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An evaluation of the family support initiative at Galbraith Elementary School

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AN EVALUATION OF
THE FAMILY SUPPORT INITIATIVE AT
GALBRAITH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Abstract

This paper discusses the issues involved in family support, and describes the family room initiative implemented at Galbraith Elementary school in the 1996-97 school year. A series of three focus groups were held with staff, students, and parents involved in the program. Each group discussed five key areas in the project which included how and why people became involved in the program, examples of parental and community interaction, how the project changed parenting skills, what additional community resources were being utilized, and how the program could improve. The findings from this research indicate that parent advocacy, staff ability to communicate with parents, and a sense of place for parents in the school are enhanced by this program.

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Making Connections is the name given to the family room initiative at Galbraith Elementary school. This title is curious because it can mean different things in different contexts. As a name it is a noun -- a thing which can be identified, manipulated and evaluated. Yet "making connections" can also be a verb -- a singular activity or a life-long task. The project is aptly titled, for this name describes not only an identifiable program, but also what the program hopes to accomplish.

As the world approaches the turn of the century, the idea of connectedness now expands beyond individuals and includes interaction among countries, economies, institutions, and populations. The visual imagery associated with "the web" envisions a world of transversing connections, and optic cables that allow for interaction between people and things. Environmental concerns call for people to "join together" to stop global warming and acid rain. While the world appears to be merging and dissolving once rigid boundaries, individuals are left with the task of finding their place in the mega systems that are evolving, while maintaining the primary social contact essential for human well being.

Making connections is a way to live in the world. It is about how individuals manoeuvre through and amongst institutions created to define and organize individual experience. Traditional institutions have defined people's roles and responsibilities in the community. Family and kinship relationships have established social status, gender roles, and economic fortune. Parentage determines who lives with whom, who inherits what, and whom one is able to associate with. It is a fundamental example of how connections with other people are made.

Likewise, education as an institution has held a primary responsibility to the democratic and participatory goals of the countries and communities that have built public schools. Education is a mandated institution in which every young person will become involved. Even though attempts have been made to equalize the education of children; socioeconomic status, community support and parental involvement are important contributors to children's educational success. (Corely & Fowler, 1996).

Schools have traditionally been viewed as universal equalizing agents in increasingly pluralistic societies. Examples of this mandate can be found in the Progressive movement of the early 1900s. John Dewey's vision of progressivism in education was "instilled with political consciousness and activism on behalf of reform and regulation" (Gutek, 1991). Public education was a way to instill the values and skills necessary for active participation in a democratic society. Today, public schools are still viewed as a means to reach the masses and effect change in the lives and thoughts of a changing populace.

Ideals about how people interact and connect with others exist in the institutions used to organize individual activity, yet the individuals that make up the families, classrooms, and populations of society come from their own particular experience -- their own set of circumstances. Samantha, for example, comes from a single-parent home. She is nine years old and one of four children. Her fifteen-year-old brother has left home and his whereabouts is unknown. Her twin brothers are six years old and live in a small rented house with Samantha and her mother. The house is sparsely furnished with mattresses on the floor and blankets

heaped upon them. Her mother is a recipient of social assistance and has no high school education nor specific job training. Alcohol abuse is frequent and the children are often left without supervision.

Samantha has problems with personal hygiene, and is now home with her mother after a short time in foster care. Samantha is known to have participated in solvent abuse, and is a constant behaviour problem in school. She yells obscenities during lessons, steals supplies and lunches from other students, physically abuses other children during gym class, and uses sexually explicit language and gestures during classroom activities. Her academic performance is low, and she is having trouble learning to read. Interaction between the school and Samantha's family has been limited to a few phone calls and a case meeting with the special education department. These interactions have been frustrating for all parties involved, and there has been no improvement in Samantha's behaviour or academic achievement at school.

This is not a situation easily "solved." There is no quick fix. There are currently a number of social agencies involved with this family, each created to work for the benefit of children like Samantha. A societal belief in social responsibility is being met through the agencies involved in Samantha's life. The resulting programs uphold a desire to assist those in need and become the actions of a public desire to give Samantha and her family an opportunity to change their situation. Through all of these "programs" Samantha continues to live and learn, seemingly unaware of the numerous case meetings, and client files that grow on her behalf.

Hypothesis

My hypothesis is that schools can be useful resource centres and appropriate venues for family support. I am concerned with how family support is offered, and want to know how it becomes a part of people's lives, and in what ways it is able to affect change in the daily living practices of families. It is my opinion that family support programs are a worthwhile and necessary part of community life. Family support has existed in the bonds felt among friends and family. While public education is focused on providing children with academic and social skills that will prepare them to live as functioning members in a democratic society, I also believe that as a public venture, schools have a responsibility to the families and neighboorhoods in which they reside. The purpose of this paper is to look at family support within schools as a viable and purposeful part of public educaiton. It is with this purpose in mind that this paper will look at the response of the Canadian government to family support.

Government Responses

Canada is a country that values its social programs. Public health care, education, and social assistance programs are hallmarks of Canadian conscience. Diplomacy and negotiation are deemed as noble attributes of the Canadian people. Much of the information produced by the Canadian government on improving the welfare of children and their families, reflects these popular Canadian attributes.

The year 1979 was hailed as the International Year of the Child,

and the government of Canada formed a committee and released an action plan in response to this initiative. In an overview that spanned six years, life-skills education and increased knowledge about social programs and opportunities were promoted (Government of Canada [GC], 1984). Several government departments produced publications that were to be distributed to schools, community-based organizations, and individuals. These packages of information distributed the messages and materials that were intended to improve parenting skills. There was a sense that information could "cure" the problems people faced.

This document reflects the prevailing attitude towards family life education during the 1970s and early 1980s. Parents of lower socioeconomic status and minority groups were commonly thought to lack the knowledge and skills necessary to improve their circumstances. Professional people, like teachers, were viewed as having "knowledge and skills which parents are lacking and need in order to promote children's intellectual development" (Kasting, 1990). This period of family life education has been called the deficit model (Panitch, 1993). Parents were viewed as not smart enough to figure out what they needed to do to improve their circumstances. The Canadian response to the International Year of the Child supports this attitude of "deficit" parenting. Proper parent education was the solution to the problem.

By 1990, the deficit model had moved to a collaborative model of education. Professional knowledge was seen as different from that of parents, "not superior, but complimentary" (Kasting, 1990, p.8). Many parents found that professional boundaries between parents and

educating agencies decreased parent involvement. Programs were provided on terms that professionals defined (Kasting, 1990). An effort was made to work with parents rather than on their behalf.

This change in attitude is noticed in the <u>Children of Canada, Children of the World</u>, document produced by the government of Canada in 1990. The document suggested that educational institutions, the private sector, and government agencies work together to expand the role of schools. "Schools have become agents for services that were not previously considered within the realm of education" (GC, 1990, p. 52). Before and after school care, public health, and lifestyles issues were included in this expanded definition of the public curriculum.

The federal government's 1992 campaign entitled Brighter Futures became entrenched in Canada's Action Plan for Children, and contained a similar recognition that parent education alone was not the answer. It acknowledged that many Canadians were worried about the declining effectiveness of parent education and recommended parenting resource centres and support groups that would "enable them to share their experiences and learn from other parents" (GC, 1992, p. 26). Under the federal Brighter Futures initiative, provinces were charged with creating their own plans for implementing family support.

Alberta's reaction was to form the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families (PCSAF). This council published several documents which recommended community-based involvement that was family centred and close to home (PCSAF, 1993). Individualization of programs that were culturally sensitive, and partnerships with other government and private organizations, were encouraged.

The Commissioner of Services for Children (CSC) was appointed in Alberta in 1993, and called for a redesign of the current approach towards support for families. Calls were made for a restructuring of service delivery, reduction of complexity, and increased coordination between government services (CSC,1993). It was also recognized that a fundamental change in society's values and priorities was taking place, and the cooperation between private community resources and government agencies was stressed (CSC, 1993). Non-governmental agencies were asked to participate, and shared the government's concern for the increased inability to keep up with the changing needs of needy people (CSC, 1993).

Family support initiatives like the ones recommended in these government documents are now operating in the Province of Alberta (National Crime Prevention Council [NCPC], 1996). Agencies interested in crime prevention are echoing the sentiments of politicians. The alarming increase in crime committed by children has prompted other publicly funded associations to look at family support. A 1996 crime prevention model includes prenatal, birth level, preschool, and school level tiers of family support as a possible model for service delivery (NCPC, 1996). Schools are mentioned in every discussion as a possible and likely community base in the delivery of services in support of families.

A Discussion of Family Support

Family resource centres are "facilities that provide families with opportunities for support, sharing, learning and relaxation in informal

neighbourhood settings" (Mayfield, 1993, p. 47). They are described as grass roots organizations that are oriented to children and adults alike. They can take a variety of different forms, depending on the demographics, needs, and resources of a particular community.

While family resource centres appear to make sense, they only become legitimate when they are acknowledged by the school and community as useful (Mawhinney, 1993). Programs such as the CLUE (Community Link Up Education) outreach program in Ontario, were started by one teacher who desired to promote community enrichment as a means to increase the life chances of adolescents in her resource class. The project gained popularity as it became recognized by educational and community authorities. This recognition helped the teacher increase authority and effectiveness; however, not all people supported the effort.

> There are those kids in resource that we have not served,
> and will never serve. The danger I see is that if we try to do
> more than we're capable of doing, we will miss those kids
> that might be in the middle. We're not a social agency,
> we're a school (Mawhinney, 1994, p. 335).

There is a concern that much time, energy, and money can be wasted helping youth that are experiencing difficulty in school, let alone tackling the problems associated with their families. It is a central consideration in family support. What types of programs are effective? How do you know if family support services have prevented youth from crime, or the ravages of poverty? What responsibility do public institutions like schools have to the populations they serve?

