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COMMUNITY LITERACY
AS SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF FAMILIES

BY

LINDA GRAHAM

Baccalaureate Degree, Case Western Reserve University, 1969

THESIS

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
In Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Education
In
Early Childhood Education

May, 2008

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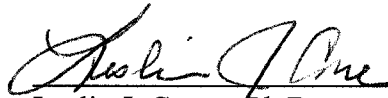
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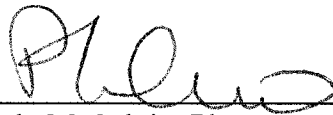
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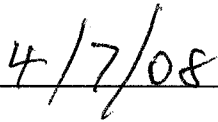
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Associate Professor of Education



Date

DEDICATION

Dedicated to John Carney

for his teaching of children's literature as an art form with power

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people to thank as I pause to consider where the help has come. It began with Leo Corriveau who set the tone by hiring me to do “field work and art.” Many thanks to John Hornstein who listened to the ideas and supported the work with thoughtful questions. He helped tack down many loose edges. Thanks to Leslie Couse for her warm and generous spirit. Her thinking helped remind me that the work was about people. Thanks to Paula Salvio who agreed without meeting me to fill the spot on my committee vacated by John Carney’s sudden death.

John Carney for his teaching of children’s literature and tireless advocacy for art. John caught me by surprise when he asked if I was interested in a writing degree. I was encouraged to pull together this study. His insight and understanding helped form the text. His abbreviated questions and timely hoorahs helped charge my vision.

Thanks to Dinah Delaney for sharing art space and always remaining true to her understanding. Thanks to Sue Stepick for listening and offering constructive ideas along the way. Thanks to Barbara Principe who shares a love of understanding what makes up mysteries we see around us. Thanks to Cindy Glidden for her perfection in presentation.

I am deeply indebted to the families who agreed to these interviews. Their willingness to take a risk venturing into something they weren’t sure of speaks volumes about the qualities I hoped to identify by asking in the first place.

Thanks to Ralph Jimenez for quietly believing I had an idea worth pursuing. And always to Nick who taught me far more than I can write about.

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ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF COMMUNITY LITERACY
AS SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF FAMILIES

by

Linda Graham

University of New Hampshire, May 2008

This study is a series of interviews conducted with three families participating in a family literacy program in rural NH. These families were asked a series of questions about their participation in community literacy events and supports to reach a synthesis of what families do that is inherently strong.

Community literacy was viewed as a pyramid. Access to basic life supports like transportation and groceries implied an access to next levels of adult education, parent child literacy and art. Art, reading for aesthetic appreciation, was seen as the uppermost area to be achieved in literacy. Families were interviewed over a period of three months. Their answers to a series of questions were analyzed for similarities and strengths.

Readings from across the literature on early childhood education, literacy and poverty and families were supported by the interviews. It is in the cross referencing that strengths were identified and weaknesses documented.

Strengths were seen in friendships, storytelling, book exchanges and the use of outdoors. Weaknesses were seen in access to systems and the ability to move forward

educationally. There were implicit strengths in these families and their attraction for the interviewer was in their ability to make sense of their lives.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Introduction to how I got involved and what I think and what brings me to this study

I have been fascinated by the development of young children all my life. The differences in care families bring to that development had caught my attention as I raised my son and thought about the family context in which I did so, when I was teaching in a preschool in Concord and again as a Head Start Teacher. It was in the coordination of a family literacy program in a small NH town that I found a voice for thoughts that had percolated in my work for years. This thesis is intended to articulate the thoughts and processing I have done to do this work. I hope to trace the sources of the work to the families themselves and by doing so, learn from it. By designing this project to test observations made in the work I did, I hoped to discover some positive conclusions that can be built on to create more positive outcomes for young children and their families.

I coordinated a family literacy program in that small NH town. Even Start is a federally funded family literacy program with four components to create and administer. Adults in a family eligible for a federally funded Even Start family literacy program have not finished high school. Adults are working for a GED or High School diploma. They may be teens parenting children while trying to finish school. They may also be

immigrants developing their English, perhaps not literate in their own language. They all have young children birth to age 8.

The work is intended to serve as glue between extant programs while providing a new range of services to meet the research based philosophy. Family literacy has as its goal the literacy development of the entire family. The theory behind family literacy tells us that families move most completely out of poverty when they can utilize reading or literacy to help themselves. Basic skills enable people to read the required forms. There is a certain savvy to moving forms through the system. Forms help us obtain jobs and services. However, reading to participate in the larger culture is a powerful tool to inform and unite readers. Using reading to develop the imagination in connection with others or reach beyond ourselves is a more complete fulfillment of the family literacy philosophy.

Helping people read is to move people out of poverty. I like this simple but powerful tenet. I am not sure it is the way out of poverty but I am sure it is a way to encourage the imagination. Mental freedom can help people to renegotiate their way through poverty.

Reading, understanding and filling out required forms, then having them arrive on time is a first level literacy task, though it can be far too complex to be called first level.

One parent told me:

That is how the system does things. They don't care about you, unless you push it, you got to push down doors and do the paper chase. T

Too often the work of a literacy program goes hand and hand with the social needs of the clientele. Pushing down the doors requires skills beyond basic decoding of words and often requires assistance. Paperwork is often the reading that does occur by necessity but provides no inspiration.

