at school and a good life at home". In contrast to Dianne, Trevor expressed the desire

that Jamie went "all the way at school, or as far as possible in school". He hoped she would finish year twelve.

6.3.6 How Dianne And Trevor Envisaged Their Roles In Jamie's Literacy

Dianne's bitterness about her mother's refusal to help her with learning problems at school, reinforced her desire to support her daughter. She wanted to help her learn to read and write, but was frightened she would not be able to. She said she would, however, "try to help her out...try and learn her new things".

Dianne believed other people would play an important role in Jamie's literacy development, especially speech therapists, and kindergarten and school staff. But always at the back of her mind was her fear that Jamie would face the same sort of problems she faced at school.

Trevor envisaged an important role for himself in Jamie's literacy. He felt he had "a big part" to play, by helping her with her subjects and ensuring she sat down and completed her homework, in much the same way as the nuns had helped him.

6.4 JAMIE'S LITERACY EXPERIENCES AND INTERACTIONS PRIOR TO HOME VISITING

6.4.1 Writing

Writing materials had not been freely available to Jamie. However, she'd had some chalk and a chalk board before home visits began (visit 1). Jamie was said to sometimes draw pictures.

6.4.2 Interest In Book Print

Dianne and Trevor described Jamie as having little interest in books prior to

the home visiting program. Dianne said she had "none.. not really", and told me how she had left a few books for Jamie "on the mantle piece all the time so she [could] look at them, but she didn't really look at them much". As a result of what Dianne perceived to be no interest in books, she had not shared stories with Jamie prior to the home visiting program.

6.4.3 Print Around The House

Trevor and Dianne read the local free paper every week. It was delivered the morning of my visit (eg. visits 3 & 8), and we discussed topics of interests during the home visits.

There were no magazines or newspapers in the house. Dianne couldn't afford them and her friends didn't have any either (visit 3). There were no adult books, either owned or borrowed, not even a cook book (visit 2). There was a calendar on the kitchen wall with important dates noted and circled. This enabled them to keep track of court dates, doctors' visits and meetings with the Housing Trust etc. (visit 8). Advertising material was also browsed through and read (visit 9). The Dobbs family didn't have a letter box at their home as it had been destroyed by some local people, and therefore they used a post box number (visit 2).

6.4.4 Discussion

This was not a household steeped in literacy traditions and activities. Dianne and Trevor had both struggled at school with reading and writing. Literacy was, however, required for the mass of official information and forms that had to be dealt with. Conducting their life with low levels of literacy was a difficult challenge for the Dobbs.

Literacy activities as a form of leisure were extremely limited. Books were out of the question. Even magazines were an enormous challenge, on the few occasions they had access to them.

Jamie would not have been exposed to many demonstrations of literacy in this household. Although a few children's books were available, she had not shown any overt interest in them.

Dianne and Trevor both wanted Jamie to have a stronger literacy foundation, and hoped the *First Start* program might help. Dianne expressed awareness of the need to provide support for her daughter. She was acutely aware of her personal literacy limitations and hoped other people would also be available when Jamie needed assistance.

6.5 HOW JAMIE CHANGED

Jamie developed an unmistakable love of books and sharing literacy activities during the home visits. Furthermore, the relationship that developed between Jamie and Dianne as they shared literacy activities was a satisfying experience for me. There had previously been difficulties in the way mother and daughter related to one another. The home visits seemed to give them some positive ways of interacting with each other.

6.5.1 Jamie's Developing Interest In Books And Reading

On the first visit, I sat on the floor next to Jamie and showed her the container of books I had brought with me. She was interested and grabbed a couple to look at. She held them upside down and turned pages from the back. She was restless and found it difficult to stay still long enough for me to read a complete story. We almost finished *The Hungry Caterpillar* and *Patrick And The Hungry Puppy*. Even at this early stage, Jamie was attracted to books, although she wasn't able to remain involved for a whole story.

It didn't take long for Jamie to enjoy sharing books with others as well as independently. The Spot stories (visit 2) really caught her attention. She was

fascinated with lifting the flaps and seeing/hearing the comments of the animals underneath, and she remained interested to the end of the stories. Dianne found that Jamie enjoyed sharing stories with her as well. She read all the books with Jamie during the access visits following my third visit, and she commented that Jamie had enjoyed *The Fantastic Funny Finger Book* the most. Indeed, Dianne and Trevor commented to me (visit 7), that they never thought that Jamie would like books so much. Like all children, Jamie had her favourite stories, and requested repeated readings of particular books. Dianne explained to me that *Jump Frog, Jump* was a favourite following the seventh visit. Trevor, Dianne and the FACS volunteer were all tired of it by the time I arrived for the subsequent visit. The *Spot* series of stories and other lift-the-flap books, books about babies and a series of board books featuring a teddy were other favourites that Jamie returned to again and again.

Reading With Her Mother

Dianne began reading regularly with Jamie after the first home visit. Even though their time together was limited to six hours per week, reading became an important shared activity. Dianne usually read all borrowed books with Jamie during the other access visits (eg. visit 4).

Dianne explained that she read whenever her daughter wanted her to (interview 28-10-92). She reported that Jamie brought "heaps of books " to her for sharing. That Jamie said, "Mummy read", and I [said] "Yeah okay, no worries. Sit down and I'll read it to you" (interview, 28-10-92).

Dianne not only read to Jamie when her daughter wanted to share a story, she also initiated sharing events. During the seventh visit, Dianne called her daughter over to share books she thought Jamie would enjoy. She sat on her mother's very pregnant lap. Dianne read her the simple text and Jamie joined in happily and spontaneously with the animal sounds. Sometimes all Dianne had to do was open a book, she didn't have to say a word. Jamie would see

the open book, understand it was an invitation, and go to her mother for the story. That same visit, Dianne picked up a musical version of *Old McDonald Had A Farm*. Jamie went straight over to her to look at it with her. Dianne was singing the song and Jamie observed closely as the pages were turned (visit 7).

Reading With Others

Trevor also read with Jamie when she wanted him to. He and Dianne calculated this would happen on about half the visits. I observed Jamie take books over to share with Trevor on a number of occasions (eg. visits 7 & 8). However, he said that she sometimes didn't want him to touch her books (interview 28-10-92).

The Family And Community Services volunteer also read happily with Jamie during access visits. It is likely that Jamie's foster parents read with her as well, although I have no evidence for this. I considered contacting the foster family for information about Jamie's developing literacy, but reluctantly rejected the idea. The Dobbs were unhappy about Jamie living with someone else. They had even heard reports from friends that Jamie called the foster mother, "mummy". Furthermore, the foster mother had signalled her intention to apply to have Jamie on a more permanent basis. I was loathe to cause further distress to the Dobbs by interviewing the other family. Trevor and Dianne would have regarded it as going behind their backs. I was also concerned about being caught up in the middle of the custody case.

Reading With Me

Jamie demonstrated an interest in books from the first visit, but was initially restless in a sharing situation. However, it didn't take long for her to appreciate the fun of sharing books and the joy of snuggling up together. She was far less restless during the second visit while we shared some Spot

stories. Jamie's body language (visit 3), showed me she wished to initiate a sharing time. She stood there looking at me, so I invited her to sit on my lap at the kitchen table, and we shared lots of stories. Some were ones I had left the previous visit, and some were new to her. The *Spot* series of books were already firm favourites. Jamie joined in with the reading, and said some of the comments under the flaps.

Jamie learned to participate actively in the reading. She joined in with the repetitive question, "Do you know who sank the boat?", as I read *Who Sank The Boat* to her (visit 4). She also sang Hickory Dickory Dock from a lift-the-flap nursery rhyme book. She would point at the pages and make comments as we shared the text. Often I was not able to understand what she actually said and neither could her mother (eg, visit 9), but the significance lay in her attempt to converse about the story, something that did not feature in the earlier visits.

Over the time of the program, she became a full partner in exploring texts of stories, rhymes, songs and fingerplays. Jamie herself chose books for us to share (visit 6). She certainly enjoyed herself during sharing events. She made the animal sounds, smiled and laughed, and she requested "more books" (eg. visit 7).

Reading-Like Behaviour

Jamie was young and had delayed speech development so I was not surprised that Jamie did not demonstrate extensive and complex reading behaviour during the home visits. She did, however, show the beginnings of this. Jamie liked to repeat some of the words during shared reading times, especially the animal sounds and the repetitive parts of texts. For example, a simple board book called *Look And Listen* had a text which followed a clear pattern eg "Look at the cows. Moo, moo, moo" (visit 6). This book and others like it were simple enough for her to remember and this encouraged her to verbalise the words.

A series of board books about a teddy were also used in a similar way. In *Poor Teddy*, a story about a little bear who kept on hurting himself, there was a repeated refrain of "Poor Teddy" on every second page which Jamie learned quickly and would say when either sharing the book with others or when reading it by herself (visit 7). *Our Baby* (visit 8), another example of a book with only two or three words on each page, was simple enough for Jamie to join in with the reading and then 'read' by herself. Jamie would want to hear a book a number of times so she could remember the words well enough to repeat them herself.

Independent Reading

Dianne, Trevor and I all noted many examples of Jamie involved in independent reading. I observed it on the first home visit as well as on most other visits, and the parents reported independent reading on other access visits as well. When I asked Dianne what Jamie did with books on the other access visits, she commented, "She just [sat] down and [read] them". I inquired if she looked at them on her own, she replied that sometimes she did. Jamie "[looked] at the pictures.. [pointed] out the pictures to me, and I [said] yeah, like a cat or a kookaburra and all that and I [did] the little sounds to it.. then she [tried] to copy". I observed that Jamie's independent reading was often either a prelude to sharing a book with myself or others, or an individual exploration after a sharing time.

Borrowing And Choosing Books

Initially, Jamie was content to have any books chosen for her. As the visits went on, however, she developed her personal preferences and wished to make choices of her own as well. Jamie also learned to search for a particular book she wanted to return to, eg about babies in visit nine.

6.5.2 Writing Behaviour

I modelled writing behaviour for Jamie during home visits and tried to connect it to other activities we shared. For example (visit 3), as I knew Jamie was very interested in her puppy, Jamie and I had again read a Spot story together and then I had taught her the song *How Much Is That Doggie In The Window?* While Jamie was watching, I wrote out the words for Dianne and Trevor so they could follow it up on another access visit. Later that visit, I encouraged Jamie to tell me some things about her all black puppy, who was also called Spot, and wrote her comments into a stapled together book.

On another occasion (visit 4), Jamie and I sat facing each other with our feet together on the floor, held hands and played and sang *Row, Row Your Boat* while rocking back and forth. We then shared a story called *Who Sank The Boat?*, and Jamie joined in with the repeated question "Do you know who sank the boat?". Book sharing led onto a joint construction of a boat from a milk carton and other materials. Later, I gave her the large cardboard box I had brought for her and suggested she could pretend it was a boat. She hopped in straight away and then brought some stuffed toys along for the boat ride. While she was watching, I wrote HMAS Jamie on the side of the box boat and told her it was named after her.

In visit seven, I ascertained that Dianne had bought Jamie a new book about cats. I explained to Jamie that she needed to have her name in her book so she wouldn't lose it (visit 7). I said her full name aloud while I wrote it inside the front cover where it stated "This book belongs to ...." and I pointed to the writing and read it out to her. I also wrote notes/messages for Jamie, for example, when the family were absent on the eleventh visit. The letter said I was sorry that I missed her and her family and that I would see her soon. Jamie's third birthday was another opportunity to make her aware of the importance of writing. I sent her a musical birthday card as I was not able to see her because of the custody case. Dianne told me that she was thrilled at

receiving her own letter and insisted upon opening it herself.

The recording of books chosen for borrowing and the marking of titles returned were routine parts of every home visit which led to Jamie doing her first functional writing-like behaviour. I asked Jamie to help me mark off the books borrowed the previous visit (visit 9). I showed her how to make a mark with a biro inside the small red square next to the book title, which she then did happily. Trevor expressed concern about Jamie drawing on my book so I explained to him that it was fine, that I wanted her to do it. He then commented, "I guess she's learning". Jamie soon understood the relevance of the writing she was doing and it was part of her job from that visit on.

The birth of her baby sister was a further opportunity to involve Jamie in writing behaviour (visit 13). We made a welcome card for her baby sister. We talked about what babies went for walks in, that is prams and pushers. I showed her how she could make a picture of a pram with some coloured shapes that I had already cut out - a rectangle, two small circles and a larger half circle. Jamie put the pieces together to make the design and then spent a long time choosing and rearranging the colours she would use. As she was deciding, we named the colours and the shapes in our conversation. We eventually glued the pram design onto the front of the yellow card and I suggested we write a message to Jessica inside the card. It said, "Welcome to my new baby sister, Jessica. Love from ....", and I encouraged her to write her name. Jamie quickly caught onto this idea and wrote some discrete writing-like shapes across the page. They looked like triangle and circle shapes and were written from left to right. We then went on making further decorations such as paper flowers, a picture of a baby from a magazine to stick in the pram, a picture of a teddy bear to keep the baby company and some kitten and puppy pictures from some wrapping paper. This card became very important to Jamie and she wanted to hold it for the rest of the visit and then take it away with her

when she left. I was told later it did come back home and was put in the baby's bedroom on display.

During an interview (28-10-92), Dianne and Trevor told me that Jamie was doing writing. She described the writing as "squiggly lines and circles... a square", and said that Jamie was aware of the difference between drawing and writing. She explained that when Jamie drew, "she just quickly [did] it" but when she wrote, "she [took] her time in doing it". This was an exciting development, as Jamie was exploring print from another perspective.

6.6 HOW THE FAMILY HELPED

Jamie's parents were eager to become involved with Jamie's emergent literacy. Dianne read with her daughter regularly. Trevor also read with Jamie on many access visits. They also helped Jamie learn the correct way to hold a book, not upside down as she often did in the beginning of the program, and to start from the front, not the back (interview 28-10-92). Both Dianne and Trevor both contributed information about their daughter's favourite books and her responses to the various literacy activities. They also asked me questions about whether they should try to teach Jamie her A,B,C's (visit 1), what other sorts of things children could do with playdough (visit 2), and what sort of writing implements they should buy for her (visit 8). Dianne and Trevor were aware of Jamie's interest in writing and responded by showing her how to write her name (interview, 28-10-92).

Dianne was serious about following up on the activities Jamie and I did during home visits. She always watched carefully while Jamie and I interacted. For example, during the sixth visit, Jamie sat on my lap and I showed her the fingerplay *Round And Round The Garden*. Jamie giggled with delight as I tickled her gently. As I was aware Dianne was interested in continuing activities with Jamie at other times, I wrote out this fingerplay and another one we had played *Clap, Clap Hands* and showed them to Dianne and Trevor. I

read them out aloud and they read along quietly for practice. We also read together the play dough recipe I left for Dianne to use another time (visit 2), and the words for the song *How Much Is That Doggie In The Window?* (visit 3).

Dianne and Trevor also joined in with activities during the home visits. They played and talked with Jamie after we had made a batch of cooked playdough (visit 2). Then when Jamie found a plastic container with a *Goldilocks and The Three Bears* book and figures, Trevor helped her to set them out (visit 7). I chatted to Jamie about literacy props, the three different sized chairs, bowls and beds, then told the story. Both Trevor and Dianne then helped Jamie and I to act out the story. Jamie joined in the story telling, saying "mummy bear", "daddy bear" and "baby bear". Dianne also played with puppets with Jamie (eg visit 10).

Dianne also drew connections for Jamie between real life and the text of books. The books about new babies I had brought for Jamie were very useful. I showed one called *The New Baby* to both Dianne and Trevor (visit 6) and explained it was one I had bought for my daughter Elise when I was pregnant with my son Adam. Dianne called out to Jamie who was playing with some toys and Jamie came and sat on Dianne's lap. Dianne shared the book with her daughter and told her the lady was going to have a baby. Dianne asked her where the baby was, and Jamie pointed to the picture of the lady's stomach and then to Dianne's stomach and said, "baby, baby".