It is conceivable that the preventative effects of family support may never be fully realized. While crime statistics and case file reports are readily available through social agencies, they usually contain the data of people having trouble. It is difficult to keep records on those who have limited contact, find the support they needed at the right time, and then move forward in their lives. In a study of the Parents as Teachers program, researchers looked for parent and child outcomes that would illustrate the program's effectiveness. Researchers used diagnostic lists and surveys of the program's characteristics (Pfannenstiel, Lambson, & Yarnell, 1991). Interviews were also used, and proved to be the most interesting to read, for it was there that one could see a glimmer of how the program had effected change (Pfannenstiel et al. 1991). It is clear that prevention is difficult to estimate.

In theory, intervention is an integral part of prevention, and there have been a plethora of family intervention models. Many of these models are outlined in the Literature Review of Early Intervention written by M. Panitch (1993). The article outlines several types of family intervention. Functional models, for example, focus on moving children to higher levels of cognitive awareness through highly defined lock step curriculams. It supposes that intervention and family support can be built up, like blocks in a tower. This model of support is family focused, and concentrates on individualized family service plans and the teaching of skills to parents. It is similar to the Biological and Transactional models, in that it predetermines what the family needs, and moves to implement those needs in an orderly manner.

Convergent models assume that no single agency can provide for all

of a child's needs, because children exist in families that live within a larger social system. Bronfenbrenner's ecology of human development provides a model that suggests that children exist in nested contexts that move from the family, to community institutions, to larger societal, political, educational, and economic systems (Panitch, 1993). Each context impinges upon the other, reacting and interacting, in ways that affect the family and ultimately the child. It is a transdisciplinary approach that looks to strengthen all family members. It focuses on parents defining what the type of support will be, and works to have the delivery of services unfold for the family. Parents are made aware of the programs available to them, and are then responsible to seek out the help they need.

The convergent model is a more holistic approach toward the provision of services for families. Successful interventions now recognize factors that put a child at risk as interactive and cumulative (Mawhinney, 1993). Family involvement is most effective when directed towards strengthening natural parent-child relationships rather than encouraging parents to assume therapeutic roles (Guralnick, 1990). Understanding how variables and contexts interact in the life of a family is now becoming the focus of many grass roots family support programs.

Community initiatives in support of families are not new to Alberta schools. An ecological research model of community development has been used to study community schools in Lethbridge (Falkenberg & Jones, 1991). The focus of such research sought to determine the effectiveness of community processes that occur in and around the schools, but with only limited success. "Effectiveness of this ecological

model to determine differences between a community school and one that is not is still in question" (Falkenberg & Jones, 1991, p. 5). The inability to "determine differences" may be the qualifying characteristic of this statement, for all schools serve a community building function in the neighbourhoods in which they reside. Interestingly, whether the school takes on the role of community meeting place, or family help mate, depends on the demographic makeup of the neighbourhood and the needs of the children attending school.

The difference between community schools for functioning families, and community outreach programs for families at risk, may be the manner in which services for children have been separated in the past. Services for mental health and child welfare have been separate from more mainstream sectors like health care, education and recreation (Shields, 1995). It can be difficult to create comprehensive services for youth when roles for service agencies compete for acknowledgement of service outputs, rather than child and family outcomes (Shields, 1995). Legitimization of school efforts in the larger community is difficult to maintain in neighbourhoods that house a multitude of families in crisis. Outreach, At-risk and crisis prevention programs, work to save the community from itself, rather than simply working to increase interaction within the neighbourhood.

Guralnick (1990) suggests that there are three parameters that work together in providing a framework for family support. The three P's: principles, paradigms, and practices, constantly work together in family support initiatives, and provide the framework in which programs operate. Principles and beliefs about home support are inherent in the

policies and practices used to reach families. These theories inform the models of delivery service that are used. Paradigms range from professional centred, to consumer-driven relationships of family alliance, to family determination of service delivery.

Galbraith school is a prime example of how principles, paradigms and practices have changed in response to evolving community needs. The school has been operating in the City of Lethbridge for 85 years and the changes that have been made to the delivery of education in that school are manifest in the different mission statements, staff and structural changes, and school program initiatives that have been implemented. The school itself becomes a working reality of the issues discussed here. A brief historical sketch of the school and its responses will outline the changes made in response to the surrounding neighbourhood, and will provide a context in which the evaluation of the Making Connections initiative takes place.

Galbraith School

Galbraith Elementary school was completed in 1912 at the edge of the then Lethbridge city limits. It was hailed as a "large and commodious building" (Lethbridge Daily Herald [LDH], 1912, p. 12) and the school board of the time was applauded for its vision in promoting the "solid advancement of the city" (LDH, 1912, p. 12). It was stated that the board had "in mind both the importance of the physical and mental well being of the pupils, and shows a most commendable regard for the healthy mind in the healthy body" (LDH, 1912, p. 12). Periodic medical examinations for all students were routine occurrences in these early

years as part of a commitment from public education to healthy living
practices in the community. The school was a

> provision, not only for the present but for the future, and
>
> will without doubt fulfil its purpose in furthering a branch
>
> of education which has hitherto to the disadvantage of
>
> all nations not been regarded in the same important light
>
> in which it is now reckoned (LDH, 1913, p. 4).

Lethbridge was then a mining town, and the new school of 1912 not only
taught children to read and write, it also increased community and civic
development.

The city has since grown up around Galbraith school which is now
currently situated in one of the oldest neighbourhoods in Lethbridge.
The original structure still stands, along with a major addition that was
completed in 1962. The physical refurbishing of the school made way
for the structural reshaping of the education offered within the building.
The late 1970s and 1980s saw an influx of immigrant people into the
surrounding neighbourhood, and a large low-income housing
development was established a few blocks from the school. An increase
in specialized programs began to proliferate in the school. By 1986
these programs included English as a Second Language,
Multiculturalism, Resource, Learning Assistance and Challenge
programs. Classroom support for teachers included a homebound
teacher and a child protection team which was supported by the Society
for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (Parent Handbook
Galbraith School [PHGS], 1986-87). The diversity in programs reflected
the diversity that was becoming more evident in the school population.

While mission statements were not yet in vogue for schools,
Galbraith had a school philosophy that reflected its focus for education.
This philosophy included: - Knowledge in basic skills

an increase in self esteem and respect for others

- a learning climate that stimulated curiosity

- responsible citizenship

increased physical fitness and health

promotion of the fine arts (PHGS, 1986, p. 5)

The broad range of educational goals that the school held as its
model for education, were designed to meet the needs of its increasingly
varied student body. The school's philosophy was the manifest
curriculum suggested by government, and public policy thinkers of the
time. Information, training and education were expected to fill the deficits
perceived in the community. Schools could serve as distributors of
specified programs which would address the cultural, physical, and
economic differences of the surrounding neighbourhood.

Canada's dedication to multiculturalism in the 1980s became a
defining characteristic of Galbraith school. The school slogan was "A
Rainbow of Cultures," and the word "welcome" was translated into
several different foreign languages around the front door. But the late
1980s and early 1990s also heralded economic restructuring of staff and
programs in the school. English as a Second Language was no longer
funded as a separate program, and resource and special education
programs moved towards integration into graded classrooms. The
Canadian commitment to multiculturalism remained strong and was
fiscally supported in the school with a five-year commitment from the

federal government.

The economic realities of the 1990s have left Alberta schools with diminished extra-curricular programs. Support from individual parents, business, and other community and governmental agencies is now being used to supplement school programs. Galbraith school, like others in Alberta, established stronger school councils throughout the 1995-96 school year, in an effort to coordinate the needs of the school and community more closely. Increased parental involvement, volunteerism, and donations from neighbourhood businesses and organizations were encouraged.

The current mission statement also promotes caring, but now includes parents as primary participants in the school environment. A noticeable change in the current mission statement, from the school philosophy of the previous decade, is the increase in parent and staff support. It acknowledges that education cannot be done by the school alone, and solicits family and individual participation in the schooling of children. It is a move from the specialized programs expressed in the 1980s, to a more collective and community oriented approach to meeting the needs of children.

The school reflects this change in its current school motto, logo, and mascot. "A Rainbow of Cultures" has been transformed into a rainbow umbrella held by the caring hare. "CARES" stands for Collaboration, Achievement, Respect, Excellence, and Safety. The image of a nurturing and enabling environment is promoted through school insignia.