Being able to do the paper chase was a skill families needed to accomplish to enroll in Even Start. Families needed to meet their own social needs, as in managing to pay their bills for rent, fuel and electricity, keep food in the house, connect with health and mental health providers, keep a schedule or arrive for an appointment as a prerequisite. Carrying through with these elements of life can interfere with education. Often it was easy to sympathize with families who did not bother with the paperwork for a useful social program because the requirements were defeating when daily needs were overwhelming their capacity to cope with demands.

I met many families for whom keeping current with the monthly bills consumed enough of their time and energy that family life could become stressed by the effort put in to these elements. Holding and losing jobs, getting places on time with unreliable transportation, relying on friends or neighbors to care for young children is often a stretch that takes a subtle toll on the adults and children residing under one roof.

The inherent reason to read is to gain understanding of the world around us and to be able to participate in that world. We also may learn to read because it is an expectation set by society. (Harvey, 2000; Keene,1997). Without a model, desire, or necessity, the reason falls away. We think we learn to read to participate in society, to access the resources we need for ourselves and for our families to prosper. (Keene,1997;Pucell-Gates,1996,1997). Without being able to read, information is conveyed through word of mouth, spoken story or repeated modeling.

The basic model of reading is most thoroughly communicated in the family. Family literacy theory holds that if children see it, experience it and feel it at home they are more prepared in school. The model says if we want to learn something new, we read.

If we want to fill out the forms for health care or insurance or to open a new account, we read and interpret the information. If we watch those we care about read, we do the same.

Teaching our children to read while encouraging them to think, plan and talk is the beginning of building the culture we believe we live in. Quality development in young children is observed in their ability to plan, think, express and talk.

Helping people read and gain access to a wider world view helps unify the culture in which we live. We develop a conversation around what meaning we gain from our life experience and how that is shared with humans around the world. Does that happen after or before reading begins? How does the life of the family help prepare a child for these tasks?

There is a fundamental struggle existing in our schools to encourage young children to read and to understand their reading. (Allington, Richard, 2001). All children need to develop a vocabulary that supports reading texts. They need to develop the background knowledge to enhance literacy development. (Hart and Risely, 1995; Snow, 1998; Juall, 2004). To understand goes beyond decoding the words. In order to learn from reading, the reader needs to do more: the reader must learn higher level reading comprehension skills. Often, the basics of 'learning to read' are taught, but the next level of 'reading to learn' is never mastered. The skills to reach the next level of appreciation are embedded in discussion and reflection.

Continuing to develop vocabulary at a rapid pace enables young readers to keep up with peers and the text. (Hart, 1995, Juall, 2004). It is in the acquisition of words that we lose children. Teaching reading is defeated without a growing vocabulary. Reading for information, reading for knowledge are expectations to be participants in society as

we know it or want it to be. Reading must also be tied to a gain or a pleasure for students to absorb the task to the degree needed for their education and participation in modern life.

The aesthetic reason for reading is to participate in the fundamental life of others through their stories, to make meaning of our own lives and recognize what is universal. It is in this element of reading that I hope this thesis will identify new strategies to encourage reading in families and young children. Art brings us to close encounters with lives that parallel our own. We live in our imaginations where we stand as equals in the simplest sense. We provide the heroes for the stories and manage to conquer our own fears. We can lead children to read with the power of story.

The fundamental notion that we strive to make aesthetic literacy a goal is enchanting in a dry and barren world of forms without art. Motivation to engage resides in a more mysterious place than rote form production. To design a program that accentuates reading for aesthetic purposes is an aberration within a culture that emphasizes material gain and deemphasizes the need to read for pleasure. Pleasure and connection are often the motivations to read however, not perfunctory paperwork.

A comprehensive literacy program, designed to build a solid foundation for lifelong learning toward an artful appreciation of reading, needs at least four components: adult education, early childhood education, interactive parent child literacy and parenting for literacy which teaches parents literacy strategies. It must also support children to show above average skills and attendance entering and in school. This is program strategy that the research tells us will be effective. All components work together to move

a family to their next level. (William F Goodling Even Start Family Literacy Programs, Elementary and Secondary Education Act subpart 3, 2000).

Being the family literacy coordinator of a small school district in a rural town, I found first that social needs for families overwhelmed our ability to concentrate on the nature of literacy and its skills. It was not hard to find families who met the criterion, but it was difficult to engage them without having their needs for food or shelter also met. It is not a stretch for the imagination to believe that the children of these families may experience more difficulty in school. The first level literacy task was to access the resources one needs to keep house and body together.

As I worked to construct a program that met the needs of those enrolled while satisfying the criterion of the federal grant, I began to see a framework surrounding families that I called a community literacy pyramid. It is a construction I created to help me grasp the complexities of literacy in life. It was a way to plan what elements already existed in the community while adding others through the program that could serve to bind the whole together. It was a simple way to analyze the larger context in which a smaller program is embedded.

Visualizing a pyramid was an epiphany for me. The visual symbol simplified a large task and allowed me to map what work could be done within a framework of what was being done. It was a cogent description that helped explain the work both to families and administrators.