The Dobbs were especially considerate about maintaining my relationship with Jamie during the seven weeks we were delayed by the court case. They were always pleased to chat on the phone with me. I heard Trevor call out to Dianne, "Tell Julie we want her to come back" (telephone call, 5-8-92). Another time Dianne asked me how my family and I were, and then told me, "Jamie is missing you" (telephone call, 21-8-92). They were both keen for the

visits to start again and commented that Jamie would like it as well (telephone call, 24-8-92). And when I finally returned for a home visit after the lengthy separation, it was as if I had never been away. Jamie greeted me with a smile and sat on lap as she had always done. She chose books for me to read with her, and she participated immediately in the rendition of the texts, saying the words and animal sounds. When I exclaimed how surprised I was with Jamie's response to me, Dianne answered, "We've been talking about you" (visit 6).

6.7 RESPONSES TO HOME VISITS

The home visiting program was an effective and enjoyable stimulus for the Dobbs family. Trevor and Dianne were both surprised and pleased with Jamie's growing interest and participation in literacy activities. Dianne stated that Jamie loved the program, that "She loved every single bit of it". Dianne noted a difference in her daughter's interest in books (28-10-92). She commented that Jamie came from a position where "she wasn't right into it before". After the program, Dianne noted that "she [loved] reading her books now. She [got] her book and sometimes she [gave] it to me and [sat] on my lap and ..read. A change really".

Dianne and Trevor stated, "She learned a lot of things". They also had the impression that her rate of learning had increased. They remarked, "She's learning a lot more than before" (interview, 28-10-92). They believed she had learned to enjoy books and that the involvement with books, rhymes, fingerplays etc. had stimulated her speech. Trevor declared, "she says words all the time". The puppets also were said to be useful as they encouraged her "to talk a bit more, a bit better".

They also noted that Jamie was more aware of print around her and that she noticed the writing in her bedroom, for example the letter design on her quilt and the numbers on Sesame Street. Furthermore, that she tried to write

herself.

Once they realised the enjoyment Jamie received from reading and drawing, they bought her books they thought she would specifically enjoy, for example a book with lots of cats in it (visit 7). Dianne and Trevor also bought her colouring in and puzzle books (visit 3). Family friends were also aware of Jamie's heightened interest in books. Two new books had been bought by friends as birthday presents (visit 9).

Dianne gained confidence in interacting with her daughter and literacy. Both Dianne and Trevor commented that they also had learned a good deal from the home visiting program. When I asked them why they thought Jamie had developed to such an extent, they responded that it was, "Help from you.. you teaching us how to do things with Jamie and that". When I commented that I had not taught them specifically, they replied, "But we've looked on and that .. we watched".

Dianne also shared books with visiting children (visit 7). One morning, Jenny, a little girl from the same street had come to play. When she came out of Jamie's bedroom, Dianne called her over to show her a book. She talked about it to her and asked her questions as they went through the pages together. I was delighted that Dianne was confident enough to convey an enjoyment of books to other children as well as her own daughter.

Dianne and Trevor were reluctant for the visits to end. During visit thirteen, I reminded them the program was due to finish soon. They expressed the wish that I would still come "lots and lots" because they "[learned] from me" and "[needed] me". Dianne also thanked me for what I'd done during the home visits.

6.8 DISCUSSION

Despite a difficult start to home visits, a break of seven weeks while custody and access were supposed to be reorganised, and occasions when Dianne and Trevor were extremely depressed with the circumstances of their lives, I believed this family gained enormously from the program. They also felt the same way.

The Dobbs, although perhaps initially wary of me, came to see me as a trusted friend. They saw Jamie respond and develop an enjoyment of and appreciation for sharing and participating in texts. Dianne, especially, learned ways of interacting with Jamie that would foster her literacy development.

6.8.1 Factors That Helped Make A Difference

A number of interrelated factors helped to make a difference for Jamie.

The Stimulus Of The Home Visitor

The home visitor was a powerful influence on Jamie and her family. Jamie benefitted greatly from my attention and our interaction during the home visits. She learned that books and other literacy activities could be explored independently and shared with others. Her speech was extended through the increased interaction she enjoyed with her family and myself.

Dianne and Trevor also acknowledged benefits coming from my presence in their home. Although they were at first wary and frightened of being judged as unworthy parents, they soon trusted me and opened their home to me. They spoke of watching Jamie and me play together and learning about things to do and ways of interacting with her. This was particularly satisfying for me as a home visitor and researcher for it supported my belief that it is not necessary to run a direct parent education program. Rather, it is possible to encourage child-parent interaction through an indirect method where the enthusiasm demonstrated by the child, supported by modelling by the home visitor, draws parents into positive involvement in literacy learning.

Interesting Literacy Materials

The range of literacy materials was another important factor in setting Jamie on the path to literacy learning. Musical books, lift-the-flap books, books about things of interest to a young child, eg the books about a teddy and books about families with a new baby, stories with puppets to accompany them, writing materials, songs, fingerplays and action rhymes all encouraged Jamie to interact and engage in literacy activities with me and the adults in her family home.

Jamie's Enjoyment Of, And Enthusiasm For, Literacy Activities

Jamie's obvious delight in exploring literacy activities and materials encouraged Dianne and Trevor to join in the fun. This set up a very positive and significant cycle of interaction in the family.

Dianne's Determination To Support Jamie

Dianne was always determined to support Jamie's learning, although she had very little idea of how to go about it. The modelling in the home visits gave her the confidence to try to share literacy experiences, read, write, play and talk more with her daughter. Trevor was committed to supporting Jamie as well.

6.8.2 Constraints

There were, however, a couple of limiting factors operating in this family situation. On a number of home visits and during keep in touch telephone conversations, there was a palpable sense of unhappiness and depression in the atmosphere. Trevor was depressed and restless about not having a job and not having enough money to pay the bills. They were also nervous about having to ask the Housing Trust for rent reduction. Trevor's gloomy mood affected everyone in the house and Dianne asked him to do something about it as it was upsetting Jamie (visit 3).

Dianne and Trevor were upset at having their parenting continually judged by social workers and others. They were fearful of having their access visits severely reduced or losing Jamie altogether, and they feared the trauma of meeting with lawyers, parole officers and attending court. On one occasion (visit 4), when Jamie was unwell, she stumbled and banged her face on the edge of the kitchen table and a bump and a black eye came up. Dianne and Trevor were very worried that they would be blamed for the accident and that it would count against them. Another time (visit 13), Dianne and Trevor were anxious about being set up by their social worker. They were fully aware that they were not allowed to be with Jamie unless there was a Family and Community Services volunteer present. He however, had to deliver another child somewhere else which meant they would be alone with Jamie for a short time until I arrived.

At times Dianne was so miserable that she cried (visit 5, 8). She was convinced that she would lose Jamie (visit 5) and told me there was no point in leaving any books behind as Jamie wouldn't be there next week. On days like this, I cut the visit a little short as I felt there was little I could do to help, they had too much else on their minds. The birth of the new baby also disturbed the functioning of this home, just as it does many other homes. Unfortunately, the baby was born with a club foot, wore an uncomfortable plaster cast and required an operation on her foot. She was neither feeding or sleeping well and this made Dianne and Trevor tired, upset and worried. They had to spend time at a mothercare house where they could get some additional help. All this meant they had less time to spend with Jamie and were less able to interact positively with her. The disturbed atmosphere also unsettled Jamie, who was unusually restless during the tenth visit.

Trevor's lack of understanding of young children probably also limited Jamie's learning to some extent. While both Dianne and Trevor wanted Jamie to come

back home and were eager to interact with Jamie, Trevor had very little idea of what could reasonably be expected of a two/three year old child. He didn't know when Jamie had enough stimulation and when to stop playing with her. Jamie was said to return to her foster mother overtired, upset and cranky after the other two access visits each week (phone calls 2-7-92 and 21-8-92). This was considered a major hindrance by the social worker to the continuance of the three access visits per week.

I am pleased that I was able to visit the Dobbs family. Jamie was a delightful child to share with and I savoured her enjoyment of the literacy activities that we shared. I was also pleased to be of help to Dianne and Trevor and support their efforts at literacy interaction with their daughter, Jamie. Working with the Dobbs family was a most satisfying experience.

CHAPTER SEVEN : THE "BENTON" FAMILY

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we encounter "Kylie" and her family. Kylie developed a strong interest in books during the program. The home visits revealed a child who mostly chose to interact with books independently. She came to spend a long time each day in her room exploring books by herself. Gradually, however, Kylie started to discover the pleasure in sharing books. The time spent sharing with her family encouraged and then gave her a foundation for further individual exploration.

7.2 BACKGROUND AND FAMILY INFORMATION

I first met with Kylie Benton, her mother and older brother on the twenty fourth of June, 1992. The mother, "Linda Benton", learned about the home visiting program through a talk by the Project Officer at the kindergarten attended by her daughter, and she was eager for Kylie to have home visits.

7.2.1 Members Of The Household

Kylie, the focus child, lived with her family in a Housing Trust home in Elizabeth. She was four years and three months old at the time visits began, and attended four morning kindergarten sessions a week. She also had delayed language development and Kylie was not even able to say her own name at the beginning of home visits. The most she could articulate was "lee". "Yep" or "no" was her usual response to everything said to her (visit 1). She was definitely the baby of the family. Other family members even addressed her as "Bubby" rather than by her name (visit 2). This was confirmed by Kylie's kindergarten teacher during a phone call (30-8-92). I organised speech therapy for her through the Children's Services Office.

Kylie's mother, Linda, had some health problems. During the period of home visits, she was taken by ambulance to hospital and stayed a couple of days. Another time she was admitted to hospital for an operation. Linda found life difficult to cope with. She was often depressed, withdrew to the soap operas on the television, and wouldn't be interrupted by anyone until her favourite programs were finished. Then she came out and discussed personal and family problems with me. Linda looked forward to talking to me each week, but I refrained from commenting on many concerns as they were often of a intimate nature between her husband and herself. She also admitted to a drinking problem. This had also been mentioned to me by Kylie's kindergarten teacher (visit to kindergarten, 5-8-92).

Linda was particular about maintaining a spotless house and yard. The children were also very tidy. Rooms were sparsely furnished and everything was in its place. It seemed that being a dedicated housekeeper was one way Linda could maintain control of her life.

Kylie's father, "Michael", was unemployed, and he searched for days of work. I saw little of him during the home visits, but Linda made a point of relaying his comments to me. There was a loving and affectionate relationship between Michael and his daughter.

Kylie had an older brother, "Jason". He was a tall, solidly built boy, who turned eleven years old during the visits. His behaviour at school and at home caused problems for the entire family. He had already been suspended from previous primary schools and was attending yet another school. Apparently his behaviour was such that he was allowed to be at school only three days a week until recess time, and only when his father went with him. This was subsequently extended to five days a week until recess time. Michael was "pissed off" with this arrangement, Linda told me, as it had become local knowledge why he was there (visit 1). Jason swore, refused to do work, and

was violent. This didn't make him popular with the school. Later in the home visiting program, Jason was again suspended for striking a Deputy Principal and messing up his office.

He was often in trouble with the police for shop stealing, and his mother was embarrassed by police knocking on her front door in front of the neighbours. Once he was discovered stealing a book (visit 7). His parents repeatedly warned him about where his behaviour would lead. They explained to him the dangers of prison for a young man. Michael, his father, spoke from personal experience, yet Jason ignored any advice offered. Eventually, he went to live in a cottage home situation and came home for visits.

Jason was usually at home during my visits. This meant I had to attempt to deal with his behaviour, as well as work with his young sister. It wasn't easy. Linda was too bowed down with problems to deal with him, and usually ignored his difficult conduct (eg. visit 6, visit 7). When she attempted to intervene (for example, visit 1), he got very angry with her and called her a "bitch".

Initially, he felt very left out, so I tried to make him feel included. I bought a four colour biro for him so he also had something new to write with (visit 2). I read books to him and with him, and I brought books for him to borrow. I helped him with home work and tried to make him feel an important helper for Kylie. Frequently, however, he wouldn't take a turn and allow Kylie to share some quiet time with me. Kylie and I withdrew from the kitchen to her bedroom for sharing time, but Jason was usually noisy and disruptive. He would swear and scream out and bang on his sister's bedroom door. This sort of behaviour unsettled her and spoiled some visits. Yet Jason also had a nice side to him. He appreciated what I did for him, and often thanked me. He made a point of helping me carry my things to and from the car. On one

occasion he picked some camellias from the front garden for me to take home, and another time he offered to wash my car for me.

On the first home visit, Linda greeted me in a friendly manner at the front door. It was a cold day and she led the way into the lounge room where the heater was on. The television was on, and remained on throughout the visit. It was a dark room with blinds partially closed. Linda sat in an armchair, and as there was no other chair close enough for me, I sat on the edge of the literacy container which I placed next to her chair. We discussed the program. As I knew Linda had difficulty with reading, I read aloud and completed the enrolment form for her. Linda was eager for her daughter to have the visits and thought it might help Kylie's speech development.

7.2.2 Kylie's Interests, Health And Behaviour

Linda said that Kylie was interested in animals, loved playing on swings and slippery dips, and with friends. She also liked riding her bike around. Kylie enjoyed watching television. She liked "Sesame Street", animal shows, cartoons and her mother's afternoon soap operas. Linda commented strongly that she herself did not like "Play School" and neither did Kylie. Kylie's health was fine, according to her mother, apart from the usual run of colds and other viruses.

Kylie was an unusual little girl. She was affectionate towards me, and spontaneously gave me hugs and kisses during visits. She raced out to meet me at the car when I arrived, and also presented me with paintings she had done at kindergarten. Yet she often chose not to participate actively during home visits. Many times, Kylie was content to watch Jason and me saying and doing the action games and rhymes. She found it amusing. On other occasions, however, she let herself go and thoroughly enjoyed herself.

7.3 PARENT'S UNDERSTANDINGS OF SCHOOL AND LITERACY

Both parents had negative experiences of school, firstly with their own education and then with their son, Jason's, education. The following information, unless otherwise indicated, is from an interview on the 12th of August, 1992.

7.3.1 Linda's Experiences Of School

Linda declared, "I hated school. I hated it in the special class too". When I asked her why she felt this way, she explained that it was "probably the teachers and the school work. It was hard work". Linda remembered she had "not many friends really". She had not, however, always disliked school so strongly. She told me that she "liked it to year four or five", but that after that "the work got too hard". Linda went to Year Nine but didn't complete it. She then left school happily and found a job. She described it as a "good job" which she had for nearly two years, but then "gave it in".

7.3.2 Linda's Experience Of Reading

When I asked Linda to describe her reading ability, she bluntly informed me she was "no good at it". She could not give me any information about how she was taught or how she learned to read or write. She stated, "I can't remember that far back". Neither could she remember whether her parents helped her with reading or writing. She answered, "suppose so... I'm trying to go forwards not backwards". She recalled having serious problems from about grade five, which corresponded with the time she was put in a special class. The move did little to help her with her reading and writing, and dented her confidence in herself.

Linda said she liked to read "Sometimes, when I feel like doing it". That when she had a bit of time, she didn't mind reading. But she added she "[couldn't]

do much while the kids [were] around". Linda liked to read at "Night time in bed. In a warm bed with the electric blanket on", or "sometimes during the day if the kids [weren't] around".

She explained to me she didn't read novels as they were too hard for her, that she "just [liked] to read Woman's Day books". She was pleased to have magazines I had finished with. Although they didn't get a daily newspaper, she read the local free Messenger every week and "Saturday's or Sunday's paper now and then".

7.3.3 Linda's Experience Of Writing

Linda felt her writing was "not bad" although she had trouble with spelling. She said she had to do "a fair bit of writing", and that it was her responsibility to "work out the bills". Linda stated she and Michael didn't "like writing forms", that they had problems with them. She told me, "We need help to fill them in. We can read them, but don't understand them". I asked her how they managed, and she replied that they asked Michael's sister, friends or her parents for assistance.

Linda said she liked writing letters and doing "word search puzzles" in the weekly magazines. She told me that she never bought magazines but looked through old copies for the word puzzles whenever she could get them.

7.3.4 Kylie's Father's Experiences Of School And Literacy

The father, Michael, also hated school and "got out of it when he was in grade seven". He regularly misbehaved, got into trouble, and was pleased to leave school at an early age. Linda informed me that Michael's reading and writing ability was low. She said, "If he did a sentence, I and you would not be able to read it, but he could". She also said he couldn't spell words "properly".

7.3.5 Kylie's Brother's Experiences Of School And Literacy

As stated previously, Jason had enormous difficulties behaving in an acceptable manner at school, and he missed many hours of school time. He exclaimed that he hated school, and had once knocked out a teacher's teeth. This event was not denied by his mother (visit 5).