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                     We Believe                        │
│                                                       │
│   Children will develop into responsible, caring,     │
│   life-long learners in a safe and positive learning  │
│   environment;                                        │
│                                                       │
│   The promotion of positive self-esteem fosters       │
│   considerate and responsible citizens;               │
│                                                       │
│   Parents, as the first teachers, should be closely   │
│   involved in a home and school partnership;          │
│                                                       │
│   All staff should feel safe and equally valued for   │
│   their professional competence and contribution.     │
│                                                       │
│   Galbraith school will continue to be hard-working,  │
│   progressive risk-takers embracing new ideas while   │
│   valuing the uniqueness of all individuals.          │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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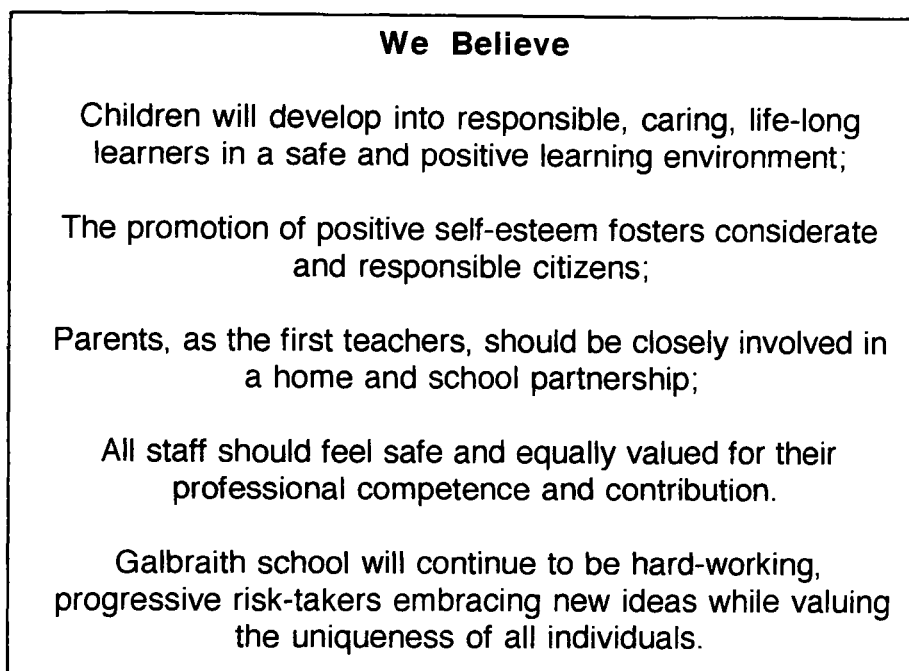
Figure 1
Galbraith School Mission Statement 1996

It is true that economic factors have been one of the primary forces that have brought about this shift in thinking, but changing community and societal needs have also contributed to this change in focus. One third of the school population originates from immigrant families to Canada, and students like Samantha are part of every classroom. The current political climate encourages downsizing in government and the public purse. Businesses are amalgamating and making new alliances with traditionally public institutions, and schools are creating new identities from the evolving milieu. Economic realities call for a reduction in the overlap among services, and an opportunity to understand the complexities between collective and individual rights.

The founding school board of Galbraith Elementary called for a

school that would become the centre for mental and physical well being. It called for a modern and collective meeting place that would forward the changing needs of the City of Lethbridge. There was a sense that individuals needed to come together to solve their own problems. The school has fulfilled these original desires well as it has adapted and changed to the surrounding community. It has placed education in the "same important light" in which it was intended.

The Family Room

The idea for a family room in the school came after the vice principal met with a distraught mother. She was asking for advice and help in dealing with his young daughter, and was overwhelmed by the case meetings and school challenges she and her daughter were facing. For example, the academic difficulties her daughter was facing were coupled with inappropriate behaviour in the classroom. As this mother was invitied to help the school overcome her son's obsticles to learning at school, she expressed her own desire to know more about parenting. From this conversation came the idea for a family room.

The vice principal wrote a proposal that was sent to the Alberta Commissioner for Children, and funding for the program was approved and subsequently came from this office. Donations from community businesses and agencies have also added greatly to the program. Partnerships were formed, a family support worker was hired, and a room in the school was designated as the family room. The room presently contains a full working kitchen, a children's play area, a lending library, and an informal sitting area.

The family support worker often participates in case meetings for individual students, and has been recognized as a parent advocate. She has organized community initiatives like Parent Break meetings, a successful community clothing exchange, the Community Kitchen program, a Games Lending Library, Music Therapy, Spanish classes, a haircut clinic, Project Child Recovery, and a preschool play group. Several other community groups also meet in the family room such as the Nobody's Perfect parenting group, a reading program for children called Rhyme Time, and a baby wellness clinic run by the health centre on an appointment basis.

The main purpose of the Making Connections program is to support the parents of students who attend Galbraith and Senator Buchanan Elementary Schools. Since the two schools share the same neighbourhood, they frequently work together. The family support worker offers one-on-one counselling and will make home visits to families, as well as providing connections to other agencies that could offer help. It is based on the idea that parents have a desire to do what is best for their children, and operates to encourage families in raising children.

The physical space in which the family room is housed, has been created to provide a homelike environment within the school. It encourages partents to feel like they have a place within the school, and extends to visitors a welcome place in which to meet. The following pictures show the kitchen and sitting area in the family room.

Kitchen   **Family Room**

Figure 2 Kitchen

Figure 3 Family Room

While parent education is a key component of the program, the family room also works as a meeting place for people to get to know each other. It works to build a sense of community among the parents of children who attend school. It is this connection among parents, agencies, and from school to the neighbourhood that is the Making Connections project. An example of how this program is working to advance these associations can be seen in the Community Kitchen program.

The aim of a Community Kitchen is to provide wholesome meals at minimal cost for families. It is designed to decrease daily workload in the home, and is an opportunity for people to work together, and get to know one another at the same time as they are increasing nutritional knowledge, cooking and budgeting skills. A planning meeting is held to decide on menu items to cook, and participants look through cookbooks and grocery advertisements for the best price on needed food items. A

time and date is set for cooking, and a per serving cost is calculated for each person. One person from the group collects money and buys groceries in advance to the cooking day. On cooking day several people spend a couple of hours together in the kitchen during which time they are able to produce anywhere from 4 to 8 main course meals for each family. The cost for these meals ranges from $10 to $20.

The three community kitchen groups that operate out of the family room at Galbraith school are weekly opportunities for community members to come to the school and prepare meals for their families. There are some regular participants in this program, while others choose to come on an occasional basis. The home management skills that are gained, are coupled with an increased sense of friendship and camaraderie. The Community Kitchen concept has been used successfully by church groups, and has proven to be a positive, hands-on venue for practical education and family support. The meals and cost savings involved make the work worthwhile, and the learning that takes place is embedded in the process. The school functions as a host and central meeting place for the program, rather than as the sole provider of education on how parents should provide nutritious, low-cost meals.

It could be argued that schools should not participate in programs like the Community Kitchen. Schools are, and continue to be, suppliers of formal education to children, and cannot hope to provide all of the familial and associated support offered by churches and other welfare organizations. Yet it is the school that houses the neighbourhood's children during the day, and it is the school that becomes the barometer of the individual and collective wellness of its children. While schools

cannot be responsible for sustaining all community support, they are a public endeavour, and the health of families, neighbourhoods, and societies are manifest through its children. It has become increasingly important for schools to acknowledge the impact of child wellness in the delivery of education. Schools become a playing field for larger societal struggles. Understanding the challenges that are embedded in the societal networks that surround children can help schools become more than warehouses for formal learning.

In an article published in 1993, Crowson and Boyd called for a new ecology of schooling. They illustrate how the needs of individuals are greatly influenced by the employment, education, and physical well being of the people with whom that individual lives and associates. How a person is able to connect and associate with the larger society provides the circumstances that affects family and child wellness. The circumstances of the parents or care givers affect children (Mawhinney, 1993). Risk factors that contribute to poor academic achievement and problematic behaviour in schools are interactive and cumulative. They do not solely stem from the single child, but from the associations formed around that child. Since schools are charged to educate the individual in a collective environment, attention is constantly given to these associations. Hence, schools are always working with families.

There has traditionally been a separation between specialized services for children, like child welfare and mental health, and the mainstream sectors of society that serve children such as health, recreation, and education (Shields, 1995). This separation suggests that children at risk need more specific attention than other children. If one

accepts the argument that children are potentially at risk because they are dependent on the social and economic welfare of their care givers, then this separation could be seen as problematic. It places the emphasis on assisting the individual child, rather than on the collective dynamics in which the child lives. Indeed, the overlap of services and separation between offerings makes complementary networks of programs difficult. Agencies become more interested in service outputs for individuals than in the family outcomes they could achieve (Shields, 1995).

Combining family support with education is a holistic approach to service delivery. The Making Connections program, and projects like the Community Kitchen, are a practical realization of the family outcomes discussed in social service delivery. The project is based on the idea that a school can be a crossroad for the associations that improve the lives of children. Making Connections is working to improve community relationships that affect how people work and live in a practical and meaningful way. Whether or not this goal is being achieved is the focus of the following research.

Research Model

In order to establish what is at work in the Making Connections program, and to gain a deeper understanding of the connections being made, an exploratory model of research was designed. Three focus groups consisting of parents, students and staff members were organized to discuss the five target areas of the project. The five areas in which information was sought included: why people became involved in

the project and how they participated; how the program changed community interaction with the school; whether Making Connections made changes in family life; how the program helped others learn about community resources; and how the program met the needs of children at Galbraith School. Several related questions were devised to be used as additional prompts and possible areas in which to expand the conversation (see Appendix A). Care was taken to keep the questioning language of such a nature that it could be readily understood by parents, teachers, and children alike.

The same questions, and conversation topics were used in all three focus groups. Parents, students, and staff members participated in their own respective focus groups so that there would be a somewhat homogeneous population involved in each discussion. The three groups also provided triangulation, and a means to validate the data collected. Since each group discussed the same five target areas in the program, an interesting comparison among each participant's participant perceptions of the project was possible.

An open invitation to all those involved in the family room was issued to the three focus group populations. Consent letters were distributed and all participants that eventually became involved agreed to have the group conversations tape recorded (see Appendix B). Parents, students, and staff members, were each invited to one of the three meetings. The parent focus group was held in the evening, with child care and a supper provided for participants. Students were invited to a morning meeting during the school day followed by lunch in the family room, and staff members met over pizza one Friday afternoon.

While attendance at the focus groups varied, each group maintained a random representation of the populations involved. Twelve people attended the staff focus group which included teachers, the child support worker, a special-needs assistance, and a member of the custodial staff. Because the invitation to participate in these focus groups was open, there was not a fixed number of people expected to participate. While only four parents, and four children participated in their respective focus groups, these participants were representative of the families involved in the project. Comments were shared among individuals from an immigrant family, a single parent household, and traditional family settings. These different perspectives allowed for a variety of responses, and as the parent and student groups contained fewer people, a more personal and lengthy response to the questions was possible.

As the group facilitator, I joined the group as a researcher, moderator, and fellow participant in the conversation. I have been involved with the program from its beginnings in October of 1996 and have had the opportunity to participate in two Community Kitchens, as well as several steering committee meetings. While I have had frequent contact with the family support worker and the school's vice principal, I had not had the opportunity to meet with any of the focus group participants prior to the arranged meetings.