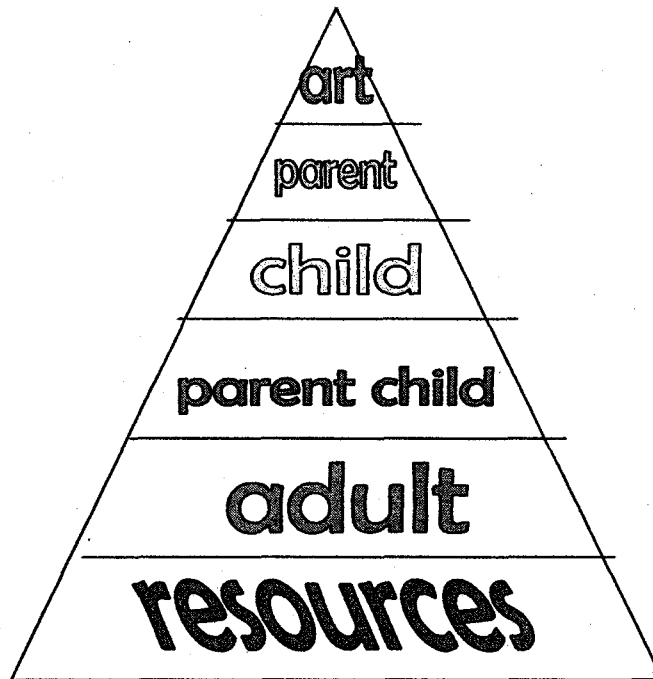
There are many levels to the development of a literate society. A pyramid may be a framework to describe those levels. Not all the levels are equal in breadth but taken together stack on top of each other. One level filled in makes the next accessible to

adults, children and the community. An inability to obtain what is needed on one level would seem to impede progress on the other levels.

Through this lens it may be possible to find elements of literacy that are strong or missing. It seemed one could look through a community to assess the strengths and weaknesses of its literacy support. The pyramid would mimic Maslow's or even the food pyramid in structure as identifying needs in each layer.

Pyramid diagram

Figure 1



To start up a ladder of literacy reaching the artful reason to read at the top, families needed to have access to or be able to satisfy basic needs. Housing, food, health care are fundamental to keep us active and able. Meeting the basic needs of our families satisfies our need to feel adequate as we provide elementary supports. Without being able to meet these needs we suffer obstacles in our ability to concentrate on furthering any educational goals.

A pyramid is broad at the base. A broad base of many activities is required to support art. Imagine a leveled pyramid with the bottom level loaded with the fundamental activities of daily life that support human needs but also inspire literacy. Do people have access to a grocery store? Or food stamps? Is there a library? How about a bookstore? Is there an assumption that people are on-line? Are they? What other assumptions might we be making about a very basic level of literacy development? Can we assume that having a basic level of resources allows adults and children to move forward more easily?

The next level is adult education. This level is a bit narrower but since it contains adult education, we should find many opportunities to develop our skills, be they work related or interest motivated. Are students finishing High School? How does one complete an education? Are there training opportunities through our jobs? Can we read opinions and thoughts from all over the world. In an age where internet access is assumed to be universal, is it?

The next level of a pyramid looks at parent child interaction. A difficult territory but the research and assumptions show that it is here, when we spend time with our children who love us best of all, that we converse and build the knowledge base children bring to school which in turn enhances their ability to make connections and understand

the printed word. We play, we talk, we socialize , we read signs, labels and story books with our children and find many places to develop that all important background knowledge which plays a big part in understanding texts or making sense of the vocabulary in novels. Vocabulary is built by living and sharing life. (Burgess et al.,2002;Caldwell, 1984;Berk,1995;Rogoff,1990;Greenspan,1997;Neuman,2005). Can we find opportunities and activities that support families in their interactions? Do they participate? Do they talk about places they have been and sights they see? What do families do together that supports the prerequisites for reading?

The next level which is narrower because the community funds the school and it is here that most resources for children are located. In a completely complemented pyramid, we should find children entering school more ready to learn. Teachers then perform their particular magic of developing in them the academic skills they need to be fully participating adults in a democratic literate society. A community funds the school and, therefore, by extension, supports the work the staff of professionals do. How are the schools doing? Do parents help their children participate in activities at the school? What are the children saying about school?

When students leave this school system they are prepared for the next level which is the parenting piece of the pyramid. Parents understand the nature of literacy, they have read on many levels. They read for pleasure and to explore the wonders of the imagination, to expand their knowledge of the world or to enhance their skills. They share stories and appreciate the value to be placed on books and reading. Do parents understand how to encourage reading? Do they recognize elements in family life that enhance reading? Are they interested in other children?

Finally at the apex is art. The reading of literature for pleasure, for shared human stories, for aesthetics and joy. There may not be many activities in a community to support art. It is the smallest area of a pyramid but it may indicate a rich area of connection. A community may support some book discussions. Artistic expression that helps us connect with others or be reminded of meaning in the world around us. There may be aesthetic appreciation in public art like movies. What is available to families? How do they engage with shared human stories?

Building this pyramid sounds overly idealistic and, of course, it is. But applying the principles of reaching the highest point, art, which is only a small part of the whole, helps the thinking around literacy and its teaching and expectations in a community. Art in literature does not preclude other art forms. It is the meaning that brings us together.

Guiding questions to be addressed in the investigation

1. What elements exist in communities to support an idea of a leveled pyramid?
2. What do families access and use from what is available?
3. How do low-income families participate in the literate life of the community?