Linda and Michael had trouble ensuring he completed the work that was sent home with him. She felt that a teacher should come to him at home and help him with it. She told me that Jason enjoys "crossword puzzles, not school work stuff". She believed he could read and write fairly well, that he "[could] do it if he [wanted] to". Linda credited one particular teacher for teaching Jason how to read. Yet earlier the same afternoon, Linda had told me he couldn't read very well, but enjoyed looking at the pictures in the books I left for him. Despite the obvious interest Jason demonstrated week after week for the books I brought, his reading and writing performance seemed to be well below what might be expected for a boy his age.

7.3.6 Linda's Beliefs About Kylie's Future

Linda was hopeful for her daughter's future, that it would "a good one- better than Jason's". She remarked that although it was hard to say how Kylie would progress until she got to school, she believed she "[would] do pretty well". Linda wanted her children "to go to school, do all their education, go out and get a job, settle down later on". Even though she had no idea what sort of future she expected for her daughter, Linda stated, "it [would] be up to her, when she's older".

7.3.7 How Linda Envisaged Her Role In Kylie's Literacy

Linda's thoughts about her role as a parent and the role of teachers and the school were closely connected in her mind. She had commented earlier that she thought Kylie would learn to read and write with her help, through showing

her how to write different things and do pictures. She thought that Michael and the kindergarten would help as well. But she said she "[didn't] know about school" - how it would help Kylie learn to read and write. Linda had little faith in the education system. She believed it had already failed Michael, Jason and her.

I asked her how she saw her role in Kylie's literacy development. Her lack of confidence in school and teachers surfaced at this point. Linda responded, "Some parents say, Why should I have to do this?.. speech therapy, reading. Schools should help, not parents doing everything". When I asked her how she felt, she said, "about the same". She told me that "When [she went] down to the school, sometimes it [looked] like some of the teachers [hadn't] had the time to help". Linda sounded cross and irritated when she made that statement, so I probed a little deeper. I asked her why she thought the teachers hadn't had the time to help, and she replied, "Sometimes they [couldn't] get the time.. sometimes they could, but [didn't] make the time".

Linda saw it as her responsibility to be a helper for Kylie when she went to school. But it was the role of the school and the teachers to teach her daughter how to read and write. She said forcefully, "If they can't do their job, they shouldn't be there". She was clear in her thoughts about teachers and schools being accountable for the education of her children. She also believed teachers did not always do as much as they should, or could, to teach children properly.

7.4 KYLIE'S LITERACY EXPERIENCES PRIOR TO HOME VISITING

7.4.1 Writing

Kylie had restricted access to writing materials before home visiting began and therefore limited opportunities for writing and drawing. This was apparent on the first visit. After sharing *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* and other stories with

her, I drew a caterpillar for her to colour in. It seemed that she had very little idea of how to do this and just drew a curved line around it. Kylie had never owned a set of pencils, crayons, chalk or especially textas before. Linda Benton worried that she would draw or scribble in the wrong places. Her brother, Jason, owned a handful of pencils and textas and a rubber. These were kept in an icecream container in his room, and she was not to touch (visit 1). Kylie was delighted when I gave her own box of crayons, pencils, textas etc. and labelled the items with her name. Linda removed the textas, glue and the crayons from the box and put them up out of Kylie's reach.

There were few opportunities for Kylie to observe or participate in writing events within the family home. Linda told me that she and Michael waited either until the children were out of the house, or for night time when they were all in their respective beds, before they did any writing or reading.

7.4.2 Interest In Book Print

According to Linda, Kylie had shown some interest in books before home visits began (interview, 7-10-92). However, I was not sure how Kylie demonstrated this interest to her mother. Her kindergarten did not allow children to borrow books to take home, and she had none of her own. Later (visit 4), I noted two 'Little Golden Books' and a book for a story tape on her dressing table, but they had been organised for her since the previous visit.

Kylie's kindergarten teacher explained to me that although Kylie did sit down with the other children at story time, her attention wandered and it was necessary to draw her back (visit to kindergarten, 5-8-92). The kindergarten staff had not noticed Kylie showing an interest in their library area, or demonstrating independent reading or reading-like behaviour.

7.4.3 Print Around The House

There was a home made sign on Kylie's bedroom door which stated, "Kylie's Room" (visit 2). I picked Kylie up, carried her to the sign, pointed to the words and asked her what it said. She smiled happily at me, but didn't say anything (visit 11). It is possible that she could recognise some environmental print, although her mother couldn't recall any examples.

The only books in the house were ones Jason borrowed books from the school library and sometimes from a local council library (visit 3). These were kept neatly on a cupboard in his bedroom. Linda and Michael didn't have any books of their own, not even a cook book. Linda explained she couldn't understand the instructions in the recipes. Later in the visits, Linda got help with cooking from a woman from Anglican Family Services. She thoroughly enjoyed these cooking sessions.

There was the local paper and the occasional weekend paper in the house. Once there were some magazines, however this confused me as Linda had previously told me she never bought them. Jason went on an errand for his mother (visit five). He came back with a plastic bag and told Linda he'd got her books. Inside were magazines and a pack of cards. Jason said he had found the cards in the same bin as the magazines. Perhaps they were out of date; I didn't like to ask. Other than those magazines or the magazines I brought for her, I never saw any print materials lying around. I presumed Linda and Michael had read them and then packed them away when they had finished with them.

7.4.4 Discussion

Before the home visits Kylie had not had ready access to printed material or writing materials in the family home. Linda Benton was concerned with keeping a clean and tidy house. This involved keeping Kylie out of possible mischief with writing materials. As a result, Kylie had restricted opportunities

to engage in literacy activities.

There were also limited opportunities for her to observe her parents engaging in day to day literacy demonstrations, as these were done when she was not around. Her brother, Jason, was probably the strongest literacy model in the house for Kylie, although I'm not sure how positive this model was. He did not like school, or completing the work that had been sent home for him. He did, however, enjoy the library books he borrowed from his school and local library as well as the ones I brought for him each visit.

7.5 HOW KYLIE CHANGED

Kylie demonstrated a definite change in interest in literacy and literacy behaviours during the home visiting program.

7.5.1 Kylie's Developing Interest In Books And Reading

Kylie quickly developed an appreciation of books. She looked forward to my visits and the opportunity to look through and choose from a collection of books.

Linda felt the visits encouraged Kylie to be more interested in books and stories. At the seventh visit, Linda told me how much Kylie had enjoyed looking at her books that week. She noted that Kylie spent more time with books as the program went on.

She thought the books themselves were an important stimulus for Kylie's growing enjoyment, and that Kylie liked many of the books provided because they were at the right level for her. She explained, "... a lot of the books you've been giving her, little small easy type of ones and things like that she [knew]. She [saw] by the pictures and by the books, you know the words and all that, right." (interview, 7-10-92).

Linda also believed Kylie had learned a variety of literacy activities, for instance, acting out stories with finger puppets or telling a story with an interested partner. Kylie and Linda discovered it wasn't necessary to always read a story, it was also great fun to tell it (interview, 7-10-92). I told Kylie the story of *Red Riding Hood* at a previous visit and we had fun together. Linda then referred to the time when a friend of the family stayed with them. Linda explained how this visitor had done the same thing. She said, "she tried it, she did the same as what you did. She played around and she was joking with her and with that *Red Riding* book as well. And I'm sitting in the other chair pissing myself laughing".

Linda felt Kylie's increased interest in books had stimulated her speech. She said, "Well, she [picked] up a lot of the words through the books", because she heard then read first and then tried to read them herself.

Reading With Her Mother

For a number of weeks, Linda reported to me that she hadn't shared any books with her daughter. She explained that Kylie, preferred to look at them by herself in her room (visit 2). I asked Linda (visit 4), whether Kylie had ever asked her to read a story and she said she hadn't.

This pattern continued until the fifth visit, when a change occurred. When I again asked her if she had been able to read with Kylie that week, this time she replied, "Not much". She said she had not wanted to "force her", but added that she sat and read with Kylie when asked. Kylie's requests for her mother to read to her were an impetus for change. From this time on, Linda and Kylie shared some books together each week. In an interview (7-10-92), Linda related how the sharing time was initiated. She said, "She'll go grab the books, she'll bring the books to me. And if I want to read em, I'll read them to her, if I'm not I won't". Linda also initiated some shared reading events. She

commented that whenever she picked a book up, Kylie came and sat by her to listen to it.

Reading With Others

Both the father, Michael, and the brother, Jason, sometimes read with Kylie, something they had not done prior to the home visits. Michael told me (visit 4) he read with Kylie before teatime, "all the time", but Linda informed me that he only read to Kylie when he was "in the mood" (interview, 7-10-92).

Reading With Me

Kylie was often restless when sharing stories. It was difficult to capture and keep her attention. Furthermore, Jason resented any time Kylie and I had on our own and his disruptive behaviour was unsettling for her. On the first visit, she could not keep still for a story. We sat together at the kitchen table the next week and did a little better. When she decided she'd had enough, she mischievously closed the books. Kylie hopped onto my lap (visit 3), but again was not interested in sharing books. There was the same response later in the visit. She just wanted a cuddle and a quick look.

We had some uninterrupted, quiet time together on the fourth visit. We went into her room to keep away from Jason, and Kylie chose some books. She sat on my lap in the armchair and shared three books with me. She joined in, looked at the illustrations, pointed things out to me and vocalised about what she saw. She was fascinated by the stairs in the pictures and moved her finger up each stair. We counted them one, two, three, four, five. This was an incredible improvement. Kylie had maintained concentration and actively participated. Later, we shared a Miffy story which she really enjoyed. It was after this visit that Kylie first asked her mother to read to her.

Her willingness to participate occurred again (visit 6. She had been sick and

asleep in bed on visit 5 and we hadn't spent time together). I felt hopeful that she would sit with me for more stories. When we went to her room for a 'quiet' sharing time, Kylie went straight for the literacy container and found *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* book, puppet and papier mache food. She opened the book, stuck out her tongue, pointed to the picture of the icecream and said an appreciative "aahh". She also pointed to other pictures such as the lollipop and said "pop". We went through the other play foods with me trying to get her to say or repeat the words after me. Then we went through the story. First, I held the caterpillar puppet and she fed it the food, then I showed her how to hold the puppet and we both fed it food. I encouraged her to match the food with the story in order and say the story as we went. Later, Kylie again browsed through the container of books. I noticed her looking at *Mr. Gumpy's Ride* turning the pages from back to the front. When I asked her if she wanted me to read it to her, she shook her head and continued looking at it by herself.

Sometimes I just sat next to her while she was browsing. She seemed to appreciate this (eg. visit 7). It reminded me of the parallel play situation that toddlers engage in. She found a book, *My Puppy*, that appealed to her and she showed it to me. As it had a short text, I again tried to read to her. She moved around the bedroom again, not looking at the pages but nevertheless listening as I read.

Kylie declined my offers to read to her during the next two home visits. However, I was determined not to leave until I had actually shared stories with her (visit 8). This time I didn't ask her whether she wanted me to read to her, I leaned on the bed next to her and read four stories aloud. This caught her attention and then she followed the pages as I read. I was pleased with myself. Having spent time with Kylie, I realised the direct approach wasn't always the most productive one. Although she enjoyed browsing through books and reading them independently, she had also demonstrated enjoyment of book sharing. While "no" was her automatic response to just about

anything, it was worth persisting with an alternative method, and it worked well on other occasions as well (eg. visit 9).

Towards the end of the program (visit 11), Kylie really enjoyed sharing books with me. She watched more carefully, she verbalised words from the text, laughed, and pointed at the pictures. And this time when I asked if she wanted me to read a particular book again, she responded, "No, Yes", so we read it together again.

Independent Reading

Independent reading quickly became established as a regular and popular literacy activity for Kylie. This was noted by Linda in the week following the first home visit. She believed that Kylie preferred to read independently the books she knew well (7-10-92). By visit ten, Linda reported that Kylie spent time in her bedroom every day reading the books by herself. She explained in an interview (7-10-92), "Since she's been reading with you for a fair while, she's been terrific. She'll just go in, go to the books, sit in there. She'll read them by herself".

Linda told me (interview, 7-10-92) that Kylie sat in her room for an hour or more at a time looking at her books. She said, "She'll come out in, like in betweens, but most of the time she'll just go back, she'll sit there and she'll read them". I asked Linda if she had gone into Kylie's room for a closer view of what she was doing. She replied that when she disturbed her, Kylie stopped reading and went "stupid". She didn't follow her mother out of the room though, but continued reading. Linda explained she didn't like people watching her. She said, "She just [played] stupid when anyone else [walked] in there, when she [was] trying to do something by herself, you know. Especially if Jason [walked] in there, she [went] stupid".

Reading-Like Behaviour

Despite Kylie's delayed speech development, reading-like behaviour did evolve. Among other books, I tried to share *Who's Going For A Ride?* with her in visit three. She appeared to pay little attention to the reading. Yet later that visit, she went back to this book and attempted to read it aloud to herself. She had obviously liked it, even though this had not been apparent to me at the time. Kylie had absorbed enough of the story to reconstruct it approximately for herself.

The following home visit, Kylie appeared to model teacher behaviour during kindergarten story time. She sat across from me on the spare bed pretending to be the teacher while I was the audience. Kylie took *Jump Frog, Jump* from the container. She looked at each page, turned it around so I could see the pages, and then pointed and verbalised about them. I wished I had understood what she said! Nevertheless, her intention was clear and we both understood and enjoyed the performance.

Linda told me (visit 5) that Kylie was trying to read stories aloud while in her room. It surprised and amused her that Kylie was "trying to read them, talking away and turning the pages". Another time (visit 6), Kylie was engrossed in a book, and declined my offer to read it to her. She commented as she turned the pages, "Here ya, me" and "A bear" etc. She didn't know this story, but tried to make some sense of it for herself using the pictures as cues. Her mother reported that Kylie often tried to reconstruct a story that was familiar to her (interview, 7-10-92). She told me she often heard Kylie read, although she had to pretend she couldn't hear anything. Linda said "And you can hear her, she's reading it to herself. Like that one I [told] you about with the animal sounds.. Well she's trying to read the words, and then she'll come out with the.. 'toot toot', or the 'baa' or the 'sh'.. or whatever it is anyway..". Linda was delighted to share this information with me and added, "She's really [done] well".

Borrowing And Choosing Books

Kylie often returned to favourite books as if they were old friends, and wanted to borrow them again and again. This self organised practice was an important factor in the development of her oral language and her reading-like behaviour.

When browsing, Kylie recognised books from previous visits. She said "me", looked through them for a longer time, and then showed them to me. It seemed she wanted me to know she remembered them (visit 6). She also said "me" or "my" in a definite voice to identify a book she wanted to borrow (visits 6, 7).

As Kylie's confidence grew during the home visits, she was less willing to listen to other people's book suggestions. Jason gave some recommendations (visit 9). He had found an A, B, C book and said, "Here Kylie, this is a good book". He then turned it around so she could see it. She shook her head and wouldn't have it. After this incident, Kylie quickly put together a pile of about six books, hugged them to her chest and declared, "All me". It seemed that she was telling him she could choose her books perfectly well by herself.

7.5.2 Writing Behaviour

Linda worried about Kylie misusing writing implements, and remained concerned about such a possibility throughout the home visits. She wanted to exchange the textas for another set of coloured pencils (visit 3). When I explained to her that there were no spare sets of pencils, she reluctantly kept the textas. I suggested she allow Kylie to use the textas when she was sitting with her. Linda then took two textas out of the pack for Kylie to use. She chose an orange and a yellow one because "they [weren't] dark". Kylie relished the opportunity to use the textas.

When I brought her a small blackboard and chalk (visit 5), Linda expressed concern that Kylie might use it to draw on the walls. I asked her if she had ever drawn on walls before. She replied that she hadn't, but she worried about her copying Jason's bad behaviour. I had also brought an old napkin as a duster for the blackboard. Linda gave it back to me and told me a wet cloth would work better and "make less mess". She then took away the red and blue chalk sticks, and gave them to Jason, telling Kylie she could use the yellow chalk. Kylie protested with a howl at this, and Jason said he was going to get some white chalk. His mother then asked him where would he get it, and he replied "from school".