My knowledge of the program and experience as a participant in some of its operations, enabled me to have a better understanding of the processes involved in Making Connections. It helped me to formulate questions and enabled me to steer the conversation towards the five

target areas described above. I was able to transcribe and analyse the data from each focus group, and copies of all groups were typed and made available for participants to read. While my own biases and values are obviously at work in this research, I made every attempt to bracket these assumptions before looking at the data collected.

This research model has produced some insightful and thoughtful comments on how the Making Connections program is working. It has been a useful way to discover the attitudes, opinions, and interactions that have, and continue to be at work in the project. The model of research described above, is part of a larger methodological practice that looks to explore why people think or feel the way they do. It is to this methodology that this paper will now turn.

Methodology

Focus groups "pay attention to the perceptions of the users and consumers of solutions, products, and services" (Krueger, 1988, p. 29). Traditionally focus groups have been used in the area of market and communications research. Commercial marketers have used them extensively to see how consumers feel or respond to a particular product.

Public Service organizations, have become increasingly aware of the need to understand how programs are perceived by the people they are intended to help. As part of an overall evaluation strategy, focus groups are becoming a useful way to find out what people think about social service delivery.

Evaluators must be able to use a variety of methods and techniques to get timely information to decision makers

about program processes and outcomes. Focus group
interviewing is an important part of a responsive evaluator's
repertoire because it has particular advantages in
providing in depth information from the perspective of
program participants. (Krueger, 1988, p. 7)

As delivery of public services has proliferated it has become important to
assess who is delivering what to whom and for what purpose. As
agencies begin to partner with business, and compete with one another
for limited public funding, the need to understand how and why people
use services is becoming increasingly important. Access to participant's
perceptions can help eliminate the overlap of services, and provide
meaningful input into service delivery.

Focus groups have been used to explore areas for further
research. The purpose of a focus group is to discuss the issue at hand. It
is a group sharing of opinions, rather than a consensus building
discussion. It is clearly not in the interest of a focus group to work at
solving a specific problem (Krueger, 1988). The group dynamic
encourages increased disclosure from participants, and from this
discussion comes the opinions that are used as the data for qualitative
research. From this data many areas of further inquiry are identified.
Thus, focus groups have traditionally been used as an exploratory
method to identify opinions and future areas of research.

Validity is a concern in all research, because it is the degree to
which the procedure really measured what it intended to measure. Focus
groups are intended to be " a group discussion that resembles a lively
conversation among friends or neighbours, and most of the problems

(with focus groups) come from topics that fail to meet this goal" (Morgan, 1988, p. 22). Indeed Krueger (1988) confirms that the largest concern for validity in focus groups, is the tendency for them to wander off topic, or to be used for topics that do not suit group discussion. Focus groups tend to have a very high face validity, in that they appear to make perfect sense. Decision makers often take the common sense comments of participants as infinitely reasonable, and make decisions without adequate skepticism. It is therefore useful to triangulate responses. Repeating focus group procedures with different populations as a means to check responses with those from another viewpoint. This triangulation of data can increase validity.

While there are several advantages to focus group research, it is important to analyse these in conjunction with the weaknesses also inherent in this procedure. Morgan (1988) outlines three basic strengths and weaknesses of focus group methodology.

One of the greatest strengths is the ease with which focus groups can be conducted. They are usually pleasant social occasions and allow for a myriad of opinions at one time. The corresponding weakness is that these groups are not situated in natural environments. Participants are usually strangers, in an uncertain situation. They may feel a strong desire to conform and censure their comments according to the perceived expectations of the moderator, or a particularly dominant member of the group. Carey and Morse (1994) agree, and have discussed this tendency in Carey's review of focus group discussions. "Not only is it possible that members could conform or censor their input to be socially acceptable but also they may actually mentally reconstruct

or "cognitively frame" their experience on the basis of the ongoing dialogue" (Carey, 1994, p. 236).

This tendency to conform is tempered somewhat by the group checking of perceptions that is constantly involved throughout the conversation. Other individuals may need to counter the opinion of others, or increase their own point of view in response to an oppositional voice. This tension is what makes the group dynamic an interesting and exciting venue for data collection, but it can also be one of the largest pitfalls in focus group research. Whether individuals exaggerate, conform, or submit to others, it is clear that individual responses will be affected by the censoring of the group.

The second strength and corresponding weakness that Morgan (1988) mentions is the group's ability to take information from interaction, and use it to stimulate their own thinking. The weakness here is that the researcher is never sure if this interaction is an accurate representation of individual behaviour. Indeed, the whole idea of focus groups is that individuals will be able to "feed" off each other. They will be able to remember things, and share ideas that would not be expressed through individual interviews. The moderator plays a role in redirecting this tendency by encouraging all participants to share in the conversation.

The third strength and corresponding weakness that Morgan (1988) discusses is the ability to generate opinions with only limited input from the moderator. This strength also means that the researcher has little control over the data collected. Morgan sees focus groups as occupying a position somewhere in between the more widespread methods of participant observation, which collect a vast amount of data

from natural settings, and individual interviews, which provide a voice for specific opinion.

> What focus groups do best is produce an opportunity to collect data from groups discussing topics of interest to the researcher....Because the researcher defines the discussion topics, focus groups are more controlled than participant observation, and because the participant-defined nature of group interaction, the focus group setting is less controlled than individual interviewing (Morgan, 1988, p. 22).

Since focus group research has tended to be exploratory, or illuminating, it has been described as " unsuitable for projection to a population" (Krueger, 1988, p. 42). While it is true that results tend to be population specific and it is unwise to make sweeping generalizations to larger populations from limited sampling, there are some cautious generalizations that could be made to populations with similar characteristics. For example, an individual who comments on what it is like to be a new immigrant to Canada tells a personal story that includes feelings, specific incidents, and particular personality characteristics. While these aspects can not be generalized to a larger population, it would be appropriate to generalize that the discomfort shared in this individual's story could be experienced by other immigrant people.

The focus group method was chosen for this evaluation project because it is an exploratory procedure that will allow many individuals from different vantage points to share their opinions. Since the focus of the family room is on making connections with other people, it is appropriate that group interaction be the venue in which data were

collected. It also allowed for an in-depth view of how participants in the program perceived the project and its purposes. Moreover, it provided a means with which people could share the attitudes that affect their lived experience, and could offer insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the program.

Selecting a specific research paradigm and methodology does not necessarily preclude other forms of assessment. Indeed one of the strengths of focus groups is its preparatory nature for different kinds of research. It is a starting point for formulating hypothesis and research questions (Byers, Wilcox, & Yuhas, 1988). It does, however, make a commitment to a certain theory of how knowledge and information are acquired, collected and disseminated. Since this theory is at work in the program as well as in the evaluative design for this project, it is worthwhile to discuss the larger beliefs manifest in this program and research.

Why Qualitative Research?

In the article <u>Understanding and Evaluating Qualitative Research</u> only 2.8% of the research projects published between 1989 -1994 in family studies were qualitative (Adler, Adler, Ambert, & Detzner, 1995). The lion's share of all research was quantitative in nature, meaning that the journals in family studies, psychology, and sociology were preferentially accepting research that yielded a specific type of data. In short they were looking for quantifiable research.

Numbers and percentages can be used to make mathematical probabilities and predictions. They are a large part of quantitative

research and rely on a belief in positivist principles, and an objective reality that can be exposed through scientific inquiry. Quantitative inquiry supports a world view that assumes a reality that can be known, studied, and tabulated. It proposes to make clear, what reality tends to muddy. It makes the assumption that the world can be known through rigorous, careful calculations, and that all can be known if it is broken down and studied long and hard enough.

The quantitatative outlook is looked upon favourably by people looking to make public policy decisions. It is easy to make appropriate decisions when they are backed up with hard facts. But as the review on family support literature in this paper attempts to make clear, information alone can not cure the social problems that emerge in all their complexities in schools. Avis (1993) explains how social relations, and the study of them, can be hampered by strict adherence to quantifiable research.

> For example, our positionality in terms of race, gender, class, sexuality and the fragmentation of these categories hold differing and often conflicting interests. Conflicts that are not easily resolvable and require structural change are rendered more complicated by the complexities of social relations. In attempting to transcend these conflict and to articulate these social differences a practice needs to be developed that goes beyond a pluralism that assumes a consensual base to society and the existence of a universalised truth that researchers can access" (Avis, 1993, p. 202).

While there is much to be learned from quantifiable research that can be readily applied to educational practice, it is the connections among individuals, systems, and ideas that make up the associations of real life. These connections and interactions are not knowable substances that can be clearly dissected and studied. They are continually evolving events within a larger environmental context. While quantifiable research can bring awareness to what some of those interactions are, it is difficult to uncover why they exist, and how people feel about them.

> Questions and methods have, at their base, assumptions about the nature of knowledge and the manner in which we can best understand the interactions of individuals and families. Qualitative family research is a broad term that covers a range of diverse epistemological assumptions and approaches, from the classical to the postmodern, from the interpretive to the structural (Adler, Adler, Ambert, & Detzner, 1999, p. 881).

Qualitative research is designed to understand complex interactions, and looks at lived experience as a cyclical and evolutionary process rather than as a defined linear progression of events. It is not as concerned with causal relationships, as it is with interpreting lived experience. Interpretive Inquiry is defined as "the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds" (Neuman, 1997, p. 69).

The Making Connections program is based on a similar premise. It is trying to develop the communications and interaction among

individuals and agencies that promotes community relationships.
Therefore, the evaluation of the project was designed to identify these
relationships, and to comment on the attitudes that are inherent in
parental support and school action.