List of specific questions asked in the interviews is available in appendix 1.

Interviewing is a challenge for me. I must try not to hear only what I am looking for but remain open to what I find. I inject myself into the choices I make for families and the questions I ask.

I have worked with many families. The families I see are more powerful than to be seen as just families eligible for a poverty eradication program. I have found many strengths in the lives of participants that elude the common expectations of academia. I have devised a problem to solve. Can I talk with three families who, in an interview

format, will help find connections back to the pyramid of community literacy? What will their stories tell me about literate life as they live it? Can I define strengths? Is family life connected to a community vision of literacy?

My interview format is intended to provide conversations that will include reflections on their access to community literacy as well as aspects of their own participation in a literate life. As I look for what they have in common, I am most interested to find and try to articulate the strengths I have found in these families. I asked three families but they speak for or represent aspects of all the families I have seen.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Description of methods including purposes and procedures, subjects and setting, data collection methods and instruments, data analysis strategies

The lived experience of literacy in families who challenge the notion of a literate life lends itself to an understanding of elements that are not specific to academic success but imply the context of literacy. By questioning the perceptions of families to understand how they live and learn may help describe qualities and expectations within the pyramid framework or researched qualities that lead to literacy in their children. The process was not intended to support a pyramid as a framework but to use that framework to question and reflect on the intersection of family life with community literacy. I planned an interview process inviting couples from families enrolled in the Even Start program to participate.

I have worked in family literacy in a rural NH town for 7 years and in that time knocked on the doors of many people. I viewed my work both as an adventure and as field work in design. There is an art to listening to people, hearing their concerns then interpreting what has been heard. It is a process of listening as carefully as possible to what is said to hear what can be done. Listening I often hear what I choose to hear and cannot help but notice my own inclinations in what I remark on.

The adventure came from meeting new people in their homes and responding to their interests and needs. The old saw “Build it and they will come” is only true if what you are building relates to families and is interesting enough to have them come. These are busy people who do not brook foolish expenditures of time.

Sample and Recruitment. I chose three families enrolled in Even Start for this project. I hoped to talk with both men and women. In choosing whom to ask, I wanted to find adults who were living as a couple with children and who had not finished high school. I wanted to work with families who are not experiencing predictable struggles. I was not looking to interview learning disabled, ESOL adults, teenagers or single mothers. The parents I chose are either working or disabled. They are all Caucasian. There are day-to-day struggles to stretch their money over all their needs. I admire the work each family does to keep their homes and lives together.

The adults I invited to participate had said or done something that set them apart from others I worked with but had much in common. One family exhibited a deep sense of humor. Laughter came easily and infected our conversations not just as a way to ease a painful subject but also as a defense against some overwhelming events. Another family mentioned the beauty of the environment in which we live and work. It was a simple observation that captured my interest because it was noted on a long drive home from work that started at 3am. To take the time to see what is beautiful around us implies an aesthetic appreciation. I could relate. The last family describes nature as a teacher. They encourage and support the outdoor play of their children in ways that I found uncommon elsewhere. This also is a family with a great storyteller. Articulate stories punctuated my

visits and gave me pause to wonder how the children were affected by these same descriptions.

These three families presented complex arrangements of a non traditional sort but ones I saw many times in my work with families in this rural district. At times I found it difficult to follow the family pattern. I felt these configurations were important to the process I was researching. I had selected white adults, not that I had much choice in rural New Hampshire. I also wanted them to reflect couples. I had met so many families who were connected by children and shared fathers or mothers, the multiple relationships seemed important to acknowledge and highlight.

I selected these families because they also met the criteria I had set. I was lucky they all agreed to participate. One family agreed right away. The other two deliberated for a week. One family was concerned that the process would be too long, that I wanted to study them for a year or more. The other was concerned that I might ask about situations they did not want to discuss, social service situations. All agreed after further explanations. Their agreement to participate had no impact on their enrollment in the Even Start program.

It was clear that part of the reason to agree was that we had already built a relationship. They were quite used to me. I assured them all that I wanted to talk with them because of strengths I noticed as special about them and because I felt they represented some unarticulated approach to literacy and quality in family life.

Family 1 consists of a married mother and father, A and T. Both are on disability. He was shot in his youth and is disabled from the incident. She has health problems that are a constant problem. Neither finished high school.

It is a second marriage for him and a first for her. Each has another family. His three children by a wife who is now dead are in their thirties. Her two children are grown. With her daughter she has maintained a steady relationship but her son was raised by his father and only recently have they gotten back in touch. She is delighted with his education and growth and expresses no regrets about his upbringing.

Together they have one son, P, whom they are now raising. He is 8. They also have taken custody of his grandson, H. His daughter spent time in jail on drug charges and the two had to work very hard to gain custody from the state. They are committed to both boys.

Family 2 is an unmarried mother and father, M and V. They are raising their four, S, W, F, and M, together. He works to support the family and she stays at home to manage the household. Neither finished high school. The children are 1 1/2, 4, 8 and 10. The older two have struggled consistently with school and academic expectations. The four year old attended Head Start and was identified as needing speech intervention. The 1 1/2 year old was seen by Early Intervention after a referral from the Doctor. He has incomplete tear ducts in both eyes which makes his eyes drain regularly.