Kylie was delighted to receive a post-it note from me each visit. During the first home visit, I wrote her a note saying I would see her next week, and suggested she stick it on the refrigerator or her bedroom door. Linda worried that Kylie would lose it and didn't want her to have it. So I told Kylie I would leave another note for her with my name on it. This one she was allowed to keep. Kylie was a keen observer of my writing. She grabbed a pad of post-it notes (visit 4), found a biro, made some marks on the paper and peeled off her message. I believe she was writing a note to me just as I write one for her every visit. For example, after we had our first positive book sharing time (visit 4), I wrote a note which said, "I like sitting in your chair and sharing stories with you. I will see you next week, Love Julie".

Kylie loved to write. She made writing-like marks on paper (visit 3). She grabbed my biro and some paper from the literacy container and produced lots of discrete circular marks. They looked like approximations of o's and e's. I asked Kylie to tell me about what she was doing, but she did not reply. I looked over to Linda who was sitting at the end of the kitchen table and asked whether she thought it was meant to be drawing or writing. She was sure Kylie intended it to be writing.

When Kylie chose the books she wanted to borrow (visit 4), I recorded the titles in my exercise book. She then took a biro from the literacy container and wrote on the page. I was intrigued about the purpose of her writing, so I asked her what she was writing. Kylie pointed to the list of books I had written and nodded at me. She wrote between the lines, with letter like shapes. Some were vertical lines while others were circular type shapes. Originally they were set out in the manner of a list with one line of writing under the other. However, she then continued to write and filled up much of the space on the page, losing the appearance of a list. I found this fascinating. Kylie was intent on demonstrating what she had observed me doing during visits. She had obviously taken more notice than I realised.

On most visits Kylie wrote on my exercise book when she observed me recording or marking off books borrowed. However, in visit eight she picked up a biro, wrote letter like marks, pointed to the mark. and said "P, R". It was likely she was saying letter names, and I wondered if she had picked it up from the "Sesame Street" television program.

Later I encouraged her to take part in the recording of books returned. Initially she made a continuous squiggly line next to the title. Then I showed her how she could do it like I did, and mark inside the little square itself (visit 10). The next visit when I asked to mark off the books, I looked at my exercise book and found she had marked them off already.

On another visit (visit 12), Kylie wrote on my exercise book as she usually did. I felt it was a good time to give her her own diary, as I had given some of the other focus children. She loved it. When I asked her if she wanted me to write her name in the front of the diary, she nodded her answer. She then watched as I wrote her name, address and phone number in the personal information

section. I asked Kylie for her help with other relevant information but she was not able to verbalise any answers. I then suggested we fill in important days like birthdays. I started recording Kylie's and then Linda took over the diary writing. Kylie was writing in it at the same time as her mother, doing continuous lines of writing. The writing so engrossed Kylie that she couldn't tear herself away long enough to choose her books for the next week, so Linda and I chose some for her.

7.6 HOW THE FAMILY HELPED

All family members spent some time reading with her. Linda was reluctant to share books and literacy activities with her for quite a while, saying she didn't want to force her. I felt this reluctance was partly because Linda was acutely aware of her low reading ability. However, she came to realise that Kylie had discovered the fun of sharing texts, as well as reading them independently, and she would read to Kylie when requested to. Eventually, she initiated book sharing times as well (interview, 7-10-92). Linda stipulated to me that she wanted Kylie to have "not big ones, little ones" (visit 6). At a later visit (7-10-92), Linda explained her concern more fully. She said, "the bigger ones are too hard for her", and added that "some of the hard ones I can't even read to her either" because the more difficult words "confused" her. She realistically felt she could help Kylie more with the simple books that she could read.

Linda responded to Kylie's growing interest in print. She took an inconspicuous, but quite active, interest in the literacy activities Kylie and I did and followed them up between the home visits. She said, "a lot of the stuff you did was pretty good.. some of the stuff you done and showed her, and I'd go in there and have a look at the stuff and I'd try and.. I'd read it and sing songs and stuff like that and all the things as well.. We'd do everything together ". She told me that they were "still doing a hell of a lot with her" (interview, 7-10-92).

Linda and Jason were very involved in the choice of books. Once when Kylie was ill with a virus, and asleep in bed, Jason searched through the container to find books he believed his sister would enjoy. Linda also checked the books telling me which ones were suitable. Jason commented Kylie would like the Benjamin Bunny story because she had a rabbit of her own in the backyard (visit 5). We had a valuable three way conversation about which books to borrow for Kylie. All the books they eventually decided on had animals in them. They agreed this was an important criteria of choice.

Linda also kept me informed about which books Kylie had particularly enjoyed, as well as those she had not liked. For example, she asked whether Kylie could borrow the Benjamin Bunny story again as it had been so popular with her daughter (visit 6).

Michael also showed an interest in the visits. On the occasions when he was home, we would have a chat about Kylie (eg visit 3). On most weeks, however, he was not home when I visited. According to Linda, he would ask Kylie in the evenings, "How'd your day go with Julie?" (interview, 7-10-92). He also read with her sometimes before tea (visit 4).

Linda also tried to support me by ensuring that my literacy materials were being looked after properly. She worried about Kylie losing books, or finger puppets and searched until missing items were located. She also found another box for Kylie to store her literacy materials in, once the original one was ruined.

7.7 RESPONSES TO HOME VISITING PROGRAM

These comments, unless otherwise indicated, come from an interview with Linda Benton on the seventh of October, 1992.

Both parents, Linda and Michael, believed the home visiting program was worthwhile and recommended it to friends. Linda thought the activities we did in the home visits were useful and commented that Jason had also enjoyed the sessions. She said that "he [liked] a lot of your stuff as well". Linda told me she thought it would work well for 'normal kids' as well as for children with speech problems. She said she'd spoken about the program to a lot of friends, and "they [reckoned] it [sounded] a really good idea".

Linda and Michael felt the program had been beneficial for Kylie as it provided her with extra help. Linda explained, "... it's helping her a hell of a lot", and she went on to say that Kylie had "got a hell of a lot of help out of it". Linda also relayed Michael's opinion that he thought Kylie was "doing really well".

Michael and Linda noted that Kylie was now very interested in books and writing; that she read, drew or wrote every day for an hour or more in her room. They even bought a few books for Kylie to keep. Linda believed that the program had also been an important stimulus to Kylie's oral language development. She said, "Well, she's sort of picking up a lot of the words through the books", and that Kylie knew "a hell of a lot of words now.. she's saying heaps".

Linda was concerned that Kylie would no longer have access to the books once the home visiting program ended. She was pleased, however, that she had been given a pile of children's books by a cousin for Kylie's use. She had been discussing the program and her cousin had remembered books which had been packed away in a shed. Linda was so excited about them that she insisted on showing them to me one by one.

Linda was disappointed that my visits would end, and asked if I could still pop in every now and then or phone her (visit 11). I assured her that I would, and we maintained contact for another year and a half.

7.8 DISCUSSION

The home visiting program was an impetus for positive change in the Benton home. As Kylie's interest in literacy unfolded and became evident to the members of the family, they acknowledged her independent exploration of texts and then participated in and initiated literacy activities with her.

7.8.1 Factors That Helped Make A Difference

Interesting Literacy Materials

The range and variety of literacy materials was important. She appreciated the finger puppets, fingerplays and the action rhymes. Kylie also enjoyed a wide range of stories, contemporary and traditional ones, simple short stories as well as more complex ones that I shared with her. The simple stories were certainly important for Kylie's literacy and language development as they encouraged her reading-like behaviour and her oral language.

Stimulus Of The Home Visitor

My presence was important for Kylie for I brought with me lots of activities to do and lots of books to read. Even though she was sometimes unwilling to join in a song, a book or a game with me, she would sometimes participate with her mother when I had gone.

Kylie's Enjoyment Of, And Enthusiasm For, Literacy Activities

Kylie's interest from the books and other literacy activities such as writing, was demonstrated to the other members of her family. Her enjoyment was obvious and when she asked her mother to join in with her, Linda could not refuse. This set up a valuable pattern of interaction, particularly between mother and daughter.

7.8.2 Constraints

Although I was generally pleased with Kylie's surge of literacy development there were quite a few factors which disturbed the effectiveness of the home visits. Kylie's personality and nature probably restrained her literacy learning to some extent. She was often unwilling to take risks and participate fully in our activities. She was embarrassed about singing, reading or playing in front of other people including me, her brother and even her mother.

Jason's difficult behaviour was a serious constraint. He attempted to monopolise my attention and time during the home visits, and his noisy, poorly controlled conduct was unsettling for both Kylie and myself. I feel sure that the visits would have been more constructive if Jason had been at school, rather than at home with us. Kylie would have probably participated more freely in the rhymes, songs, craft activities and book sharing opportunities that I initiated and prepared for her.

The timing of the home visits was also unfortunate. I visited Kylie and her family early Wednesday afternoons. This allowed time for Kylie to have lunch after attending the morning session of kindergarten. Visits, however, coincided with the "Days Of Our Lives" television program, one of Linda's favourites and one she was rarely prepared to miss. This meant that while Kylie and I were busy in her bedroom, or the kitchen or outside in the garden, Linda was usually in the lounge room, however, she sometimes popped to see us during commercial breaks. Although I would have preferred more parent-child participation during the home visits, I came to realise that Linda felt she needed the break from Jason and Kylie. Another reason might have been that she did not want to expose her limited reading and writing skills.

The time I spent with Kylie and her family was often challenging and I sometimes felt that I was not making a sufficiently positive contribution. Nevertheless, Kylie's oral language flourished, she learned to enjoy exploring

literacy activities and share them with others. Furthermore, her family responded to the interest she demonstrated, and they supported her learning in ways that were comfortable for them.

CHAPTER EIGHT : THE "ROSEDORP" FAMILY

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the fourth and final focus child, "Missy Rosedorp". It reveals how a tiny nudge from the home visitor set this child off on a voyage of literacy discovery. This set of home visits highlights the considerable influence a small intervention can have on a young child and her mother. Although initially indifferent to sharing books with her mother, Missy developed a remarkable love of sharing books and also of exploring writing. Furthermore, she and her mother became enthusiastic partners for literacy growth.

8.2 BACKGROUND AND FAMILY INFORMATION

"Mrs. Rosedorp" learned about the home visiting program through Early Childhood Workers with the Mobile Toy Library service. She then met the Project Officer and agreed to a visit. I posted a letter addressed to Missy (and her mother) confirming the visit. It was written on cat note paper which a young girl would find appealing. The initial visit with the Rosedorp family was on the sixteenth of June, 1992.

8.2.1 Members Of The Household

The focus child, Missy, lived with her mother, "Jane", in a Housing Trust maisonette in the Elizabeth area. Missy was about three years and nine months old at the beginning of the home visits. She attended a pre-entry session for kindergarten one morning per week, and went to a childcare centre one day each fortnight.

Missy's mother, Jane, was a woman in her late twenties. Jane had separated from her husband, with whom she had two daughters. "Sandra", their firstborn daughter, was nine years old. She had lived with the father since the

separation, while Missy had continued to reside with her mother. There remained a close connection between the two adults and the two girls. They lived within a couple of streets of each other and deliberately maintained close contact. Sandra came to her mother's and sister's house a few afternoons a week after school, and had regular overnight stays. Missy also stayed over at her father's house once a week. Jane often shopped and cooked for her other daughter and estranged husband. The husband was unemployed, while Jane relied on a supporting mother's allowance.

At this first visit I was greeted at the front door by both Jane and Missy. I said hello, I was Julie, and they must be Jane and Missy. Missy looked surprised but was happy I knew her name. I asked her if she knew who I was, but she shook her head. Although I had sent her a letter she had not received it. Jane explained that young lads around the neighbourhood vandalised letter boxes. The family used to have a letter box set in concrete, but it had been broken, so she had nailed an icecream container on a post. Unfortunately, this letter box had also been vandalised, and she considered using a post office box instead. Jane acknowledged my disappointment and commented that children hardly ever received their own letters.

We sat in the lounge room and discussed the program. She had already seen the one page flyer, stated she was pleased to participate, and filled in the enrolment form immediately. Together, we organised a regular early afternoon visiting time. Jane informed me, however, that when Missy turned four in September she would be attending afternoon kindergarten. I responded that we could work out another time when necessary.

8.2.2 Missy's Interests, Health And Behaviour

Jane described Missy as "a real chatterbox". Missy liked to play with jigsaw puzzles, listen to story tapes, look at books, and run around outside when friends came over. Although outside play was a favourite activity for Missy, it

had been difficult for Jane to organise. Firstly, she could not afford outside toys to play with, and secondly, the backyard had not had a safe gate until the previous week. It had taken a long time to save up the money for the gate.

Missy, was described by her mother as a "bath fanatic" who enjoyed a long bath two times each day with her toys. She was said to enjoy children's programs on television, especially "Play School", "Sesame Street" and "Chip and Dale Rescue Rangers". Jane reported that Missy had no health concerns.

8.3 PARENT'S UNDERSTANDINGS OF SCHOOL AND LITERACY

The following information, unless otherwise indicated, is from an interview on the 11th of August, 1992.

8.3.1 Jane's Experiences Of School

Jane said she couldn't "remember much about school". She recalled, however, that she had enjoyed it and "[had done] well at school". She had liked "social science, maths and English best" and had "always read a lot". She had especially liked doing social studies projects. Jane felt she had "got on well with the teachers.. this [helped]".

Jane completed year ten, left school to get a job, and found one within a week. She explained there were two factors which contributed to the decision to leave school. Her mother was a single mother and the financial pressures were difficult - leaving school would help relieve the burden on her mother. In addition, part way through Year 10, Jane had changed schools. She recalled that she had "got into more trouble there.. everyone messed around and I followed". Jane had come to regard leaving school early as a poor choice. She expressed regret about leaving after year ten and explained that one of her girlfriends had since returned to continue her education. She talked about

returning to some form of education or training. She had an opportunity to attend a computer training course. Fees were taken care of, transport was organised, and there was a creche in situ, but the course was cancelled as not enough people enrolled.

8.3.2 Jane's Experience Of Reading

Jane said she had always been "good" at reading, both while at school and since. She remembered having a regular reading time at home with her mother, and that she "always read a lot of books". Her mother was a strong support and influence on her education. Jane recalled that she "started me off on little novels" which she then finished reading by herself. Her mother also made her "look up words in the dictionary" and helped with social studies projects.

Jane still enjoyed reading as an adult, but she was not able to read "like [she] used to". Family responsibilities meant she had less time, but regardless, she always read before she went to sleep. Reading, she said, relaxed her and she "[looked] forward to this time". She was particularly interested in reading the newspaper "so she [knew] what was going on". The children, she said, "[took] over the t.v." and therefore she didn't "see the news". The paper allowed her to keep in touch with world affairs. It was not delivered daily; she bought one when she could afford it. Magazines were rarely bought, either by her or her friends, as they were too expensive. Any they had were shared around among her circle of friends.

I asked her whether she read novels and she answered that she did when she could get hold of them. I said I had many novels at home I could lend her, and that she would probably find some she liked among them. Jane was quite delighted. She even reminded me about bringing the books when I left. As the program went on, Jane borrowed and read numerous novels from my collection. I also brought magazines for her to read. Jane commented that

she read "in the evenings when the kids [were] in bed". Other forms of reading included the local paper, personal mail, Missy's books, Sandra's books and homework, and advertising material.

8.3.3 Jane's Experiences Of Writing

Jane's memories of school were scant, but she remembered writing lessons when there "big lines" for writing on and where "everyone [did] the same thing". She stated that she liked to write and still did "a lot of writing" because "it [passed] the time". Writing was an important means of communication between her boyfriend and herself, who was "inside". She wrote four long letters, "thirty to forty pages a week" to him in prison. Jane felt that writing to her boyfriend had led to a "renewed interest in writing". Her boyfriend wrote back to her, and she helped him with his writing and spelling. He also had a tutor to help him. She was pleased about the assistance as she felt the boyfriend "might as well do something while in there". Jane wrote regular letters to friends as well.

Writing poetry was another form of writing that Jane enjoyed. "I [jotted] down words during the day, and at night I put them together", she explained. Then she put them up around the house to cheer herself up. She even had an appreciative audience for her poems. A Year 9 and a Year 10 girl who lived at the back of her house came over to read them and even took some to school. Other forms of writing included shopping lists, messages, bills and official forms. Jane also chose to do her writing later in the evening when the children were in bed.