At this point it is worth noting the division between theory and
practice that plagues education and social relations. Avis (1993) talks
about how "educational research tends to fold back into empiricism in
order to deliver a practice/policy orientation." The spoken intent of a
research project or program philosophy often differs from the practices
used to implement policy. In short, when the interpretive process
becomes murky, practitioners usually grasp onto clearly defined
empirical methods of implementation and evaluation. They need to get
the job done, and as such use whichever practice is most politically
expedient. Indeed, this may be the reason for such limited publications in
qualitative research in family studies. Decisions made about funding are
often based on numerical predictabilities and the probability of success.
Programs such as Making Connections are developed to provide a
process in which problems can be solved and community input and
family support can be enhanced. It was not created to meet specific
measurable outcomes in accordance to some prescribed criteria. The
goal of this evaluation is to reflect on the overall purpose of the program,
and meld the theory and practice that are inherent in this work.

Robinson (1993) suggests that educational practice be more
closely connected to research through problem-based methodology.
She suggests that "educational researchers who wish to make a
contribution to practice adopt the goal of problem understanding and

resolution, rather than the goal of change" (Robinson, 1993, p. 8). She believes that a change in the actions of research will enhance the possibilities for change in practice. In doing so, it may help to alleviate some of the problems associated with the division between theory and practice.

Bowman and Haggerson (1992) agree in their book Informing Educational Policy and Practice through Interpretive Inquiry. They state that

..all practice is informed by theory, that is, guided by it even if the practitioners don't know what it is. Any time someone has an expectation that an action will lead to some kind of outcome a theory is involved (p. 5).

The premise of the book is based on three types of interpretive inquiry that serve as research methodologies. These methodologies also work as an integral and accepted part of the process they are evaluating. Research is not a sterile, separate part of the educational practice being studied, but part of the overall aim and purpose of the activity.

This project was originally intended to not only evaluate the Making Connections program, but to also become a small part of its overall purpose. The five categories that come out of the group discussions are a reflection of the attitudes, beliefs, and opinions of the people that work and participate in the program. This research most closely identifies with the mythological/practical method of interpretive inquiry as described by Bowman and Haggerson (1992).

It is not my intention to misinterpret ethnography or grounded theory, yet as I look to the transcripts for themes and suggestions, I find

that I will be using parts of both these methodologies. In the following report and analysis, I hope to state my own particular assumptions and biases clearly before looking to the information from the focus groups. I am assuming that the information provided in the focus groups is accurate, and reflects the interactions as experienced by participants. I will use these comments to provide insight into how the program is operating. I will also be discussing how the information relates to theories of family support. Because Galbraith Elementary is part of a larger community that the family room hopes to influence, these suggestions and comments will be related to the larger societal context. In this way, elements of ethnography and grounded theory will be part of this analysis and will work together to provide the framework for the evaluation of the Making Connections project.

Researcher's Assumptions

My own experience as a classroom teacher drew me to participate in the Making Connections project. I have worked as a Grade Three teacher for six years, and have taught children who are behaviourally and emotionally disturbed. Children and parents have described particular incidents of crisis, which were often accompanied by continual economic and social struggles. Throughout my teaching experience I was constantly aware of the parameters of my involvement with the parents and guardians of the children in my class. While I made attempts to understand the influences and interactions that affected the academic, social, emotional, and physical behaviour of students, I was frequently frustrated with my inability to influence or assist those struggling with their

own parenting.

Many of the students experiencing trouble in school have behavioural problems that came from their home environments. While this is a classical lament for all teachers, I became increasingly sensitive to the plight of parents who were often unaware or unable to make the connections that were needed to change their situations. On one occasion a mother crawled to the doorway of the school, wanting to use the phone to call an ambulance. She had been involved in a domestic dispute and was suffering from a severe beating that required medical treatment. Her eight-year-old son watched her approach from my classroom window. This boy was a continual behaviour problem in class and was frequently violent with other students. On this particular day he sat silently, and watched his mother struggle to walk up the sidewalk, amidst the gathering children who were drawn from their schoolwork to watch the spectacle. I was struck with the plight of this boy and his mother who were obviously part of an abusive family dynamic, and wondered what role the school had in this situation. Silent sadness and humiliation filled the school room that day, and I wondered what responsibility I had, if any, to this family. What additional areas of support could be offered to parents in the raising of their children? How could I as a teacher and a member of a school community that was interested in the well being of children, ignore the larger issues at work in this child's life, his school work and behaviour?

These questions have drawn me to the family room initiative at Galbraith Elementary. As a mother myself, I have approached this project with the idea that parents often do the best they can within the contexts in

which they reside. I believe that community development is part of the overall purpose of schools, and I am interested in whether the goals of family support programs like Making Connections can be realized in a manner that is practical and acceptable to schools, parents and communities. My enthusiasm for family support initiatives is tempered by my remembrance of the teaching realities that exist in schools.

My current mind set is to accept that family support in schools is a positive and proactive approach to providing services to families, yet I am aware of the duplicity of social services that this may represent. Teachers and schools cannot be all things to all people. I am aware that if this program is not accepted by the parents and community as worthwhile, it will fail to live up to its mandate. I believe in the manner in which this program is being conducted, and have been a curious observer of the processes involved in the development of the Making Connections program. It is from this viewpoint that I look to the following conversations for insight into the Galbraith family room initiative.

Interpretation of Group Conversations

Each group discussion is affected by the interaction of particular individuals in attendance. This interaction leads to some meaningful comments, but also contributes to a dynamic that existed outside of the transcribed conversation. The student's focus group for example, was dramatically affected by the actions of a single child. This child participated in the introductory games used to help stimulate the conversation, but refused to speak during the discussion. The child darted around the room, focused on playing with the toys in the play centre and chose to completely

withdraw from the conversation. These behaviours were so distracting that they affected other children's comments and behaviours. Comments such as "that's bothering me," and "that's distracting" were frequently used in the conversation.

It is interesting to note that this child found the social interaction in the focus group difficult. During lunch, she hoarded pizza and would squeal and cry if another child wanted a piece. It appeared that this child wanted to participate in the clean-up activities and concluding games, but became very frustrated when in close proximity to other children, or when taking turns. The attention-seeking behaviour, and frequent emotional outbursts, had considerable impact upon the conversation and information I was able to collect from this focus group.

This behaviour was connected to the group dynamic and did not become an official part of the conversation. What it did provide was a living example of why the family room initiative was started at Galbraith school. It became a living example of how individual actions affect the relationships within a group of people.

The five areas of questioning used in the focus group conversations will be used to organize the responses of participants. Comments from all focus groups will be mentioned as they relate to these topics, and conclusions will be organized around the themes that emerge from the discussion. The five topic areas include:

Topic 1. Why people became involved in the family room, and how they were now participating in the program.

Topic 2. How, if at all, the program changed interaction with the school.

Topic 3. How, if at all, the program has improved family life.

Topic 4. How the program has increased knowledge about the community and other service agencies.

Topic 5. What Making Connections could do better to meet the needs of children.

These topics will organize the analysis of the conversation, and demonstrate how people are viewing family support at Galbraith school. Examples of the conversations will be presented as findings from the data, and a discussion of the themes from each topic will be coupled with the findings from each topic area.

Topic 1: Why people became involved and how they have participated in the Making Connections project.

Findings

Four parents attended the evening focus group and talked about how they became involved in the program. One of the mothers is an immigrant to Canada who is currently involved in teaching Spanish classes through the family room. Two other parents have been involved in the preschool and parenting programs offered, and one mother became associated with the program on the suggestion of the family support worker. Each had a different initial experience, and shared their observations on why other parents may or may not be using this facility.

The experience of parents presented becomes a living example of how flexibility and parent advocacy are important to family support. In one instance the family support worker went to the home of two stdents who had missed several days of school. The mother of these children told of how the persistent friendliness

of the family support worker brought her to her home.

> I was almost rude to her, but she wanted to know why my
>
> kids hadn't been in school for four days. She told me that
>
> she wasn't an officer from the school, and that she just
>
> wanted to know if she could help. And so I told her
>
> everything. She was a really good shoulder to cry on
>
> (Parent Focus Group Meeting [PFGM], May 29, 1997).

It was useful for this individual to have a contact person at the school who was there to listen rather than solely administrate a school truancy policy. And while the family support worker did come to the home on an issue of truancy, she was not there to make charges of the mother, or demand that the child be back in school. The fact that the family support worker came on behalf of the parent was important.

This parent commented on how she has been able to use the family room to "get her out of the house, and work on some personal issues" (PFGM, May 29, 1997). She mentioned how the family support worker was a very "big support" and encouraged her attendance at AADAC meetings, gave her information on counselling opportunities, and introduced her to the Community Kitchen. This parent mentioned how becoming overly involved too quickly was a problem and spoke of how she had to back off and manage the program for herself.

Another parent expressed her feeling of loss for the teaching position that she had held in a foreign country. When arriving in Canada, she felt nervous sending her children to a new school, but found the family room a welcome environment in which her teaching skills could be used. The Spanish classes that she instructs were organized by the

family support worker, and allowed this parent to make a worthwhile contribution to the school. It also helped this parent feel like a functioning part of her new community.

Two of the mothers mentioned the importance of having a place in the school that was friendly to preschoolers. Often when coming to the school they had felt restricted in becoming involved or even talking to others because they were worried about caring for their toddlers. The family room was mentioned as a safe and welcome meeting place for nursing mothers and preschool children.

One of the mothers talked of how she missed attending Parent Break meetings. She was now attending only the preschool group due to the needs of her young son, but said, "I prefer the Parent Break because they have topics that are really interesting and they help me get a different perspective on all kinds of parenting....whatever the topic, you can ask questions about anything" (PGFM, May, 29, 1997).