Family 3 is an unmarried couple, P and J. Neither finished high school. J has a record which affects his ability to get a job. They are raising her three children, T, M, and H, by two different fathers. He expresses commitment to her and the children. They plan to marry after she gets her teeth fixed. They met while she was living with the father of her two youngest children. That father was a stay at home dad while she worked to support the family. He did little in the way of care and by her description seems to have only taken advantage of her willingness to work. He does not see the children. The father

of the other was not mentioned and does not see his daughter by any account or report I ever heard. All three think of J as their dad.

The older daughter is 8. She seems to just miss the cut offs for assistance in academics, but with advocacy was included in a reading group. The younger daughter was identified for speech intervention. She just misses the speech cutoff for the school preschool and was enrolled in Head Start. She barely spoke to me when I first met her but warmed on familiarity. The youngest boy is speaking and participating. He is 1 1/2 and appears developmentally on target.

Data Collection. The interview process became a two way street then. The questions I planned were to be neutral, asked of each family and relevant to developing an understanding of the framework I created. More importantly, they were an attempt to reflect on resources in families that belie everyday academia.

There were times in the process I was undone by my own questions. I had to recreate them on the spot. I made notes on the question sheets I kept for each family when I moved off the question and substituted. Sometimes, I realized what I was asking was so much from my own perspective that it didn't relate to the lives of the adults I was interviewing. I again made notes.

In transcribing the interviews I found spots where I was too quick to move off a point, or used my own words to fill in blanks or was awkward with my own question. This seemed to be a part of the process. The interviews were about me sometimes.

I asked questions related to the levels of the pyramid. This gave me a form to question from. For instance, asking about housing, food and resources important to a stable life, will imply access to the first level of the pyramid. The next level brought up

questions about further education and training for adults. Questions related to each level of the pyramid were asked. It was not so much to prove the diagram as to use a framework for the questions.

In each area of the pyramid I had mapped resources that were available to families. The pyramid served to help categorize what would seem to support and lead to a literate community life. Art seemed to be available when all other aspects of building a literate life were extant.

In designing questions, I looked at each area to determine what might be available and how it could be talked about through an interview. It was inevitable that a large section of questions would pertain to the basic life supports of food, transportation and healthcare. Aspects of life that comes from research, as in vocabulary acquisition, seemed to pertain as well to the fundamental conditions around life. There is a lot of life lived in the first level. I expected this interview territory to be extensive and suggest secondary levels of community literacy.

Participation in other aspects of community literacy are not predicted easily but may contain elements we don't understand. It is too easy to dismiss families from participation. I wanted to hone my questions and data collection to help map qualities as well as deficits of understanding that together can help define new strategies for inclusion of all.

I devised questions and created an interview paper for each family. I kept notes throughout the interviews on which questions we had covered. I noted questions that were hard to ask or seemed inappropriate. I refer to these times in the thesis. There was usually an overlap with each family. If I tried a question out in one context and it seemed

difficult or inappropriate, I found the same true the next time. I thought of the task as verifying qualities that were inherent and shared while plotting them against important strategies to literacy.

Data Analysis. I transcribed the interviews and read them over several times looking for common themes. I also looked for what was unexpected. Hearing the same thing in different form from three families is noteworthy and I highlighted those similarities. It may suggest there is more here than thought to be. It is in the small stories that I hoped to find larger connected stories. Their answers tie them to an understanding of ways in which together we think about building a literate society.

I looked for research that supported aspects of what I found. Over the years I have worked in early childhood education and family literacy, I have read and looked for research that can help me do my job better. It has been important to me to read from a cross section of theorists, researchers and advocates in literacy, early childhood education and family studies. It was in this paper that I thought I could bring together much of what I had read with the families as they saw themselves and described themselves.

The questions were asked with these three families over a period of three months. I tape recorded the conversations to ensure accuracy and my own freedom to talk without trying to write. I used the questions to serve as prompts. There were times when the conversation strayed. Some informal tangents helped to describe an area I wanted to hear about anyway. Some of these tangents have been included here.

The questions helped me be sure that each family responded to the same questions, but they were not presented as a survey to which they needed to respond. I

found some questions were repetitive or difficult to ask...like, “what does reading mean to you?” I sought to create a more natural discussion and find answers in their telling but not avoid the question.

I found the questions I had about art to be the most difficult to ask. My thoughts originally had been about art as sharing common human experiences. I found my questions revolved too much around ideas of art as painting or drama. I also found I wasn't clear enough in my questions to elicit answers that were relevant to what I wanted to know. This is an area that could be better mined. I would enjoy returning to reflect on these thoughts.

I found the interviews had points in common with each other as well as points in common with community and research expectations. This analysis helped create the image of a pyramid through the context of living. The pyramid is not substantiated by the process. It suggests avenues for further research.

While three families were the focus of this study, context and character are added by reference to the other families who participated in the program or entered into a relationship with me. The three families who participated seemed to embody characteristics I had found to be common with the families I worked with. Not to allude to these is to leave them standing offstage. They appear as references in the paper.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relevant research and related literature

To develop a fuller understanding of common characteristics of rural life, poverty, reading and education, my research lead to many interesting texts. Some of the descriptions are relevant to community as well as relevant to an understanding of how community affects literacy. The references mentioned were read to develop a more thorough understanding of how literacy affects our lives, or what emphasis a family places on literacy and its acquisition. I also was interested in how an idea moves through a culture.