8.3.4 Missy's Sister's And Father's Experiences Of Reading And School

Sandra, Missy's sister, enjoyed school and did very well. It seemed that she had a wonderful head start with her reading. Jane reported that Sandra could

read before she went to school (visit 1). She thought the early reading development was helped by the regular bedtime reading Sandra did with her father. Sandra had also kept a diary for two years (visit 4). The father was also said to be a good and enthusiastic reader.

8.3.5 Jane's Beliefs About Missy's Future

Jane had concerns about Missy's progress at school because she "[lost] concentration easily" in comparison with her older sister. Jane described Missy as "a real wrigglepot" and doubted whether she "[would] be able to sit down and take it all in". She then observed, "I expect too much out of her", and that she believed Missy "[would] do well, above average".

Jane believed that she and Sandra would be valuable helpers for Missy's literacy development. Jane reported that Missy now had a story every day with her and that Missy's sister "[went] through the books with her every night". She thought kindergarten and school would also help her learn to read and write.

Jane was hopeful Missy would "go right through all her schooling - the end of Year 12 and into college. You have to now.. don't want my children to regret it". She also expected her to achieve this future. She was pessimistic, however, about future job opportunities for Missy. She said, "... with unemployment. What future is there in another fifteen years?".

8.3.6 How Jane Envisaged Her Role In Missy's Literacy

Before home visiting, Jane had not envisaged a major role for herself in Missy's pre-school literacy development. She commented, "I didn't spend that much time with her, doing things like that". Instead she left it up to the older sister to look at books with Missy. Jane explained she had not read books to her young daughter because "she didn't really want me to read them to her" (interview, 29-9-92). She believed Missy was a wriggle pot and not ready for

stories. She had also restricted Missy's access to her sister's toy box full of books. Jane explained, "before it wasn't worth bringing them out, cause she, you know, didn't look after them" (29-9-92).

There was a clear change in Jane's perception of her role during the home visiting program. By the time of the later interview, she believed her role was to encourage Missy's literacy development, even at the preschool stage. She also thought some deliberate teaching would be useful. Missy and Jane "[started] writing the alphabet" and she showed her "how to write the letters" (29-9-92). Jane always believed there was an important place for parents in their children's education. She appreciated the assistance and support given to her by her own mother. Jane stated, "Parents have an important role. If parents didn't help them at home it would take them longer to pick up at school". This belief was then extended to include Missy's preschool years as well.

8.4 MISSY'S LITERACY EXPERIENCES AND INTERACTIONS PRIOR TO HOME VISITING

8.4.1 Writing

Access to paper to write on and things to write with were limited. Jane said Missy had done drawings, "but nothing to do with writing or um numbers and things like that". She said, "I used to get paper for her, but then if it wasn't around she didn't worry about it". Missy had been interested in drawing/writing implements. Missy had owned some crayons, Jane told me, but they were all gone by the time of the first visit. She then declared that Missy took her biros all the time.

8.4.2 Interest In Book Print

According to her mother, Missy "would just look at a book .. she wasn't interested.. about the story and things" before the home visits. Jane

commented that Missy didn't want her to read books with her. She added that she had left sharing books with Missy to her older daughter "cause her sister always read and [did] things like that" (interview 29-9-92).

Although Jane felt Missy had shown little interest, I observed that she was indeed familiar with handling books (visit 1). I showed her the container of books, and she systematically looked through many books, one page at a time. She knew which way to hold them, where they started, and how to turn pages. She appeared to enjoy them, and put aside an enormous pile of books she wanted to keep. Furthermore, as she looked, she talked continuously to herself and counted things on the pages.

8.4.3 Print Around The House

Often Sandra's short novels from school and a television program guide were in the lounge room. There were also bookshelves on the wall near the front entrance which contained children's books and a set of *The Junior World Encyclopaedia.*

Although Jane said she often read the daily newspaper, the local paper etc., they were never left lying around the house. Jane kept a very tidy house and probably packed them away when she had finished with them.

8.4.4 Discussion

Missy's access to books relevant to her age, and materials for writing was limited. Paper etc. was not always available, and her sister's children's books remained packed away until Missy demonstrated to her mother she could look after them.

Both writing and reading were important, regular and enjoyable literacy activities in Jane Rosedorp's life. Poetry writing, letter writing and leisure reading featured prominently in her daily routine. Nevertheless, they remained

largely invisible to her young daughter, Missy, because Jane preferred to do them when the children were in bed. Even functional literacy activities such as shopping lists were written late in the evening. Sandra, however, was a visible model of literate behaviour as she read her novels, did her homework, and shared books with her sister while on visits to the mother's house.

8.5 HOW MISSY CHANGED

Missy seemed to blossom during the home visiting sessions. Her mother was thrilled with the changes, and so was I.

8.5.1 Missy's Developing Interest In Books And Reading

Missy discovered joy in books during the home visiting time. She was always pleased when I arrived with my books and other literacy materials. She often ran out to the car to greet me, and gave me kisses and hugs. She came, calling out, "Julie, Julie, my Julie" (visit 3). Missy would even greet me at the car with "Got some more books for me?" (visit 7), and "I want some books. You read me some stories?" (visit 10).

Her mother noted what she thought was a change in Missy's attitude. She said, "She wants.. she's more positive towards things now. She wants to learn things now. Because we weren't paying much attention and doing things it didn't bother her - she didn't know, but now she knows about it she wants more and more all the time". Jane also thought because Missy was more interested in books, she "[kept] herself more occupied" with them.

The books were so popular with her that she wanted to choose many more than the four I lent to each child. Her mother reminded her that she couldn't have all the books because there wouldn't be any left for the other children (visit 4). She was so keen, however, that I allowed her to borrow extra books.

When I arrived for visit six, Missy met me at the front screen door hugging a book to her chest. She told me, "I liked it. It was fun". Missy then spontaneously recalled a couple of parts of the story she particularly enjoyed. Missy even packed her books in her bag when she went to her father's house for an access visit (visit 10). After our time reading together, she sometimes showed her favourite parts of books to her mother (visit 10).

She became absorbed in many books she read. While sharing a book about a lost baby kangaroo entitled *Where Is My Home?*, Missy worried about the joey being all alone and wanted to know "Where's the mother been?" (visit 9).

She was also interested in sharing as many books in a series as possible. We had read *Grug And His Music* earlier in visit eleven, and her attention then turned to writing m's. Immediately after this, Missy's interest swung back to the character Grug. She asked me where he lived, and so we searched through the container of books until we found the first Grug story which explained where he came from and how he made his home. She then chose another Grug story to have together. Missy was observant of all the written information in a text. She even turned to the part of a book which detailed titles and pictures about other books in a series, commented on which ones we had shared, and identified the one she held at that time (visit 10).

Reading With Her Mother

Initially, Missy, preferred not to share books with her mother. Once, I wondered out aloud just how long Missy would stay with me if I continued to read (visit 10, early September). Then her mother mentioned that she had found it difficult to get Missy to sit down for a story with her. I was surprised and puzzled by Jane's comment, as Missy made a beeline to me every visit and never wanted me or the books to leave. However, this reluctance to share books with her mother changed (interview 29-9-92). Jane stated then that Missy brought stories to her and asked her to read them. Jane said, "Well,

[she'd] always [come] out, 'Read this, read this, read this'".

Jane Rosedorp noted a corresponding change in Missy's behaviour while sharing stories. She commented, "Before when I was reading she wasn't interested, like she wouldn't take any notice, but now we can sit down and read the book together, and go through it". Missy, her mother said, sometimes asked her questions about the book they were sharing (interview 29-9-92). She also saw her daughter's attention to print increase. Rather than Missy continuing with whatever else she'd been doing, she sat with her mother and noticed "the writing, and each word and each page".

Reading With Others

Missy and her sister shared books regularly. This had been happening to some extent before the home visiting program, but Jane believed it occurred more frequently once the program started. She said, "Her sister [read] a lot with her, when she [was] over". She also read with her foster nanna (visit 8), and with her father when at his house (29-9-92).

Reading At Kindergarten

Jane told me how Missy's interest in books had influenced her choice of activities at kindergarten. When she went to pick her up from her afternoon sessions, she said she saw Missy "just sitting down in their little library with the books" (29-9-92).

Reading With Me

From the first visit, Missy was happy to share books with me. She was very involved in the shared book experiences. She talked about the stories and the pictures and asked me questions. She also anticipated story events as we shared books, and discussed her favourite parts (visit 10). As we read, she commented, "I like this page. I like this page too. I like this page, do you?".

She responded with amused expressions, laughs and giggles (visit 10).

Missy became a real partner in our book sharing. She joined in with repetitive parts of stories (visit 6, visit 10). From this time, as I read, I deliberately left words out for her to fill in. She had no difficulty supplying the missing words of the oral cloze.

She organised a routine for our time. We usually sat on the lounge, close to each other, and she asked me to read stories to her, interspersed with her visits to the container of books. She stayed there until we shared another type of literacy activity such as story magnets, making playdough, or I had to leave, whichever came first. She preferred not to share me or our activities with children who came to visit (visit 11).

Reading-Like Behaviour: Awareness Of Print

Missy's awareness of print grew steadily during the home visiting program, as did her understanding of reading-like behaviour. During the first visit she recognised the name Spot on a page of a book, and pointed it out to me on other pages. She recognised this word from Spot episodes on the television. I realised she was aware the story lay in the print and not the illustrations, and I was careful to always point to the words while I read. Missy came to believe that pointing to words was part of the reading process.

There appeared to be a leap of awareness and increased attention to print later in the program. Missy had internalised that each group of letters was a word (visit 9). I was reading the Humpty Dumpty verse from *The Nursery Rhymes Peek-A-Book* and Missy decided to control what I read. She pointed to various parts of the text she wanted me to read. She was like a musical conductor! Missy even noticed I hadn't read all the rhyme, *Hickory Dickory Dock*, under the flap. She commented, "You didn't read me this one" and physically guided my finger along the words. Such high level attention to text

continued through later home visits.

Missy was fascinated with all the print on the books, not only the story text. She pointed to the small print about publishing details at the bottom of the inside cover and asked me to read it to her (visit 9). She wanted to know about the information on the title page of stories, the author and illustrator. She pointed to the writing and asked me "What [did] that say?" (visit 10). Missy insisted I read every single word on the introductory pages, and as I pointed to the words as I read, she knew if I missed any out (visit 11).

Missy also wanted to know all about the print I had written in biro on the cover and first page of my books. It was my name, and I explained that I wrote it so people would know who the books belonged to in case they were misplaced. I believed Missy actually knew the purpose of this writing, but was checking her concept.

Missy knew there was a strong connection between pictures and words. She developed this concept to the point where she thought the text should mention all the ideas drawn in the illustrations. Once I read a book which showed a little boy cleaning his face at a hand basin. The illustration also included a cat playing with the water coming out of a bath tap. She pointed to this part of the page and said, "You didn't read this bit!". She thought this because the text had not mentioned anything about a cat (visit 10). She repeated this objection during the next visit.

Learning Reading-Like Behaviour

Missy was initially reluctant to attempt to 'read' a story. I believed this was partly because she lacked confidence, and partly because she already knew enough about books to know she could not read a story 'properly'. I read Missy a version of *The Little Red Hen* which had felt finger puppets to

accompany the story. We then retold the story together and took turns at being the various characters. When I asked her to read the story to me, she said she couldn't read the words. I explained to Missy that she could read and tell the story by looking at the pictures. She had a go, and enjoyed herself (visit 4). However, she still wasn't entirely happy with reading this way. Again she responded to an invitation for her to read to me with, "I can't read" (visit 6). I stated I knew she could read, and I read the story to her again. Missy then 'read' the story to me and I told her how clever she was.

Simple books, with only a few words on each page, allowed her to virtually memorise the text. They increased her confidence with reading-like behaviour. *Knock at the Door*, a simple finger play board book, was a turning point in her confidence (visit 6). Later in this visit I heard her 'reading' another book aloud to herself. Books such as *Spot* ones featured speech balloons with simple spoken language. She quickly became familiar with the speech balloons and enjoyed reading those words as we shared the stories. From this time, Missy's reading-like behaviour became an integral part of her interaction with print.

Missy insisted I read books over and over again. These repeated readings appeared to be an important way for her to learn the pattern of the book and connect the picture cues with the sense of the text. She particularly enjoyed a version of *Ten In The Bed.* We read it, sang it and accompanied it with the hand actions many times in a row. She then declared, "Now I read it" and sang her way through the book. For example, "Roll over. One fell out of the bed", and "So one fell out of the bed", "There were six in the bed, said roll over", and "Roll over, one fell out". She paid careful attention to the picture cues and her understanding of the story structure. On the visit close to her birthday (visit 10), she was fascinated with a story called *Do Something Special On Your Birthday.* It was a delightfully whimsical and amusing book. This was another book I had to read a number of times in a row. On the third and fourth times she joined in with many of the words. Missy had become

confident enough to 'read' more complex books.

She also made good use of the vinyl story character magnets and the finger puppets that accompanied some traditional books. These (for example, *The Enormous Turnip,* visit 7) allowed her to explore and master the story structure. After my initial telling of the story with her help, she took the initiative and allowed me a supporting role with some characters. We moved from the kitchen floor in front of the refrigerator, to the comfort of a chair and the kitchen table, and this time I read the story to her. Missy hopped off my lap, and collected the story magnets from the refrigerator. She then 'read' the story to me manipulating the magnets so they followed the illustrations on the pages.

While reading a book (visit 11), I was fascinated to hear her echoing the precise words after I said them. She then started at the beginning of the book and 'read' it to me. When she completed the entire book, she triumphantly exclaimed, "I read it all by myself!". I felt Missy had realised her reading was close to the original text and was pleased with herself for doing so well. Naturally I was suitably impressed and told her so. Her mother, Jane, informed me that Missy sometimes 'read' to her as well.

Independent Reading

Once Missy believed she could make a good attempt at reading a book, she felt confident enough to sit and read/tell stories independently to herself. Jane explained, "She [remembered] the stories and.. and that, then [she'd] try to do it". She added that she told "her to sit down and read them herself, as well. She [sat] down and she just [chattered] away". Jane also believed it was a matter of confidence. She said, "like I said before, she didn't really understand it, that's why she wouldn't do it, but now.. she's got a bit more confidence". Often it occurred in her bedroom, between visits, and sometimes I observed

this during my visits.

In visit seven, Missy chose a wordless book, *The Chicken's Child*. After we discussed the pictures, what happened on each page and predicted what would happen next, she went through the book telling the story to herself aloud. Missy then chose *Our Dog Sam* for me to read to her. Then she read it to herself, not to me. She turned the pages of the story and quietly told herself the story.

Borrowing And Choosing Books

Missy enjoyed browsing through the selection of books each visit, talking to herself about the books. She had definite opinions about books. I had heard her say, "What's this one? Ooh, it's my favourite". Then she addressed a comment to me, "You don't know what I'm seeing!". This, I felt, was an invitation to me to share the book with her (visit 11). Sometimes she would express a negative opinion about a book. During browsing (visit 7) she stated firmly, "Not this yucky one!". She also gave a shout of delight when she located a book she knew she would enjoy. (for example, a different *Spot* book, visit 6.)

Missy was not as dogmatic as some other children about keeping control over books borrowed. She usually chose books we had shared during the home visit, as well as some favourites to which she wanted to return. She was also happy to listen to an occasional recommendation from her mother or me.

8.5.2 Writing Behaviour

During the first visit with Missy, I gave her some literacy materials- a box of crayons, textas and paper, and a box with a lid to keep them in. [On later visits she received a blackboard and chalk and coloured pencils.] I labelled them with her name and she recognised it. Knowing what her name looked like set the scene for her strong interest in writing later in the home visits.

Missy wasn't initially keen on writing, but we enjoyed drawing collaborative pictures together. In visit four, she asked me to draw some of the animal characters from a book we had shared. She then added other details to the picture. When I suggested she tell me something about it so I could write on the bottom of the page, she protested. She was not happy with this proposed interruption to our drawing time.

This lack of interest in writing certainly changed. I made a point of leaving her a brief message on post-it notes each visit. There were also a few occasions when they weren't home when I visited, and so I left either a message or a longer letter for both her and her mother at the front door. It may have been a simple message about seeing her next week (visit 1), or that I was sorry to have missed them (visit 8).