Another parent agreed, and spoke of how she had been able to make friends, and find out more about the school and the community through Parent Break meetings. Her family had recently moved to Lethbridge, and had not made a lot of connections to people in the neighbourhood. The meetings allowed her to get to know other people. She mentioned that it felt like a small town atmosphere in the big city, and said that she had even brought her father-in-law to the family room when he was visiting.

When asked why they thought other people were not taking advantage of the programs, the parents spoke of how there was a perception that you could only go into the family room if you had an

"Issue or something." One parent spoke of mentioning the family room to kindergarten parents who "thought that they would be looking at you - and that they just wouldn't feel comfortable." This parent shared her own experience of coming to the family room "literally in tears" because she was having a problem with her child. Having a calming, homelike environment in which to discuss the situation, and being able to spend time with her child was very beneficial. Each parent mentioned that more people were beginning to use the family room.

Some of the children also mentioned how they were able to stop by the family room while their parents were cooking, or attending meetings. "Sometimes I just stop by to see what they are cooking, or to tell my mom something." The idea that their parents were in the school was discussed in positive terms.

When asked how people were learning about the program, word of mouth undoubtedly seemed to be the best advertisement. One parent told of how the first hair cutting clinic grew from 5 to 18 people in the first two sessions. The same example was given for the cooking group. People heard about what was going on from other people. One mother explained the program in this way:

> The first week when we get our schedule for all of
> the little meetings, I saw the hair cutting clinic, and
> I took advantage of it. My children took a food item
> and got a free haircut. For families, I know
> because I have been in that situation, if you don't
> have ten bucks to get your kids a haircut, it's
> amazing what it can do for the self esteem of the

children....The mother feels like heck because she

can't send her kid for a haircut, and then the child

is unhappy because they don't feel good about

how they look. It's a simple thing like a haircut, but

it's more than a haircut. (PFGM, May 29, 1997)

Staff members also mentioned how the children are becoming involved in the family room. The game-lending library has become very popular, and both staff and students mentioned how they could move freely in and out of the family room. One teacher mentioned how students have been able to make friends with others involved in the kids cooking group. Another mentioned how one student looks forward to Friday afternoons because it is "his time" in the family room.

When staff members were asked how they got involved with the program they spoke of how they watched some cupboards being painted, and a chair upholstered and "we thought--nice--this looks great , but what is it going to do for us?" Several people commented on how they have used the family support worker as a source of advice when dealing with parents. Others mentioned how she just "appeared" at the right moment. One teacher told of how a student was brought to her classroom in the middle of the morning. This student had been in 7 schools in the last 2 years and was coming to Galbraith mid year. She did not want to enter the classroom or have anything to do with the teacher. The student began to cause a scene in the hallway, and the teacher, who was in the middle of a lesson, was unable to soothe the child. The family support worker " just arrived" and was able to convince this child to come to the family room, where she visited and met some of her new classmates in

less formal surroundings. The child was able to attend classes in the afternoon, and after several days "it was like she had been there her whole life." As another teacher put it, "We did not know her role at the onset, but it is becoming defined with each new crisis, with each new event and conflict. We begin to understand as a staff how we can access this help" (Staff Focus Group Meeting [SFGM], June 1, 1997).

Conclusions

Several aspects of family support are apparent in topic one. Throughout the conversation suggestions and examples of program effectiveness were expressed. These comments have been synthesized into the following points.

1. The importance of parent advocacy and program flexibility.

2. The significance of individual contributions to the school and community.

3. How having a "pre-school friendly" environment increases the sense of place for families in Galbraith school.

4. How getting to know other people can increase individual well being, and increase individual acceptance in the community.

5. Parents are interested in parenting topics, as well as social activities.

6. Parents are not comfortable in situations where they feel needy, and awkward.

7 Support is most appreciated when it is practical, and accessible.

The incident of truancy described in the findings of topic 1 exemplify the importance of parent advocacy in family support, and show

that parents like to have control over their own situation. The theme of parental advocacy and choice is a common sentiment shared throughout all three group discussions.

The importance of utilizing and recognizing individual competencies was clearly expressed. The stated desire to contribute, and be accepted within a new community was important. It enables individuals to feel like an important part of the school, and has increased their ability to get to know other people.

Throughout the discussions it is clear that flexibility is an important component of the Making Connections project. All parties mentioned how they could just "drop by," or how the family support worker was able to step in "when needed." Students mentioned that they felt comfortable going into the room. Parents mentioned several times how having an environment in which their preschool children were welcome and safe, allowed them to participate more fully in the school. This flexibility and ability for parents to participate when it is convenient is a central issue in the convergent model of family support suggested by Shields (1995). When people feel ownership over their own interactions, and choose what is most useful for them at a particular time, they are able to integrate family support into their lives in a more meaningful and functional way. Flexibility allows participants to take part in the programs when they can, and respects the autonomy of individuals as well.

Feeling accepted and welcome in the school is another common theme throughout the discussions. Parents made reference to the fact that the family support worker was an advocate on their behalf. Staff also commented on how she has attended case meetings, and has been an

excellent resource for parents frustrated with their children. Descriptive words like "non-judgemental," "accepting," and "skilled at dealing with the topic at hand" have all been used to describe the way in which the family support worker has supported parents, and increased their feelings of acceptance in the school. Parents that have a sense of place in the school, are much more comfortable being in the school (Corely & Fowler, 1996).

Staff members have also mentioned that having extra support in dealing with parents has been a great help to them. Dealing with parents is recognized as a priority by staff members, but is a difficult thing to do well. One staff member described how important it is to deal with a parent when they are in the middle of a crisis. They need help and a listening ear at a particular moment in time. Teachers are responsible for a group of children for six hours a day, and thus cannot spend the time with parents that is necessary to effectively deal with crisis situations. This problem will be discussed more in the following section.

Topic 2: How the Program Has Changed Parental Involvement with the School.

Findings

Staff members made reference to the fact that they did not have enough time to deal with parents, and were frequently frustrated in crisis situations. Comments such as the following were common to 10 of the 12 staff members that participated in the discussion.

Teacher 1. "Instead of having to leave my classroom to deal with some really quite severe family problems, I have been

able to call the family support worker. She has got the parents

into the school and talked with them."

Teacher 2. "The family support worker was seen as an

advocate, and we were seen as the enemy."

Teacher 3. "We could put out the fires for the child, but we

didn't have the whole picture... we couldn't reach out to the

parents."

Teacher 4. "If she didn't intervene, I don't know what I would

have done. I had so many serious abuse situations this year."

(SMFC, June 1, 1997)

The above quotations clearly illustrate the frustration felt by teachers in

not being able to effectively deal with parental issues in the school. One

teacher told of a family feud that had begun to affect several families and

had far-reaching implications for the staff at school. Staff were being

accused of interference and the whole situation was becoming

increasingly controversial. The family support worker approached the

people involved in a neutral manner, and was instrumental in diffusing

the situation. Neutrality was a theme mentioned over and over. The

benefit of having a person without a specific school mandate to

administer, and someone who was also seen as a parent advocate, was

particularly useful when conflicts arose.

While all staff members indicated that they thought connections

between school and the home were imperative, many spoke of being

restricted in their ability to make those connections. "Now I can worry

about the child, without worrying about having to go to the family." It was

clear that staff members felt their first responsibility was to the children as

a whole as opposed to being able to specifically concentrate on a particular individual. Time away from the classroom dealing with parents often meant neglecting daily responsibilities in the classroom.

This inability to facilitate parental support, which they all believed was very important, led to a sense of guilt on behalf of staff members. A running joke: "Do you want to know what we want to do, or what we really do?" When asked how parental situations were dealt with before the family room was in operation, a group discussion followed that included comments like "We did, if it got attended to at all"; or, "In my case I don't think those things would have been dealt with and I think those poor children would have been left, and left...." There was general consensus that family problems for the most part went home with the family. Teachers had very little to offer, outside of notifying appropriate authorities if signs of abuse became apparent.

The parent in crisis is a particularly difficult situation for teachers to deal with, because the time for intervention is at the time of the incident. Parents ask for assistance in the moment of the crisis, and cannot be told to wait for the next available interview time. Many staff members commented on how beneficial it has been to send parents to the family room while the crisis was developing or occurring.

The gap between theory and practice was evident in this conversation. While Galbraith school has made every effort to diminish the animosity sometimes experienced between home and school, teachers remain committed to advocating the rights of the child, and the responsibilities of the school. While these responsibilities do not preclude teacher's ability to work with parents, in actuality "it just doesn't get done."

Having the family room, and the support worker available to fill this role, was of great assistance to staff members.

Parents mentioned that they had experienced a feeling at other schools that, "they just don't have time for us," and because of that general feeling, they didn't participate in the school very much. All of the parents mentioned that the entire staff at Galbraith school made efforts to make them feel welcome. One parent told of how shocked she was to be called by name as she walked in the front door of the school. It made a lasting impression on her. The family room has added to the sense that parents are welcome and have a place in the school.

One parent commented that she would miss the family room when the school closed for the summer. She had come to see it as a part of her daily life, and would "feel lost" without it. This view of the school as being more than an institution for children was clear. The school became a socializing function for this mother. This may also suggest that some individuals may become dependent on the services offered at the school.

While this indicates that the interaction with the school is indeed changing, it was interesting to note the responses of parents when asked if they would be involved in this program if it were run out of a community centre or a church. Some of the parents indicated that they would, but not to the same degree. One parent said she would not, and stressed how the scheduling considerations that families make around the school day, largely determine what parents are able to do. For example, Parent Break is scheduled around the kindergarten lunch hour. Parents can drop off their child, spend a morning in the family room, and then pick up their child before lunch. Another example is the baby wellness clinic run

by the health unit. Because mothers without vehicles have trouble getting themselves and their preschoolers downtown, the health unit comes to the school. Scheduling and proximity were stressed as very important components of the program.