There are comprehensive qualitative descriptions of home environments. Purcell Gates in *Other People's Words: The Cycle of Low Literacy* describes a year of working with a child starting in a school context from a family with no print literacy skills. As she begins to visit the home, she realizes that her assumptions about literacy do not apply. She describes her understanding of items as simple as tape and pencil and their use but which were interpreted differently by the family whose use of the supplies was based on their needs or what they had seen. Paulo Friere in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

describes his revelation that the interpretation is based on the context of the viewer.

Purcell Gates investigates her own assumptions as they are reflected in her work with this family, how families struggle without print literacy skills and how the culture perpetuates the cycle.

Belenky, Bond and Weinstock, *A Tradition That Has No Name* presents a picture of the work done in rural Vermont with low income women in a listening project. The achievement was discovering the power of voice when women came together, recognized their similarities and gave words to their experience. The description of the fulfillment through sharing a story suggests many ways for society to work to hear and respond to common needs. Janet Fitchen, *Poverty in Rural America*, explores in an exhaustive longitudinal study, the daily life and expectations among a group of families living on the edge. Their inability to participate in mainstream culture is inhibited by more than the lack of money. Her careful observations are made over a period of twenty years. Though some of the material has changed with the times, the essence of her contribution bears directly on lives still on the edge.

The *Growth of the Mind* and other works by Stanley Greenspan assures us that it is in relationship that we grow and learn. In the family those excellent early exchanges with parents or babies make for a solid bond that builds the desire to speak, to tell and to learn. Embracing the understanding that it is in the close bonds we have with another that we desire to learn what they know, early childhood classrooms are built on quality relationships. In closing remarks he says that “parents’ most important gift to their child is not a good education, elaborate educational toys, or summer camp, but time- regular, substantial chunks of it spent together doing things that are naturally appealing to the

child.” (Greenspan, 1997, p.311) It is in this spirit that I looked for what families did naturally, what made them special and what aspects could be encouraged as a universal gift for all children and their caring adults.

Rubie Payne’s *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, has been described as a fundamental text for teaching the values of mainstream culture to those who do not share it. Poverty brings with it many qualities that are not prevalent in middle class life. The values include an ability to tell a story and hold the attention of an audience. People with these qualities are esteemed. Sharing, not saving, money is a value that may make choices in family work difficult to understand for those who become involved.

Conversation is shared in the “casual” register, or spoken language, as opposed to the “formal” register, or written language, of school. Formal register belongs more to a fully developed storyline while casual relies more on exclamations, gestures and common expressions. Learning to use both is important to children entering school where the culture revolves around speaking and writing in a more formal context. Discipline is expected from a middle class reference point. References to this work pepper the text of this thesis.

I find a basic understanding of literacy may be meaningful as well. It is an assumption that we all mean the same thing. We bandy the word literacy about but there are many nuances associated with the word. I suspect interpretations of what literacy is may vary and may be well worth identifying to provide clarity of interpretation.

I reached an appreciation of the different tracks through a children’s literature course taught by John Carney at UNH. He used the term “efferent” to describe reading as it deals with outcomes.” Learning to extract what is needed from the text and retain it is

taught in schools” he said. It is “efferent” reading Aesthetic reading is to appreciate “what is being lived through during the reading event.” Being able to pay attention to the quality of emotion, idea or situation moves reading along to another level for the reader. Understanding a difference is important in our discussions about families and children learning to read.

There are many rubrics created for discussing and improving a home literacy environment. These have been designed to measure aspects of the home environment from television viewing to conversations. They are relevant to measure and improve interactions among family members with an eye for a specifically designed goal. In home visiting programs they can be helpful tools for discussion.

Several of these were helpful to me in developing an objectivity as I visited homes. I read about the HOME survey when I first started working in family literacy. It was a fascinating study that suggested that simple facets in the home can lead to quality literacy outcomes for children. I was most taken by “non-curtained windows” which provided a light filled interior. The light filled interior of a home was related to positive outcomes for children. Such a subtle clue makes environmental sense.

Light filled interiors relates to Malcolm Gladstone’s *Tipping Point* in which the signals of a community’s health can be read by the visuals. Graffiti covering the trains coming in and out of the subway indicated an atmosphere of neglect and danger in NY. Change this one thing and one begins to change the culture.

Assessments are referred to in the bibliography. They were not used. There is a sense in a assessment that one passes or fails. I was not looking to assess particular

variables in families but to find areas that are not usually identified in assessments but are strong or could be enhanced.

The development of oral language is a basic skill that has been closely linked to academic skills in Hart and Risely's *Meaningful Differences in the Every Day Lives of American Children*. This profound mystery story took apart the data from a study of families in St Louis. Seeking to check what language was used with young children, intrepid researchers taped every conversation, then analyzed the tapes for content. It was discovered that children in low income homes heard 10 million words by the time they were 3. Children from high income families heard 30 million. As though quantity were not enough, children from low income homes were hearing prohibitions while high income children were engaged in conversation. Extrapolate and extend the data to age five when children enter school and the significance of the findings are apparent. This significant study also found that it was common for all the children to hear as few words as they might in a low income home in their classrooms.