Missy and Jane (visit 6) mentioned they had found the letters I had left for them the week before. Missy declared, "I like things for my door". So I drew a happy face on a post-it note and wrote "To Missy, see you soon. Love Julie". Missy was delighted and ran to put this new message on her bedroom door. She was also interested when I wrote a reminder for myself to bring some thick chalks for her and some novels for her mother the following week. She wanted to know what it was for and what it said.

A large 1992 diary was another spur to Missy's growing interest in print and writing. When I gave it to her, Jane commented to Missy that she could do a picture in the space for each day. She also showed her the calendar pages and circled the date of Missy's approaching birthday. Missy then got a biro and her mother helped her circle Sandra's birthday and Jane's birthday. When I mentioned my daughter Elise was having her birthday the following Monday, she wanted to circle that one too. According to Jane, Missy had asked for help

to add other birthdays etc. during subsequent weeks.

One week (visit 9), Jane was pleased to report a change in Missy's literacy development. She told me that Missy was recognising letters from her name in the print around her. She explained, "When we [were] out together she [saw] signs and everything", and she pointed out m's and s's and "[thought] it [said] her name". I asked her why she thought this was happening and she replied she wasn't sure but thought it had something to do with looking at books and my visits. Later in visit nine, I asked Missy whether she would like me to write her name on a piece of paper. "Yes", she responded and watched carefully as I wrote.

Glimpses of the way Missy's mind worked intrigued me. On the visit close to her birthday (visit 10), I kissed her and gave her a little present. It was a set of fruit scented coloured biros, and she started to draw with them immediately. I noticed she was having trouble getting these new biros to work, and quite coincidentally I had reminded her to put the caps on the other end of the biros so she wouldn't lose them. She watched me put a cap on a biro and write with it. Missy assumed that was how I had made it work and I heard her say to herself that she must put the cap on for a biro to work! Missy really loved biros. She noticed my new biros (visit 11) which had sea creatures printed on them and chatted about the various animals. I knew they would catch the children's eyes.

A significant literacy event occurred in visit eleven. We had read *Grug And His Music.* Missy pointed to the M at the beginning of Music and stated, "I can do that.. watch". She made a mark with my biro on the exercise book I wrote visit plans and field notes in. Then she announced proudly, "There did I. Let me do it". Jane who was in the room with us explained that Missy had practised writing M's. I looked again and realised that was exactly what the mark was on the page. Missy proceeded to write lots of M's on the exercise book. I

commented how well she had written the M's (see appendix E) and showed her my new key ring which had a decorative J for Julie on it. She nodded when I asked her if she would like to help me write some J's. I held her hand and we wrote J's together. We all enjoyed this focus on writing.

Missy also helped to record the return of borrowed books. Her mother read out the titles, I pointed to where they were recorded and Missy made a mark. However after practise with writing her name, Missy decided to record returned books with an M in the square next to them! By visit thirteen, Missy proudly wrote all the letters of her rather long name, although not yet in the right order.

8.6 HOW THE FAMILY HELPED

All members of her family shared books with Missy - her mother, her sister, her father and her foster nanna as well. Jane, in particular, was a wonderful support to Missy in many ways. Apart from reading with her, she also encouraged her to become a more independent reader (interview 29-9-92). She made time to teach her how handle books properly. She reminded her not to stand on books (visit 6), and explained how to turn pages carefully so they didn't tear (visit 7).

She bought Missy some books of her own. She went through advertising brochures, made a list of books she wanted to buy on layby and put away for her daughter until Christmas (visit 6).

Jane expressed concern about a steady supply of books for Missy when the home visits came to an end, even though her sister's books were gradually being brought out. She commented, "she's used to having her different books each week now, she's used to having them". She had planned to enquire about borrowing books from the kindergarten library.

Jane also supported Missy's developing writing. She helped her learn to write her name. Jane said to me that she was "really into it.. like with [Missy] writing her name and that now. With so many things like birthdays and things, like she's writing her name, trying to, on the cards for people and that. She does her little bit on them". She also helped her write in and fill in sections in her diary (interview 29-9-92).

Missy's mother responded to Missy's interest in print by making some of her functional writing activities more visible. Later in the program, Jane told me that she now wrote her shopping list at a time when Missy could help her (visit 13). This didn't happen before home visiting and was a response to Missy's developing interest in writing. In an interview (29-9-92), Jane said she had been helping Missy to learn the letters of the alphabet.

Jane often discussed Missy's development with me during home visits. She was excited at the visible growth in reading and writing.

Once Missy started afternoon kindergarten sessions, Jane was keen to reorganise our home visit time, even though it didn't leave them much time to get ready (visit 10). She also made a point of reminding me about the new time.

8.7 RESPONSES TO HOME VISITING PROGRAM

Jane believed the home visits made her see Missy as "brighter" than she originally thought. She had previously perceived Missy as much slower than her older sister, Sandra. She also believed Missy was not ready for sharing books or being interested in writing. As a result, Jane didn't think it was important to spend time with her doing any type of literacy activities. The home visiting program prompted her to change her mind. She watched while Missy developed a love of print and set about exploring it. Jane stated Missy "really [got] a lot out of it. I've seen a difference in her".

According to Jane, Missy loved the home visits. She looked forward to our Tuesday time together, and worried when I was late arriving at her house, in case I wasn't coming for a visit. She also commented that Missy had become so interested in books that she looked at them when they were out shopping together (interview 29-9-92). Furthermore, she explained to me that she wouldn't have spent the time with her daughter if the program hadn't started. She would have continued to leave it up to Sandra.

8.8 DISCUSSION

I feel the home visiting program came at a fortunate time for Missy Rosedorp and her mother. Missy had some prior experience with literacy activities through her older sister, and was primed for a more active involvement with reading and writing.

8.8.1 Factors That Helped Make A Difference

The Stimulus Of The Home Visitor

Missy's emergent literacy was ready to flourish, and I was able to light a spark. I sense that it was probably important, at first, for Missy to have an adult other than her mother to interact with. Visits from someone with experience with young children and who had time to spend with her made an extraordinary difference to Missy's interest in, and enjoyment of, literacy activities. I expressed confidence in her ability and encouraged her reading-like behaviour and I believe these responses were significant development triggers. Once she had developed a pattern of positive interaction with me, she was then able to share literacy experiences with her mother.

Interesting Literacy Materials

Missy enjoyed everything we did, but the simple books with a few words per page were a vitally important jumping off point in her literacy development.

Being able to remember and 'read' simple texts allowed Missy to develop the confidence to 'read' more complex texts as well. An awareness of print was fostered by these texts which lead to an investigation of the letters in her name and then other letters of the alphabet.

Missy's Initiative During Activities

Missy seemed to have an intuitive understanding of what she needed to do to, and I usually followed her lead during the visits. She developed a number of strategies which enabled her to get an ear for the sense and structure of a story. She used repeated readings of stories, vinyl story magnets, picture cues and 'echo' reading as strategies to promote her knowledge of a text and support her reading.

Jane's Revised Perception Of Missy As A Literacy Learner

Jane observed Missy and I having a lot of fun and literacy experiences during the home visits, and realised that her daughter was indeed an active literacy learner. She discovered that her daughter was ready for another step along the literacy path. Jane was then glad to build a strong literacy relationship with her young daughter and participate in and further stimulate Missy's learning.

8.8.2 Constraints

There didn't appear to be any significant constraints operating during this set of home visits, other than perhaps financial ones. I'm sure Jane wished she had the money to buy Missy lots of books, writing materials and other educational materials, but she was determined, nevertheless, to nurture her daughter's learning to the best of her ability.

Missy and I thoroughly enjoyed our Tuesday afternoons together. Her curious, happy and easy going manner was a congenial conclusion to my Tuesdays in Elizabeth. I was excited by the literacy growth I observed and felt fortunate to have been a participant in Missy's development. I was also pleased to be able

to foster the valuable learning interaction that unfolded between Missy and her mother, Jane Rosedorp.

CHAPTER NINE : FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Literacy practices within the family home are powerful influences on the early literacy development of young children. While much is known about literacy in mainstream homes, less is known and understood about the construction of literacy within low income homes. This study was set within an early intervention program offered to families in a low income area. The study explored the literacy experiences of four young children within the context of their family homes. It also documented what was seen, heard and understood about early literacy within these low income homes. It gathered information about the literacy environments of the four families both prior to, and during, the home visiting program, and also reflected upon the value of the intervention itself.

Four focus questions guided the research. These were:

1. What were the parent's understandings and experiences of school and literacy?
2. What literacy experiences were the children having in terms of the home environment and family interactions, both prior to, and during, the program?
3. How did the children and other family/household members respond to the home visits?
4. In what ways was home visiting useful in encouraging emergent literacy and parental involvement in young children's literacy?

The four focus questions were interrelated and addressed overlapping aspects of family literacy. These include the experiences and understandings of

literacy developed by parents while at home, at school, and through living as adults in a community. The practice of literacy within each family home, and therefore the opportunity for young children to participate in, or observe, adult modelling of literacy events, is greatly influenced by the literacy experiences and understandings of the significant adults. It is not surprising, therefore, that data relating to one particular question was found to also have relevance for other focus questions.

Data was collected during home visits and telephone conversations, analysed and organised into a set of four case studies, one for each family. The case studies provide rich descriptions of family interaction and the literacy environments in which the children lived. They also describe the many ways that the home visiting intervention facilitated the development of the focus children's emergent literacy.

This final chapter reminds us of the limitations inherent in the study, presents the major findings of the investigation and then discusses evidence which relates to issues raised in the literature. It also discusses implications for local providers of education and for future early literacy interventions.

9.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Four families is a small sample which can not be claimed to represent the range of families in the area. Neither can the four focus children be seen as representative. Firstly, no boys are included in my study, although they were in the larger program with other home visitors. The considerable age range of the children, from 2 years 10 months to 4 years 3 months at the start of the study, may also require consideration.

The data is a sample only of the lives of the children and their families. It was collected in the midst of a financial recession, and may, therefore, reflect circumstances peculiar to the time. Furthermore, the data was collected in a

relatively brief seven month time frame from June 1992 to December 1992. It is my feeling, however, that patterns of family literacy that emerged from this study would have been sustained with a longer data collection period.

Generalisations can not be claimed from this research, and any conclusions drawn need to take into account the limitations of the study. Nevertheless, the findings of this exploration make a contribution to a picture of family literacy in Elizabeth and provide important insights that may help others to understand early literacy within low income Australian families.

9.3 FINDINGS, INSIGHTS AND ISSUES

9.3.1 Major Findings From The Research

Ten major findings emerged from the study. It found that:

1. *There was a wide continuum of literacy backgrounds, experiences and practices among the parents of the focus children.*
2. *Families did not appear to be aware of the significance of young children's literacy experiences prior to formal schooling.*
3. *Prior to the intervention, children had few opportunities to engage in literacy activities as well as limited exposure to demonstrations of literacy in their family homes.*
4. *The families wanted their children to succeed at school, and after the intervention were willing to assist and support their children's literacy learning, both during school years and before formal schooling.*
5. *Families greatly appreciated and enjoyed home visits.*
6. *The families were happy for their child and themselves to be involved in an early literacy home visiting program.*
7. *Practical access to children's books before children attended school was a concern for families with limited transport options and financial means.*
8. *After the home visit intervention program, the children showed a strong interest in using writing implements and spending time with books.*

9. *The interest and enjoyment demonstrated by children in the program drew parents and other adults into literacy interaction.*
10. *Oral language was fostered by the encouragement and development of reading-like behaviour.*

9.3.2 Findings, Issues and Insights

The ten findings and relevant issues from the literature will be discussed in relation to the study's guiding focus questions.

Focus Question One : What were the parent's understandings and experiences of school and literacy?

The first two findings relate to this focus question and each will be discussed in turn.

***Finding One** : There was a wide continuum of literacy backgrounds, experiences and practices among the parents of the focus children.*

From the evidence of the families, it can be seen there was a wide continuum of backgrounds, experiences and literacy practices among the parents of the focus children. Five of the eight parents experienced considerable failure at school and four of these were placed in special education classes. [All adults and children involved in the study are protected by pseudonyms.] Dianne and Trevor Dobbs, Linda and Michael Benton and Steven Crean struggled with low levels of literacy in their daily lives. They faced difficulties in reading and writing with both official forms and leisure activities. They were unable to read magazines to their satisfaction, let alone novels.

Other parents, such as Karen Crean and Jane Rosedorp, enjoyed their education more and achieved some success up to year ten level. They felt their literacy abilities were sound, and had no difficulty leading their lives in a literate society. Jane Rosedorp was the parent most enthusiastic about reading and writing, and enjoyed writing poetry as a leisure activity.

None of the parents could afford to purchase the literacy materials they enjoyed. Daily newspapers, magazines and books were rare treats and were shared among friends and family. The free local paper, however, was a significant source of information for the families and was looked through and read each week.

***Finding Two** : Families did not appear to be aware of the significance of young children's literacy experiences prior to formal schooling.*

Families appeared not to be aware that children developed significant literacy understandings and knowledge in the years before school, and that families build a foundation for literacy experience and success within the home. In some families, early literacy, was initially understood in terms of formal learning and seen as the province of schools and teachers, rather than a role for the family.

The parents in the study believed that their children were not yet ready for reading and for sharing stories. One mother, Linda Benton, explained that she did not want to 'force' her daughter. The parents in the study all stated that their children were not interested in print before the program began, that they never looked at books and didn't want stories read to them. All felt their children were not yet ready for literacy learning. Casual observation led mothers to believe that their children were uninterested and/or too restless to become involved in stories, songs, rhymes or book texts. They waited for signs of interest in literacy to emerge, and when they didn't, they assumed they would occur once the children started school.

The home visiting intervention, however, demonstrated in a low key way that literacy was not something that waited for school, that it was something young children discovered and enjoyed through interaction in the home. Home visits

showed parents a different side of their children - that their children were indeed active literacy learners keen to engage with, and explore the world of print. Parents were surprised and delighted by this new perspective and responded positively to their children.

Focus Question Two : What literacy experiences were the children having in terms of the home environment and family interactions, both prior to, and during, the program?

The third and fourth findings are relevant to this focus question.

Finding Three : Prior to the intervention, children had few opportunities to engage in literacy activities as well as limited exposure to demonstrations of literacy in their family homes.

Researchers Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988), Heath (1983), Schiefflin and Cochran-Smith (1984), and Teale (1986) conclude that low income families are participants in our literate world. This study produced some evidence in support. Parents varied greatly in their reading and writing abilities. Some read and wrote for pleasure as well as functional purposes. Yet all families had to contend with the official documentation and forms required by government agencies to ensure income, health and housing. Some parents, however, had to seek help within their families in order to cope with the literacy demands of their lives.

Anderson and Stokes (1984), Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) and Teale (1986) go further to contend that low income children are actively involved in the literate life of the family. These researchers produced credible evidence to support the view that children in low income families are surrounded by literacy events. Teale, in his 1986 study, detailed a high frequency of literacy related events in twenty two low income urban homes in San Diego. Anderson and Stokes (1984) also observed a wide variety of print related activities which low income children were involved in either as a participant or interested observer.

This study, however, produces evidence that stands in contrast to their research. A quite different reality is suggested for these *First Start* families. Before my intervention, opportunities for the focus children to be involved in, or exposed to modelling of literacy activities in their family homes were limited. No parents read with their children, even on an occasional basis. No families bought magazines regularly or newspapers on a daily basis as they were considered too expensive. The Sunday newspaper was most likely to be bought because it had a free weekly television guide within it.

Children in the focus families had limited access to writing materials at home prior to the intervention, and in two families they were deliberately kept from the children for fear of them being used inappropriately. The children were said not to ask for them either.

Parents in this study perceived their child was neither interested in, nor ready for, reading or writing. This perception was based on observations that children had demonstrated little curiosity about books or other environmental print. They had, therefore, not attempted to provide literacy experiences for children. No parent read with a focus child on a regular or even occasional basis. This was consistent across the nine families in the *First Start* program. This appears to be at variance with the Williams' (1990) Australian study of the home reading practices of parents with preschool age children, even those families considered low income or disadvantaged. Williams discovered regular book sharing between mother and child to be a widespread phenomenon in the Australian community, whether the family was low income (93.36%) or middle class (98.93%). Although it may simply be the case that these nine families are representative of the small percentage that do not read with their preschoolers, it may also be that mother-child reading is not as prevalent in the Elizabeth area, or perhaps in other areas of poverty.