When teachers were asked the same question they mentioned that the school was a "microcosm" of children's social lives, and when students run into trouble with authority in the classroom it is useful for parents to come to the school and deal with the situation, *where* it happens. People from outside of the school environment are able to see the reality, or the context, in which the children are displaying certain behaviours. As another teacher said it helps give her perspective. "I'm better able to deal with them (students) myself because I can see the big picture, and not just the immediate reaction in the classroom" (SFGM, June 1, 1997).

Conclusions

The conversations that arose from the questions asked in topic 2 focused on how the school presently responds to family concerns and on how parent's perception of the school has changed. Teachers in particular noticed how parents are more frequently involved in the school and commented on how concerns with individual students are less intrusive in the classroom as a result of the Making Connections project. The conclusions from this topic include the following:

1. Having a neutral facilitator between home and school, improved teachers ability to deal with individual students and families.

2. Many teachers felt unable to work with parents in crisis

situations, especially during the school day.

3. Staff members felt that the school needed to be concerned with the family needs but admitted that as teachers they seldom had the time, resources, or opportunity to do so. The role of the family support worker within the school, was seen as a way to address this often neglected aspect of their work and was deemed valuable by staff members.

4. The family room and its accompanying programs made parents feel welcome in the school.

5. A family support program in a school was more accessible than other support programs because it is centrally located, and the schedules of parents and children can be easily coordinated.

These conclusions indicate that the Making Connections program is viewed as a worthwhile and useful part of the community. It supports Mawhinney's (1993) suggestion that family support centers need to be legitimized by the school before they can become entrenched in the community. It also indicates that the program is being accepted in the community because of its convenient location and coordination with the regular school timetable.

Teachers commented on their inablity to deal with crisis situations and pointed out the gap between theory and practice in family support. In theory teachers should be able to discuss family circumstances and deal with irrate parents and upset children after school hours and at parent teacher conferences. In practice these situations arise throughout the school day, and are often brushed aside or dealt with in a perfunctory manner in an effort to avoid disruption in the classroom. Avis (1993) talked about how this gap applied to qualitative research. The same idea can be applied to this living example within the teaching profession.

Teachers know that contact with the family is important, but are often restricted in their work with parents by their daily responsibilities. The family room and the efforts of the family support worker, have enabled teachers to address this division between theory and practice in a proactive manner. The program has helped to bridge the gap between what staff members would like to do and what they are able to do.

Topic 3: How the Program has Made Changes in Family Life
Findings

This aspect of the Making Connections program is ultimately the most important, and the most vaguely answered in the focus group discussions. Two of the parents mentioned that they did not think the program had changed their own parenting skills, but stated "It makes me feel like I'm not as bad a parent as I thought." Another parent simply stated that yes, it did improve her parenting skills, but did not elaborate further.

Students alluded to how they have used the room, but did not specifically say how it had made changes in their families. One student mentioned that "my mom usually comes down and talks to the family support worker when she is mad." She indicated that she spent more time with her mom because she was cooking here during the day.

Teachers commented on how they spend more hours a day at the school with other people's children than with their own. Other teachers commented on the fact that the community kitchen attended by staff members, was greatly appreciated by their own family members. The children's community kitchen group was mentioned again as providing a

family like atmosphere within the school.

> Most of these kids go home to an empty house, because
> they don't need a baby sitter anymore. So when we sit
> down to our meal it was like our own little family, and the
> children brought a lot of that to it. One little boy asked if we
> could say a prayer. He made it clear that he would never
> do that at his house but wanted to do it here. It was like a
> family together. (SFGM, June 1, 1997)

Associations and relationships between staff and students and among classmates and staff members was clearly voiced as having the greatest impact on family life.

Conclusions

Determining how parenting skills are used at home is clearly an area for further inquiry. Because of the inter-related nature of the discussion, and the open-ended questioning style, it was difficult to retrieve any specific instances of direct application of parenting skills. The conclusions made from the questions asked in topic 3 include a general comment on how the family room is contributing to family life and possible areas of inquiry and future research considerations. The conclusions from this topic are as follows.

> 1. The family room is operating as a surregate home. It is providing people with a sense of place and community.

> 2. A more specific research tool could be used to determine how parenting skills were being implemented at home.

> 3. Participants may have censored personal comments within the group discussion.

The family room as surregate home, is an important theme throughout the conversations, and may have impact on the future delivery of the family support program at Galbraith school. In the discussion of findings from topic 1 a parent mentioned how the family room would be missed during the summer months. Dependancy on daily personal support could become an area of concern for the school. Once individuals and the community begin to value and use this venue of family support, it may become more like an essential service as opposed to being an additional program offered within the school. On the other hand, the home-like atmosphere of the family room offers children, staff, and parents an opportunity to experience what home can be like. As one teacher stated "I think that the family room was the only place that my student felt happy all year." The home-like atmosphere is one of the most powerful and positive themes that emerge from the focus group discussions.

A suggestion for future research, would be to devise a less open-ended research tool that specified possible or likely ways in which family life may have been enhanced as a result of family support programs. A questionaire that outlined specific parenting skills and their possible application at home, may provide a more specific prompt from which parents could respond. It may also help participants to become more aware of the skills that they are now implementing. Distributing this questionaire over a one year period may also help participants and researchers to determine how family life has changed.

The group nature of the conversations may have inhibited people

from talking about what was going on at home. The censoring affects of focus groups as discussed by Morgan (1988) and Carey and Morse (1994), clearly speak to the need for individuals to protect their own image within the group, and may have inhibited individuals from speaking about more personal matters. Individual interviews that use more specific questioning techniques is a suggestion for future research.

Topic 4: How the Program has Integrated Community Services

Findings

When staff members were asked how community services were now being used in the school, they were able to list several agencies, groups, and individuals that used the family room. Harbour House runs a program called Project Child Recovery that works with children who have suffered abuse, or have witnessed abuse in the home. The Family Centre, Alberta Mental Health, and Lethbridge Family Services, were all mentioned as frequent participants in the program. Vietnamese and Spanish community groups had meetings at the school, and individual community members who volunteered their time were mentioned. A grandmother comes and reads with children twice a week, and a teenage student from a neighbouring school spends regular time reading, doing homework, and visiting with a male student.

Staff also spoke of how the family room was used within the school community. "It can almost be like a 'time out' room for some of the children that require a physical proximity away from the classroom.... a positive 'time out'." Students who went to the family room spoke of

feeling like they were special. Extra attention was given to these children when they attended, and this was spoken of as beneficial by both staff and students.

Staff and parents both commented on how the family support worker has been able to make them aware of programs and helped them to access funds that already exist in the community. Both teachers and a parent mentioned that there were summer camps that children from the school could attend free of charge. They had not been previously aware of these opportunities. Funding for the camps was available through Knights of Columbus, but had not been accessed by the school before. One parent mentioned how the issue of funding had prevented her children from participating in summer programs of this nature, and spoke of how grateful she was that her children were now having this opportunity.

Another parent spoke of how "you can just talk to the family support worker and she can get you funding, and you don't have to show cause." Both this mother and her husband wanted to attend a two day workshop offered at the Lethbridge Community College. The workshop was offered at $79.00, but when the price of a babysitter was added to this fee, it did not appear that they would be able to afford this experience. The family support worker was able to access funds, and let other parents know about the subsidized opportunities that were available through the college. The ability of the family support worker to be financially considerate of parents was greatly appreciated.

It was clear from the conversations that community agencies and individuals were using the family room to increase their contact with

parents. Again the location, timing, and resources available at the school make the delivery of services to the surrounding neighbourhood possible. It is important to note that the family support worker plays a key role in figuring out what community resources exist, and in coordinating delivery to parents. It was also mentioned that the manner in which she was able to approach parents was important; sensitivity to financial issues was important to parents.

Conclusions

The discussions generated by questions in topic 3 indicated that staff members and parents have a broad knowledge of other community support organizations. Staff members in particular were well informed of the different community agencies that were offering programs in the family room. Coordination of services became an important theme throughout the discussions, and was perceived as one of the primary functions of the family support worker. These themes are apparent in the following conclusions.

1. Many community agencies are using the family room in Galbraith school as a venue for their programs.

2. The family room operates as a positive 'time out' place for children in distress.

3. All three focus groups mentioned that they appreciated the additional funding for specific programs that the family support worker was able to access. The family support worker's consideration of financial situations and her ability to coordinate programs within the community was mentioned in all three of the focus groups.

The focus group conversations clearly state that the family support

worker is coordinating and integrating community services within the Making Connections project. Parents, staff, and students, could all name specific organizations that worked with the school, and knew of partnerships between the family room and other agencies.

This coordination of services supports Sheilds (1995) premise that integrated services increase interaction within the neighbourhood for all families, and not just for those classified as "at-risk." This is an important consideration in family support because it is clear, from the comments made by parents in the focus group, that parents do not want to be treated like charity cases. While funding was mentioned as an important consideration in the coordination of services, it was the sensitive and helpful way in which it was offered that was most appreciated.

While the family room is being recognized as a place for family support within the larger communtiy, it is also being used as a place for children within the community of the school. Many staff members mentioned that they had sent distraught students to the family room so that they could cool down, and collect themselves before returning to the classroom. Offering students a home-like environment where they could take some 'time out' of the classroom, had increased the options available to teachers in moments of crisis.

Topic 5: How Making Connections Can Better Meet the Needs Of Children

Findings

This question was intended to generate responses specifically aimed at the needs of children. While some respondents did mention

how the project has affected children, it became more of a discussion on what was important to the future success of the project.

While parents spoke of their appreciation for the time spent with children, all mentioned the characteristics they admired in the family support worker. Her patience and persistence were greatly appreciated. Staff and parents spoke of how she was able to deal with one issue at a time, listen effectively, and then make constructive suggestions. When staff were asked to define her role, they could not clearly specify a job description. "The key is that she is taking ownership of the program. You can't put it in a job description, and I think that is what makes it unique. That is what gives it the strength. Her personal commitment to it, and her vision."