In longitudinal studies by Catherine Snow, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* or Connie Juell, *Making Words Stick*, both proved, with data, that there are many reasons some children fall behind. Specific instruction in phonics as well specific vocabulary acquisition were keys to preventing reading difficulties. Without an ability to decode words and a rich and growing vocabulary, children are quickly left behind. By the end of third grade children need to be able to decode and understand 80,000 words. (Juel,2004, p.34)

The overlap from each study proved to be powerful in setting this researcher's brain to work on what else was happening. All the work cited related back to early

childhood education. I have studied early childhood education. Armed with the knowledge of social constructivism and development in learning, I added other concepts as I analyzed the overlaps between these readings. The necessity of developing oral language skills and proceeding to develop vocabulary at a rapid pace make the work of families and schools all the more pressured.

Though it takes skill to work with deprivation, it seems essential to find areas that are strong or can be strengthened in families where children spend most of their time. Attention to the common interests and natural inclinations may produce more powerful results than the effort to bring children where they do not naturally want to go.

The community builds the pyramid, the family participates in it. Can we use the words and lives of families themselves to understand what is built from outside a family and how the opportunities within the community are used? Can we see what is powerful within the family itself that may help authenticate literacy experiences for the families as they are? I expect there are many stories from other families which will echo in this project. I hope the voices will speak clearly for themselves as I want to express what I find ineffable in lives I see.

I have included a complete bibliography of works that informed my thinking and seemed to move it to another level and broaden it. Each work cited has served to inform this thesis and move the process forward. The overlap of early childhood education with family studies, language acquisition and poverty have helped generate the territory in which my adventure and art reside. I also expected to continue to find new questions for myself and the families who participate.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Results:

What I found, what I didn't expect, what surprised me and the research it relates to

All three guiding questions are addressed in the body of interview questions. They were formulated from a pyramidal framework with the spirit of answering the questions with families. The need for elementary resources builds a society whether one is looking at a framework of self actualization or art or health and safety. A large solid base must exist for access to the next level. Each level builds on the previous. The apex is the highest level of understanding. It is the narrowest area with the fewest events.

Base of the pyramid and town description. My first questions were about the resources I thought were needed to build a base. Health, housing, transportation, childcare, mental health, a religious life, parenting help, family all weighed in as aspects of the community in which we live that helps us function as adequate adults caring for our family and selves. It seems fundamentally obvious that without housing, food or a regular means to obtain basic life support, we cannot rise to care about education or assist our children as needed or take an interest in others or enjoy the enrichment art contributes to our daily lives. There are always aberrations. This is the generalization. Many are raising children without resources. Within the walls of family life, there is more going on.

The town is a small one of 4500 people 25 miles from the larger cities in the State. There is a local health clinic, an outpost of the larger hospital services. Mental health services have moved around and are currently accessible 25 miles away. There are many churches providing a variety of services from hosting the local SERVE program to playgroups and parent support programs from Riverbend Mental Health. The WIC program is hosted at a local church once a month and serves clients from this region based on an alphabetic registration. A-K is one month, L-Z the next.

Two local grocery stores closed recently when a larger centrally located chain store opened. There is a food pantry which passes out bags of donated food from the USDA and local churches. Upstairs from the food pantry there is a clothing closet which gives free clothing, assorted household goods and toys to anyone who makes the trip up the stairs to see what they want. A donation is requested for the heat of the building. Donations from the community supply the clothing closet.

The local library has a twice weekly story hour for preschoolers. The library offers a full range of services besides books and interlibrary loans. It includes a GED program for adult education as well as internet access, CDs and DVDs. All is free of charge and available for local town residents. One family in this study did not live in the town and would need to pay a fee (\$15) to use it. Smaller libraries provide part time service in the smaller towns of the school district.

Privately owned cars and trucks move people from place to place. Distance across town can be in the miles. Without one's own vehicle, a family is dependent on others. The local taxi has started service and stopped. It was expensive to travel any distance with fare to Concord running \$40. Transportation is a thorny problem. Without friends or

family, appointments and schedules are hard to make and keep. I do know of one mother who walks everywhere, pushing her active child in a stroller or desperately hanging on to his hand.

Childcare is a obstacle to participation or employment. There is a local Head Start with childcare options for before school and after. Children are eligible at the age of three. Head Start is available after an application process that determines eligibility based on 100% poverty rate which is \$20,000 for a family of 4. There is a local preschool with childcare also available. A new childcare facility opened with a maximum enrollment of 5 children under 4. Again, most childcare is done by relatives or friends and in homes.

The Elementary school provides identified children with a preschool program. Mainstream children are eligible for extra slots through a lottery. The preschool program has expanded to include three year olds.

The largest local business has become a technical facility. Employment requires a high school diploma or GED. There are several car dealerships and car repair businesses. One is the largest snow mobile dealer in the state. There are a number of small chains like McDonald's or Dunkin' Donuts. Having a Wal Mart planned to move in to town has been a subject of contentious local discussion. Wal Mart recently abandoned plans to open due to its own shrinking base of sales.

The school district encompasses several towns. It is the second largest employer in town. Due to No Child Left Behind legislation, the school district hiring practices have changed. Paraprofessionals now need a level of education to support their work in the classroom. Fewer are hired.