Furthermore, exposure to adult modelling of literacy was rare for these four young focus children. Certainly, all families and homes were involved in both functional and leisure literacy activities. They had bills to pay, they needed visible reminders of appointments, and they wrote letters and even poetry in one case. Yet many of these events were invisible to the young children in this study. Parents usually waited for peace and quiet before engaging in reading and writing activities - that is, until the children were in bed or out of the way, before they wrote or read. This was the case whether the activity was of a functional or leisure nature. It appears that while literacy events were part of the fabric of their daily lives, they were generally not seen, or participated in, by the children. While models of literate behaviour may be alive and well in some families, it appears they are, to some extent, invisible to the children. Some children, however, observed demonstrations of literacy from an older brother or sister, or at kindergarten.

The third finding, therefore, fits better with the work of Purcell-Gates, L'Allier and Smith (1995), who documented wide variation in the extent to which print mediates the lives of low income families and their children.

***Finding Four**: The families wanted their children to succeed at school, and after the intervention were willing to assist and support their children's literacy learning, both during school years and before formal schooling.*

A number of researchers (Cairney and Munsie 1992, Edwards 1989, Goldenberg 1989, Mavrogenes 1990, Snow and Barnes et al 1991), contend it is a myth that low income families are not interested in their children's education. This study strongly supports this contention. All parents wanted their children to do well at school, and were prepared to do whatever they could to assist them. They recognised that a solid education would be prerequisite for future success. Some parents, bitter about the lack of assistance they received from their own parents, were determined to support

their children's education.

Parents with unhappy memories of school and teachers held fears for the education of their children and were especially concerned that their children did well at school and avoid the unhappiness and failure they had experienced. Those with low levels of literacy were concerned about being able to provide enough support to their child and they worried whether their own literacy background would enable them to do this effectively. As described by Miller, Nemoianca and Dejong (1986:13), schooling and literacy were "valued, hoped for, sought after but not taken for granted" by these low income parents.

Parents also felt it was important to act on behalf of their children to ensure the school and the teachers carried out their professional duties properly. The importance of parents' taking on an advocacy role for their children is noted by Auerbach (1989) and Williams (1991).

Toomey, Keck and Atkinson (1987) and Cairney and Munsie (1992) suggest that while most parents are committed to the successful education of their children and are willing to help, many have little idea of how to accomplish this. Parents, especially those with preschool aged children, are unaware that they can foster literacy development in their child. The parents in the study were not aware that the development of literacy had its foundation in the family home, even before children were old enough to attend school. They did not realise early literacy could be fostered both by direct, deliberately provided experiences such as book sharing and also by indirect means of modelling and interacting with their young children during daily living literacy experiences.

The Effects And Influences Of The Intervention

This finding also contributes information about how the literacy experiences of the focus children expanded during the intervention. The children savoured

the opportunities to write when I wrote, and to explore writing both independently and in partnership with adults. They also gained satisfaction from quiet, independent exploration of books (often done in their bedrooms), reading-like behaviour and shared reading events with adults, siblings or favourite toys.

As a result of the intervention, all parents expressed surprise and delight about the interest demonstrated by their children. The focus children requested and/or demanded that adults read and write with them, or be an audience for their independent read aloud performances. The unmistakable enjoyment of the children drew the parents and other adults into interaction with books, finger plays, nursery rhymes etc. This study, therefore, supports the view of the child as an inquisitive literacy learner initiating literacy events (McNaughton 1995; Schickendanz & Sullivan 1984; Spreadbury 1994; Teale 1986).

The results of my intervention also appear to support the comments expressed by parents in a McCormick and Mason study (1989). They reported that children frequently used the little books at home, and initiated shared reading events with others. Comments by parents in that 1989 study that they were unaware their child was interested in books until the books came home, echo closely the observations of parents that I visited. Such comments were also a feature of the *La Trobe Parents and Reading Project* (Toomey, Keck and Atkinson 1987). During the home visiting program, parents read, played, sang and wrote with their children.

Focus Question Three : How did the children and other family and household members respond to the home visits?

Findings five, six and seven contribute information relevant to this question.

***Finding Five** : Families greatly appreciated and enjoyed home visits.*

All families in the study expressed positive attitudes to the home visits and

recommended them to friends as worthwhile. They all commented on how much they and the children got from the visits. They felt their children had learned a great deal during the program. The observed and reported that the children had discovered enjoyment in reading, writing, singing and playing with literacy, whether in an individual or sharing situation. Furthermore, the parents of the three out of four children who had delayed speech believed the home visits and time spent with reading and singing texts had stimulated the children to expand their oral language.

***Finding Six**: The families were happy for their child and themselves to be involved in an early literacy home visiting program.*

This study shows that low income families, including those unlikely to have the confidence and self esteem to volunteer for parent education programs on early literacy, can be happy for their preschool child and themselves to be involved in an early literacy home visiting program. I believe many of the parents in the *First Start* program would not have attended direct parent education courses, whether they were organised in a kindergarten, school or even in their homes. Many parents, such as Dianne Dobbs and Linda and Michael Benton, would have felt uncomfortable or even threatened in a direct teaching situation, however sensitively it was planned. Their negative experiences of school and teachers would have kept them away from a parent education course.

Others would have felt it was unnecessary and/or that they didn't have the time to attend. Karen Crean, for instance, had a busy life with many hospital and doctors' visits and continual tiredness from poor quality sleep because of her daughter, Marie. It is unlikely that she would have attended sessions about literacy and the preschool child rather than relaxing at home. Yet these parents all stated that the home visits were worthwhile, both for their children and for themselves.

Parents also reported that the home visiting program had benefits for them as parents. They were excited to discover how interested their children became in reading and writing, the range of literacy behaviours their children developed, and as a result, they saw their children in a new light. They also said they learned activities they could do with their children and ways of interacting.

***Finding Seven** : Practical access to children's books before children attend school was a concern for families with limited transport options and financial means.*

Involvement in the home visiting program meant that the focus children had a selection of books from which to choose on a regular basis. Parents explained that the children had become accustomed to, and enjoyed this routine. Concern was expressed about how a source of books could be maintained once my visits ended.

For a number of reasons families found children's books difficult to access. None could afford to buy many books for their young children, although as a result of the program all reported an intention to purchase books. Favourite books were put on layby to be paid off by Christmas and books were given as birthday presents by family friends. Inexpensive 'Little Golden Books' were also bought from supermarkets.

Some parents used the mobile toy library, but explained that it carried few books from which to choose. Neither were the local kindergartens a source of library books as they are in some areas. The kindergartens attended by three of the four children (the other child was not yet old enough) did not have a policy of lending library books to the children to take home.

Moreover, the local library was not used by any parents in the program. There

were understandable reasons why the library was underused. Parents without cars found it difficult to get there; there were concerns about the possible misbehaviour of children; and some parents felt uncomfortable in library surroundings. Possible solutions are suggested in the following section on implications.

Focus Question Four : In what ways was home visiting useful in encouraging emergent literacy and parental involvement in young children's literacy?
The eighth, ninth and tenth findings are related to this question.

***Finding Eight** : After the home visit intervention program, the children showed a strong interest in using writing implements and spending time with books.*
The home visiting was indeed a useful stimulus for early literacy development. In this study, a good deal of individual reading and browsing occurred, writing exploration was fostered, and much adult-child literacy interaction was evident.

The children looked forward to the visits and worried if I was a little late arriving at their homes. They certainly enjoyed the opportunity to browse through and choose some books that they wanted each week. They all wanted to borrow many more books each visit than I could allow. Parents were amused when they attempted to keep additional books. Marie would make a number of attempts to sneak extras into her room and even lie on top of them to stop me from collecting them up and packing them away.

They all spent much time in independent reading, often in the quiet and privacy of their rooms. Kylie, Missy and Marie read their books daily or almost each day, while Jamie read quietly to herself on most access visits.

The four girls also came to enjoy sharing texts with others. They invited or insisted that their family and household members read to them and with them.

They would either ask directly, or indirectly by picking up a book and taking it to an adult. Missy even 'invited' me to read with her by teasing me about what she could see in the book she was holding, "You don't know what I'm seeing!".

All the children became quite involved in the books they shared and looked at by themselves. Missy would meet me at the front door with a favourite book and tell me all about her favourite parts. She wanted to explore all the books in the *Grug* series. She also organised to pack her books when she went for an overnight stay with her father or foster nanna. Marie would use her name instead of the name of the fictional character and read the story as if it was happening to her. Kylie enjoyed reading stories to her toys, and pretending she was a teacher reading to children just as she had seen at kindergarten. The children were also especially interested in the little messages I would leave for them on post-it notes and proudly stuck them on the refrigerator or on their bedroom doors.

The children became active participants in shared situations, even though it took longer for Kylie to become comfortable with this. They sat on my lap or close by and looked at and talked about the illustrations in the books. They laughed, expressed opinions and pointed out things of interest. The girls would also join in the story rendition whenever they could and would repeat and echo what I had just read. They all developed reading-like behaviour and discovered great satisfaction in their closer renditions of text.

Writing behaviour also received an important boost during the intervention. The girls appreciated occasions to observe and participate in writing events. They also revelled in the opportunity to own and use a variety of writing implements. They wanted to write whenever they saw me writing. They wrote on my visit and field note book, they also wanted to write on sheets of post-it pad paper just as I did. The large diaries also stimulated shared writing events between them and their parents.

Without the stimulus of the home visiting intervention, it is likely that the children's early literacy development would have been left largely dormant until the children began school. I feel, as I believe the parents would also have felt, that it would have been a wasted opportunity.

Finding Nine : The interest and enjoyment demonstrated by children in the program drew parents and other adults into literacy interaction.
This, I feel, was the heart of the program's success. Parents developed their understandings and perceptions of their children as literacy learners through their observations. Both before and during the program they followed the lead of their children. Prior to the intervention, however, parents judged their children as restless and not 'ready' for books, as they showed little or no interest in literacy, especially book related literacy. Concern was expressed about not pushing children who were not ready, and it was believed that interest would emerge as they grew older, settled down and went to school.

As the program evolved, however, parents observed and remarked upon the different behaviour they were witnessing from their children. They were surprised and delighted to observe their children exploring print, whether reading or writing, whether independently or in a shared, interactive situation during the home visits. They then came to see their children as active literacy learners. The obvious interest and the requests for literacy information and shared activities drew the parents and other adults into responding to the children. Once again parents followed the lead of their children, but this time it was into literacy partnerships. Children requested shared stories, an audience for their reading-like behaviour, participants in stories, rhymes, fingerplays and songs, and help with writing. Parents and other adults could not, and did not, want to refuse the children, and so they were happily drawn into literacy interaction with their children.

Furthermore, parents made good use of the literacy modelling I demonstrated as home visitor, and actively set up literacy situations for their children. They initiated shared reading and writing events, such as writing a shopping list together, scribing for drawings, encouraged the learning of the alphabet and how to write letters, invited children to come to them for stories and scaffolded literacy events in order that their children could participate more fully.

Finding Ten : Oral language was fostered by the encouragement and development of reading-like behaviour.

Reading books, both to themselves and to their families, appeared to prompt the speech of children with underdeveloped oral language. Both parents and I observed significant progress in the speech of the three focus children with delayed speech. Through books the children became interested both in the look and sound of the words. Sharing of literacy activities also increased the amount of time adults spent talking with children. Furthermore, Marie's speech therapist was most supportive of the home visiting program. She included some of the literacy activities in her program and glued the rhymes, songs and fingerplays I had written out into Marie's speech book for them to share also.

9.4 SUMMARY

The home visiting program, therefore, was a most useful way to increase parents' awareness of the significance of early literacy development and their role, and to encourage parental involvement in literacy related activities with their children. When I look back on the program however, I am acutely aware of things I could have, and perhaps should have, done with the children. For example, it would have been worthwhile to include more nonfiction material (although very little was available at that time for such young children), and have a stronger emphasis on environmental literacy. Nevertheless, the *First Start* intervention had clear and positive effects, even within families coping with difficult circumstances, and no family wanted the visits to come to an end.

9.4.1 Discussion

I was not trying to play school literacy, even though I must have been influenced by my background as a junior primary teacher. I felt I was encouraging children to discover the fun and joy of playing with literacy, showing parents the potential in their children, and fostering vital literacy interaction between parents and children.

In an analysis of home based visiting early childhood programs, Lombard (1988) noted that they were all based on the assumption that interaction is a feature of the parent-child relationship. Lombard concluded that all these programs shared a philosophy in common, that by influencing either the input of parents or children, it is possible to positively influence the effects of the interaction itself.

Virtually all the programs that I examined in the literature attempted to foster and enrich parent-child literacy interaction by influencing the input of the parents through parent education sessions. This program, however, was based on the belief that many parents, especially those with low levels of literacy themselves, might be uncomfortable attending 'how to' classes or having people teach them directly in their homes. How then can you reach out to these parents. My belief is that all parents want to help their children, and that it is possible to foster parent-child literacy interaction in a more comfortable and indirect way by offering a genuine service to their young children and allowing the enthusiasm of the children to draw their family into literacy interaction. This is indeed what happened.

Many factors contributed to the achievements of the home visiting program. The inclusion of a wide variety of literature, (simple brief books in addition to the more complex stories) were appreciated by the children and their families.

Musical books, story/song books, finger plays and action rhymes were appreciated by the children and their families, and also encouraged speech. Other literacy materials such as finger and hand puppets and vinyl story magnets allowed children to develop their sense of story in a fun, hands on way.

The use of simple books and lift-the-flap books was valuable for these children. Simple texts encouraged speech in those with delayed language development, and encouraged all the children to practise independent reading behaviour. It gave the children a sense of control over their reading. For example, they could recognise and remember the words in the simple books as well as the words under the flaps of the lift-the-flap books. A great sense of achievement was experienced when they could produce a close rendition of a text and read a book either to themselves or to someone else.

This evidence is in line with the results of the Mason and McCormick studies (1986, 1989). In these, simple texts were used with children attending *Head Start* preschool programs. Both the intervention by the researcher and the Mason and McCormick intervention focussed on the children themselves rather than the direct parent education of many other initiatives. Yet *First Start* was home based while the other was based in preschools. While the Mason and McCormick intervention was certainly valuable, I believe my intervention had wider benefits. The writing/drawing part of literacy was highlighted as well as the reading and sharing of texts. There was also the added support of the low key literacy modelling by the home visitor for parents to observe and to follow if they wished.

9.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL PROVIDERS OF EDUCATION AND EARLY LITERACY INTERVENTIONS

9.5.1 Low Income Families Need Better Access To :

*** Information about the significance of early literacy**

* **Information and demonstrations on how they can help**
* **Children's books and other literacy resources**

If, as this study suggests, some low income parents are unaware of the significance of early literacy, and the vital role of the family in the development of a young child's literacy, improved access to this information is necessary. Parents were unaware of the interest their child could demonstrate in books (or in discovering writing) until the child and books were brought together. It seems valuable, therefore, to organise for this to happen as early as possible in a child's life. Mothers would then be less likely to wait for their children to show signs of interest in books and literacy, as did the mothers in this study, and deliberately encourage active participation in literacy activities. Families, perhaps low income families in particular, also need ready access to books and other literacy related adjuncts such as puppets, vinyl story magnets, felt story pieces and tapes. Furthermore, access needs to be both comfortable, convenient and easy. Parents and children must be encouraged to borrow, and to be made welcome when they do.

Mother and baby health clinics would be a useful first place to introduce books etc. The baby clinic system in Pittsburg Pennsylvania, *Beginning With Books,* where families observe modelling of adult child book sharing, receive information about early literacy, a few free children's books as well as a voucher for another when they visit the local library, could be a valuable model on which to base an intervention. Many Children And Family Services (CAFS) clinics in South Australia already have a selection of books for parents to borrow, and so it is a sensible idea to extend borrowing to the children as well. A small library area with selections of sturdy children's books would be a valuable addition to any clinic. It would also be helpful to have parents and the clinic sister modelling reading and book sharing with children. Writing/drawing materials also need to be available to young children while they are waiting.