The issue of authority was also addressed. The "lack of a need for authority," gave the program an advocacy role that could not be assumed if the program was responsible to strict policy guidelines. The idea of flexibility and individual interpretation were emphasized.

Several other staff members mentioned that the average person would have been "burnt out by now," and others mentioned the family support worker's ability to "know her limits." These characteristics may be considered personalitiy traits, but they were also described as part of the job description. Flexibility and interpretation of support were frequently mentioned. When staff were asked what the program could improve upon, the response was "we could clone her." While this is a vote of confidence for the role that this person is fulfilling in the school, it does make reference to the person in the role, rather than to the role itself. When asked what other schools who were looking to implement a

similar program would look for, they unanimously stated that it would have to be "the right person." Personality characteristics and training in counselling and crisis managment were mentioned as importnant attributes of the family support worker.

A member of the maintenance staff mentioned that there were issues of additional workload and physical considerations within the building when the family room was implemented. Putting a kitchen in the classroom had to go through school, and division maintenance departments, fire codes, and other building regulations. Secretaries at the front desk would often become inundated with calls for the family room, which detracted from their ability to take care of school business. Cleaning staff found it difficult to get into the room to clean because the room is usually occupied from morning to night. The way in which the room is structured, and the fact that it exists in a school, means that the workload of support services also increased.

The issue of security was also brought up. When you open the school doors to the general public anyone can come in the building. The following example illustrates this point.

> One other program that came was going to be a meeting of battered wives, and we were concerned that maybe the husbands would come, and wanted to make sure that all the doors were locked. And if I've got a rental in another part of the building, with the Brownies coming in, you have a little bit of a conflict. (SFGM, June 1, 1997)

It was mentioned that the administration had been very considerate in helping support staff work through scheduling problems, and the issues

surrounding the physical structure of the school. While the addition of the family room was deemed "worthwhile," there was a sense that the entire school had to share in the purposes of the family room. Caretakers, secretaries, teachers, and administration all had to participate in solving the problems that arose with the implementation of this program. Another staff member mentioned it as "being able to hold the vision" All staff members had to be committed to the idea of family support in order to overcome the challenges in its implementation.

Conclusions

The conversations from questions in topic 5 focused on the characteristics of the family support worker, and areas of concern in the physical implementation of the program. The conclusions are as follows.

1. The characteristics most admired in the family support worker included her ability to demonstrate tenacity, patience, initiative, and maintain a positive attitude. Her specific training in family management was mentioned frequently.

2. The importance of knowing the limits of family support was stressed.

3. Implementation of the family room increased the workload of maintenance and support staff.

4. The school building had to be modified to accomodate the family room.

Participants in the Making Connections project made clear the importance of the role and personality of the family support worker. In all discussions the family support worker was a central figure, and it was often difficult to distinguish between the person and the program itself. In many instances the Making Connections project was the family support

worker. This has implications for other schools that may want to implement a family room. The person hired to oversee the project will greatly influence how family support is offered, and perceived by the community.

Gulanick's (1990) discussion of the parameters of family support, is based on the idea that beliefs about home and family are inherent in the practices of family support initiatives. Understanding the framework in which support exists, shapes what initiatives like the Making Connections project can accomplish. This idea was apparent in the discussion of the role of the family support worker. Knowing the limits of personal involvement, and appreciating the limits of collaborative efforts was an important theme in all focus group discussions.

The school building itself is managed and maintained by the school district, and consideration for the maintenance of an additional room within the school was important. The regulations that govern school buildings, the increase in workload for support staff, and issues of security are involved in the implementation and continual operation of the family room. Support of school administration and a desire among all school staff to make the project work, is a significant consideration in the Making Connections project.

Conclusion

My hypothesis has been that family support would be a worthwhile and useful component in schools. This evaluation was designed to find out how parents, teachers, and students feel about the

program. It was intended to be exploratory in nature, and to discover if this project is living up to its mandate. Is the family room initiative making connections with parents and children? Are staff members seeing improvement in home and school relations? Are children improving their work habits and behaviour in the classroom?

The answer to these questions reside in the attitudes, beliefs, and feelings of the people who participate in this program. Based on the information from the discussion groups I would conclude that the project has had a successful first year, and that the family room is making the connections it set out to make.

It is a grass roots initiative that works to strengthen the bonds between home and school, and between parents and children. It is very similar to the type of family resource centres Mayfield outlined in his 1993 article Family Support: Neighbourhoods helping Children. It is centrally located within the community, has the support of existing agencies, businesses, and neighbourhood associations, and has been organized and implemented by the people that work and live there.

This evaluation attempted to find out if participants acknowledged the program as useful. As Mawhinney (1993) states, it is the perception of the program, and its recognition beyond the school, that contributes to its legitimization. All discussions clearly supported the program, and saw it as beneficial to the community. Staff members were able to recount specific incidents of increased family participation in the schools, and improved behaviour amongst the student population. A teacher shared an example of a mother who had never participated in the classroom before. This teacher had taught consecutive years of siblings from this

same family. After several visits to the family room, and counselling from an outside agency, this mother came into the classroom to volunteer, and the teacher noticed that "the self esteem in this mother and child, shot through the roof." A prime example of how the program is being legitimized through its work.

This program closely resembles convergent models of family support (Panitch, 1993). The initiative has operated on the premise that parenting is an interactive process. The family room has involved ethnic associations, public health services, individual volunteers and parenting programs. It has focused on practical family concerns, like the community kitchen and the hair cutting clinic. Making Connections is working with the variables that interact within family life.

This program is adopting many of the suggestions put forth by the Commissioner of Services for Children in the 1993 document Focus on Children: A Plan for Effective Integrated Community Services for Children. It is collaborating with private community associations and government services. The program is making use of facilities, and personnel that already exist in the school environment, and is providing families with a safe place in which they can reach out to each other, and the services that they may individually need. It is a program that can be used by all parents and children within the school. This initiative is not trying to single out only those families in crisis; it is integrating parenting skills and community support within the larger community.

As has been stated in the literature review, it is difficult to evaluate prevention. This evaluation provides a glimpse into the attitudes that influence issues like intervention and prevention. The exploratory nature

of the research has identified some of the strengths and weaknesses in the methodology used to collect the feelings and perceptions of specific interest groups.

Understanding how parenting skills are being used in the home is a difficult process. People are more comfortable talking about the program, or their interaction with the family room, than they are about how they are implementing parenting skills. Part of this reluctance to speak on the subject may be due to the censoring nature of group discussions, or the fact that people do not know how these new skills are being used in their own experience. It is probable that certain individuals have trouble seeing improvement in their own parenting skills, particularly at the same time they are parenting. While some individuals can make conscientious decisions to change their behaviour, others may not be able to assess what is at work in their family, until they have had time to reflect on the process. For example, a research project that interviewed families over a two year period may be able to get more specific data in this area. A more detailed questioning tool may also encourage participants to reflect on how their parenting has changed as a result of a particular family support initiative. This type of specific research may be able to provide insight into the ultimate goal of family support.

At the conclusion of this project, I am most impressed with the perception and use of the family room in the school. Staff members were eager to participate in this evaluation, and provided many specific examples of how the family room has increased their ability to deal with parents and children. Although attendance in the parent and student

focus groups was considerably smaller, these groups also spoke of the flexible, practical, and welcoming attitude that has become the Making Connections project. Making Connections is... making connections.

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Why did you become involved in the family room?

1. How did you find out about the family room?

2. What events (if any) led you to the family room?

3. What was your first impression of the family room?

4. Did the family room reach out to you, or did you reach out to the family room?

5. What made you become part of the family room?

6. What programs interest you?

How has Making Connections changed your interaction with the school?

1. Do you think of the school differently, now that you have been in the family room?

2. In what ways does the family room change the school ?

3. How have you used family room?

4. Do you know of other schools that have something like a family room?

5. Does the school use the family room?

6. Have other staff members used the family room?

Has Making Connections helped you make changes in your family ?

1. Has anything changed in your life because of something you learned through the family room?

2. Do you think about your family in a different way?

3. Has the family room made any change in the way you act around your family?

4. What do other members of your family think about the family room at the school?

Has Making Connections helped you know more about the community?

1. Have you made friends through the family room?

2. Has the family room helped you to make contact with other agencies?

3. Have other services used the family room?

4. What role does the family room have in the community?

5. What events has the family room used to reach out to the community?

Is Making Connections meeting the needs of children?

1. What has the family room done to help children?

2. What could the family room do to help children better?

3. Do you think that this program is useful for children in the school?

4. What does the family room do for children?

5. What is your opinion of the family room?

6. What can the family room do better?

Appendix B

Hello,

My name is Angela Payne and I am working with Galbraith Elementary school's _Making Connections_ program. I am a graduate student at the University of Lethbridge, and am conducting research on how the family support program is working. I will be holding a group discussion with children from the school who have been involved in the program. We will be discussing the family room on **Monday June 2**, and a pizza lunch will be served.

As part of this research your child will be asked to participate in some pre-discussion activities, before commenting on five general questions prepared for our conversation. The conversation will be tape recorded, and all names locations and identifying information will **not** be included in results. You will have an opportunity to read the results of our discussion when completed, and your child can choose to withdraw from the discussion at any time.

Your assistance in this study is appreciated. Please fill out the following consent form and return it to the family room at Galbraith school by the 28th of May. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions regarding this research. I can be reached at 329-2460. Thank you for your cooperation.

Nola Aitken (faculty supervisor 329-2429)
Craig Lowen (ethics committee 329-2455)

Sincerely,

Angela Payne

Making Connections Discussion Group Consent Form

I ,_____ agree to have
      (parent/guardians name)

my child _____participate in the family room
      (child's name)
discussion group at Galbraith school on June 2, 1997.