Such a program would be relatively simple to organise, and could be a comparatively low cost way to encourage family literacy activity.

It was found in this study that families did not use local council libraries for their young children either because they did not feel comfortable in them, or because of difficulties with transport. While children of school age have access to school libraries, parents of preschoolers would appreciate easier access to books for their under school age children.

Kindergartens and Early Childhood Services need to be made aware of the lack of access to books experienced by some families of preschoolers in low income areas, and they need to build better access into their programs. Kindergartens are usually accessible to families and certainly easier to get to than local council libraries. The playgroups and kindergartens attended by the focus children appeared to be an ideal source of books. However, they did not have book borrowing programs, due to insufficient resources and concerns that they could not afford to replace the inevitable lost or damaged books. Kindergartens need to provide for daily borrowing for children. Play groups and kindergartens, especially those in low income areas, require funding to build and maintain libraries for local toddlers and children. It is time there was increased funding to make books more available to families with young children.

The Mobile Toy Library Service offers another opportunity for bringing families and books together. It is used by many families of young children and could be another excellent source of books and literacy adjuncts. Mobile Toy Libraries already do an excellent job of lending toys and the service is greatly appreciated by parents. Unfortunately, they do not carry many book resources. The number of Mobile Toy Libraries and their selection of books could be expanded. This is another possibility that needs to be investigated by local education providers.

Even though these suggestions demand increased levels of funding they would help raise community awareness about the important role of the family in early literacy development, as well as improve access to books for families in low income areas. Sensitive home visiting programs are another excellent option. Home visits can bring a friendly and personal touch to this increased awareness. They have been shown to be make a valuable contribution to early literacy, and furthermore they are welcomed and appreciated by low income parents. Home visiting may be a relatively high cost option and should perhaps be targetted at those most in need.

9.5.2 The Importance Of The Home Visitor

This study reveals that low income parents and children can be reached and helped in their understanding of early literacy of early literacy by a home visiting program such as *First Start*. It seriously attempted to offer a valuable, nonthreatening literacy experience for families. Successful rapport between the home visitor and families was an essential element and a most satisfying part of this intervention.

Rapport between the home visitor and the families was enhanced by a number of factors. As a female and a mother I found I could relate easily to the mothers that took part in the study. We had much common ground for discussion and enjoyed relating on a mother to mother basis. As a female I was probably also less threatening to the males in the study. My professional and personal knowledge and experiences of young children and early literacy also stood me in good stead.

Future home visiting interventions will need to explore what combination of factors make an effective home visitor. Do visitors really need to be mothers, or professional or paraprofessional educators? Can male visitors be effective,

and what would be the possible benefits of a male role model to the young boys and fathers in an intervention? Furthermore, what personal characteristics may be important to the success of visits? Exploration of the home visiting intervention option may also need to consider the content and practice of the visits themselves. Questions abound, and they need to be addressed.

9.6 FINAL COMMENT

Smith-Burke (1989) calls for research that establishes adequate and relevant knowledge and understanding of literacy within low income communities. This home based early literacy intervention documents the understandings and practices of literacy in four families in a low income area of South Australia. Despite limitations, this exploration, grounded in the lives of low income families, allows a 'holistic' view of each child and her family to emerge, and offers some interesting and valuable insights and information about family and early literacy in Elizabeth.

A wide continuum of literacy backgrounds, experiences and practices was found to exist. No parents, however, were aware of the significance of young children's literacy experiences before the age of formal schooling and none read or wrote with their young children. While parents and other household adults were involved in a variety of print related activities, many of these events were invisible to the children. The focus children, therefore, had few opportunities for either exposure to adult literacy modelling or to participate in literacy events prior to the intervention program. Access to literacy information and resources emerged as a concern for these families and is an issue that needs to be addressed.

There was no doubt parents wanted their children to succeed at school. They saw school success as a key to a better life for their children, and came to realise that they had an important and indeed enjoyable role to play in early

literacy development.

The children, parents and other household members responded positively to the intervention and were pleased to be able to participate in the *First Start* program. The interest and enthusiasm demonstrated by the children drew the parents and other adults into literacy interaction with the children and this was, I believe, a major factor in the success of the program.

The *First Start* home visiting program seemed to meet many needs of the children and the adults in the families. It encouraged both the personal forces of the children as active problem solvers, and the social forces of positive moment to moment interaction between children and family members (McNaughton 1995). The focus children became active literacy constructors and learners and the adults responded positively to their interest and enjoyment. These forces combined to foster appropriate conditions for early literacy learning and to create the "learning and development system" detailed by McNaughton (1995:8)

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FIRST START

A WEEKLY HALF-HOUR PROGRAMME OF

play
conversation
stories
activities

FOR CHILDREN AND PARENTS

AT HOME

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE INVOLVED OR TO KNOW MORE,
TELL ANNE OR DEBBIE ON THE TOY LIBRARY,
OR
PHONE LIZ ON 282 3513

FIRST START PROGRAM - INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

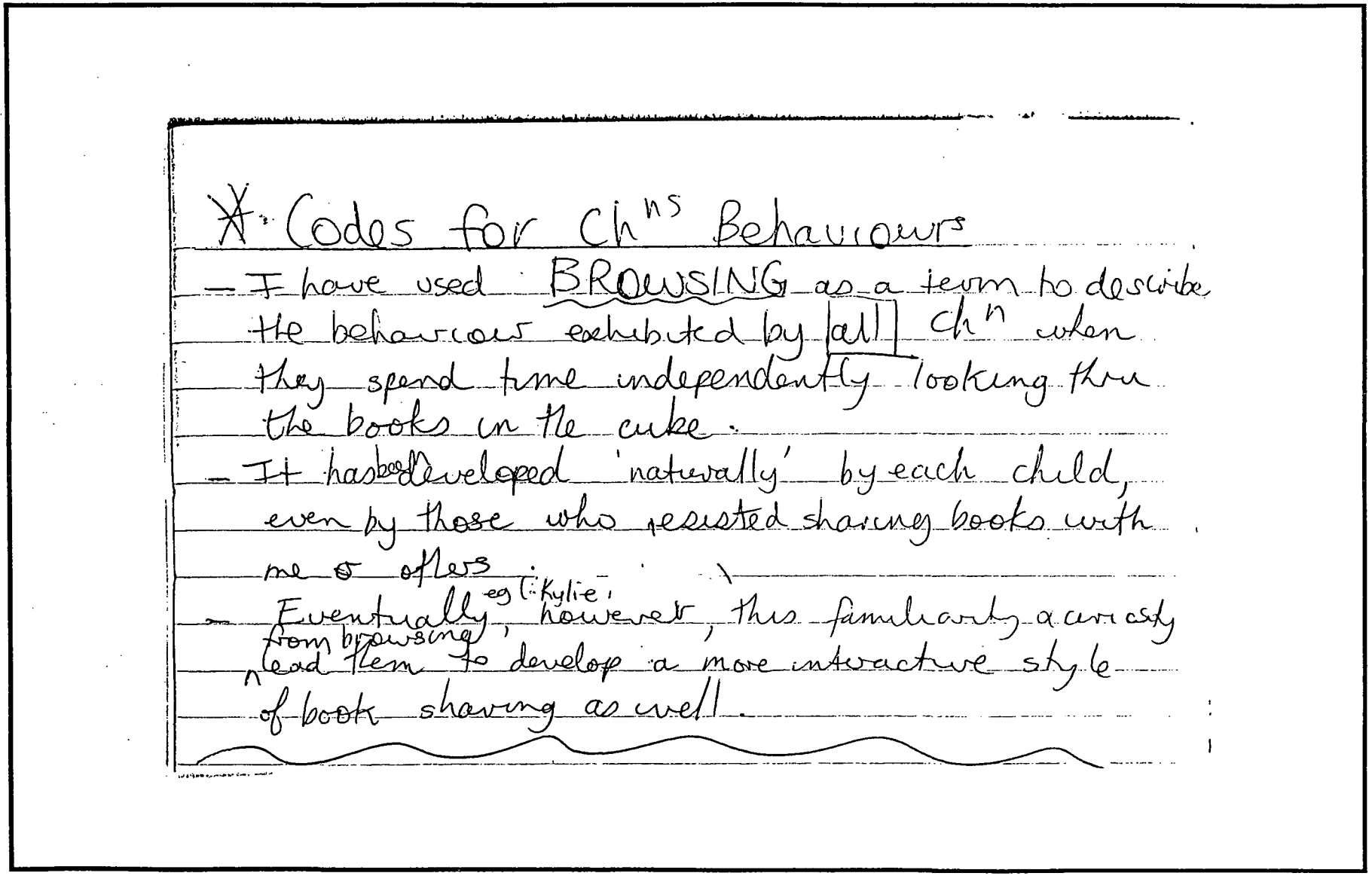
This program is the beginning of a major project to help children in the Elizabeth/Munno Para area develop the skills they need to be confident and enthusiastic about learning both before and after they start school.

A person accustomed to working with young children and parents will visit your home for thirty to forty-five minutes each week, bringing with her a selection of stories and activities for your child to enjoy. She will also talk with you about leaving some materials and books for your child to use, either alone, with brothers or sisters, or with you. It is by doing such things as listening to stories, drawing, cutting and pasting doing puzzles, and above all sharing in and talking about everyday events within the family that young children lay the foundations for later reading and writing.

The basic belief underlying this program is that parents are the first and most effective educators of their children and that they should be supported in their often difficult parenting role. So all of us who are involved in the program will be learning from each other. The home visitors will need to learn from you and your child, and hopefully you and your child will be able to learn from them.

If you have any questions or concerns about the program at any time, talk to your home visitor or phone Liz Pritchard on 282-3515
282-3513





* Codes for Ch^ns Behaviours

- I have used BROWSING as a term to describe the behaviours exhibited by all Ch^n when they spend time independently looking thru the books in the cube.
- It has been developed 'naturally' by each child, even by those who resisted sharing books with me or others.
- Eventually, however, this familiarity accessed from browsing lead them to develop a more interactive style of book sharing as well. eg: Kylie:

FIELD NOTES - K

hands -"No". I turned the chart over and put her hands on the empty space. Now she was happy for me to draw around them.

* Next I asked her if she would like to use scissors to cut the paper, and received a "Yes" response. She cut pieces of paper and put it on the chart. I glued them on the hands.

* Jason came in from outside and sat with Kylie He said K had asked him to help her with cutting. I found another pair of scissors for his use. I showed him the fingerplay and read it to him and demonstrated the actions. I said it would be a good idea if he played it with her.

* They seemed content sitting together cutting so I went into the kitchen to show Linda the Vocabulary Checklist I had been given by speech therapists after the last visit. I informed her they said they would see Kylie by October. She told me that on the morning of 14th of September Kylie will be having her hearing, speech and other forms of development checked & that she would be attending.

The special education person has certainly moved fast after our discussion last Wednesday. I wonder what they will come up with. I feel there is more to Kylie's slow development than delayed speech.

* Linda and I went through the Vocabulary Checklist marking off words K uses in a spontaneous manner. I left it with her to complete during the week.

* I asked K to bring last weeks books so I could mark them off. She picked up my biro and like other visits began to write in my exercise book. She pointed to her marks and said what sounded like "P.P.R." (that is pee, ar)

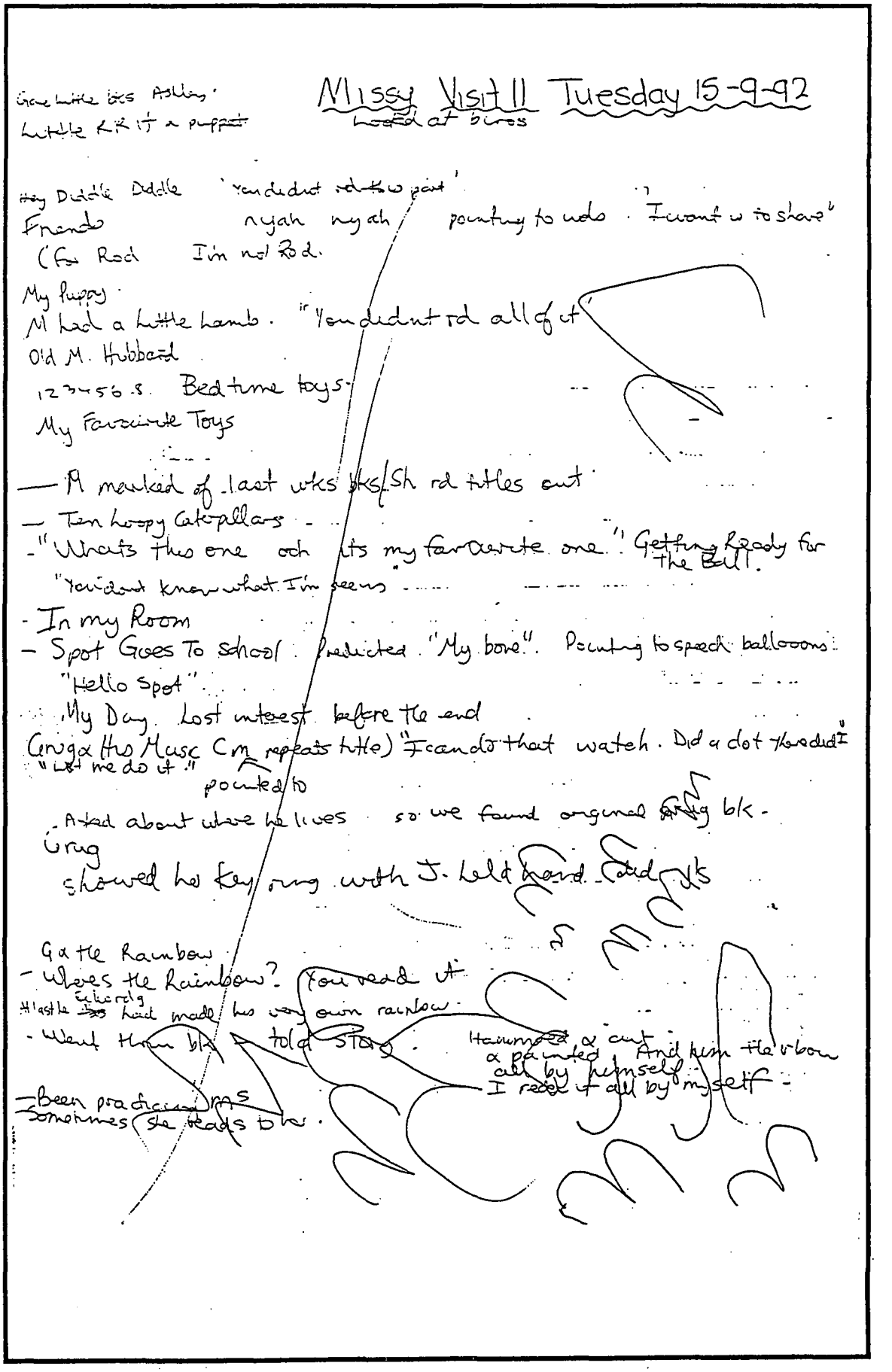
I wonder where she has picked up the letter names from and how I might be able to follow up on this.

* I told her it was time to choose her new books. she sat on her bed and browsed. Eventually she chose My Favourite Toys; Spot's First Words; A Scrumptious Sunday; and Our Dog Sam. When I asked herif she'd like me to read them to her once again she said "no' and shook her head.

* I felt determined I wasn't going to leave until I had shared some stories with her, so I leaned on the bed next to her and began to read through the four stories. AHA! the stories caught her attention and she followed as I read.

* I asked Linda how Kylie had been using books this week and she said she'd been looking at them by herself in her room.

* I said goodbye to everyone and they all came out to the car.


Missy Visit II Tuesday 15-9-92
looked at times
Hey Diddle Diddle
Friends
(For Rod I'm not Rod.
My Puppy
M had a Little Lamb.
Old M. Hubbard
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8. Bed time toys.
My Favourite Toys
- M marked off last wks
- Ten Loopy Caterpillars
- In my Room
- Spot Goes To school
- My Day
Group
showed her key ring with J.
Gentle Rainbow
- Where's the Rainbow?
- Went through
- Been practising
Sometimes she reads to us.
I want to shave"
pointing to words
"I can't do that watch. Did a dot then I did"
"Let me do it."
pointed to
- Asked about where he lives so we found original
Hamper & cat
a painted
all by himself
I read it all by myself -