Children further from campus than one mile can ride the bus to school. For some children it is a long bus ride. Many parents choose to transport their children. The elementary school enrolls 610 children. Free and reduced lunch rate is 35%. "Before school" breakfast is available. An after school program has been funded through a 21st C grant in conjunction with a similar program at the middle school.

The school is in its third year as a school "in need of improvement" based on the NHEAP scores of the students who are educationally disabled and low income. The high school dropout rate is listed as 4% but a cumulative rate of well over 14% is acknowledged.

The downtown is perched on a steep hill next to a river. Several buildings remained empty for the years I worked there. There are now two restaurants, a sausage stand, several churches and three flea market stores. There is no book store. The renovation ceased on one main downtown building when the owners ran out of money. It looks better but remains empty. The library is housed in a large Victorian house. Head Start is down the street in another Victorian house.

Housing, Food, Health, Family, transportation, childcare are the base of a pyramid. In planning questions, I knew from the families I worked with that the basics of life are often the impediments to progress. I heard of changes in simple daily life supports so often that I developed my list of questions based on what seemed to be basics families cited often and my own thoughts on what we need to have to feel our basic needs are met.

Why and how families came to live in town started with connections they may have to the area. I thought checking to see if families had roots to the area would indicate a familiarity with resources and connections that may help support their life in town.

Each family reported finding housing in town through friends or a connection to the area. There is often a lot of movement in the school district. They report a 20% turnover each year which is not uncommon in NH. It accounts for some of the unknown when planning programs but also in family's lives. Connections to the area provide a network of friends or family to rely on.(Fitchen,1981;Payne,2005). Connections can account for returns.

The landlord sold the house, it was a condominium [I lived in], the landlord sold the condominium, and I had to find another place to live, and my uncle knew the girl who used to run this place here, well I mean she used to do the maintenance, so they hooked me up, and that is how I got this place here. T

First We found a place in Warner but then we didn't like the park, the park rents kept going up. His sister and brother in law were going to move and they owned this trailer before us. M

This one?L

Yes, we bought this one, this very one from his sister. M

Well, me and J got tired of apartment life. We felt like we were wasting our money. That we needed to come upon something to call our own. J went to see if he qualified for a personal loan, and he did. So we started looking around for mobile homes that were reasonable and worth the money that we were putting into it and we found this in _____ and I used to live in _____ a long time ago and we liked this area and I've always had the same doctor for the last seven years and they are here in _____. And it was close to J's work in _____. P

Family 1 lives in section 8 housing and has lived there for more than 10 years.

Section8 comes with restrictions and expectations. They have adjusted to what they have but it will become apparent through these interviews that there are limitations for them.

The other two families live in trailers in parks. They pay rent to keep the trailer on the land in the park. Each trailer is dated and has need of functional repairs and space limitations. One family shared the cost of their trailer which was \$10,000. The cost is way below most housing costs in central NH at this time.

I originally thought family must play a large role in all lives. I seemed to hear about family connection from all I worked with. Rarely were there no ties to even difficult parents and siblings. The family remains a tie for us whether for ill or for our own good. The family is a refuge and a retreat. Literally, you can always go home is a mantra when families can provide little else as a support. (Fitchen,1981). I knew from previous discussions with all the adults, their growing up families had been non-traditional. By non traditional I mean not nuclear -mom and dad and the kids. I also knew there were numbers of their relatives living around them now. Relatives are woven throughout the text of this thesis.

Couples met and stayed together in complex ways. There were patterns of involvement with each other that were complicated enough not to follow without a pencil and paper. Stability in relationships can be a factor in family life offered to children. It is not simple to achieve but without it, a more testing environment is set up. Stability is not predicated on a particular pattern, but seems to rely on the caring interest of at least one caregiver. (Greenspan, 1997)

I asked about how they originally met and became involved with each other. The adults in Family 1 first met when she was a teenager caring for her sisters and brothers. Her mother was very ill and A left school to take charge of the family. This was not an uncommon reason for adults I met throughout the program to leave school. Family emergencies or illnesses contribute to school distraction. T was parenting three children with his first wife and met A as his children used her apartment and very youthful parenting style as an escape. They met again after many years and changes in life.

When we hooked up, it had been two or three years since my wife died and I thought it was time to get back out there, so we hook up and I'm saying

maybe something will happen tonight, maybe something won't. go as we go, maybe a one night stand, whatever. She ends up sick. Okay, now. I'm all depressed cause my woman is dead, you know, my first wife, my kids are all gone, I'm here by myself, I go out with a chick who is younger than me, supposed to be in better shape than me, and I have to take care of her cause she is sick. And it had nothing to do with what she ate, it was cramps, just cramps, right?

Yeah A

So I go find a old hot water bag, cause she couldn't think of what to do to save herself. T

M and V, Family 2, did not marry but have committed themselves to the raising of their four children. Not married seems to work for them in this relationship but certainly impinges on a civil piece of her life. This was an area we did not talk extensively about. In interviews it becomes clear that some issues are not going to be discussed. I sometimes, in the transcriptions, found my self to be a blockhead to the verbal indications, but others I recognized and let be.

How did you and V get together.....or meet? L

*Umm..*that's going to take a minute. At a dinner party. He actually started going out with one of my friends first. M

Yeahh L

And then after they broke up, we were visiting, we just stayed friends. M

P and J, Family 3, are raising her three children. He is involved in the childcare and manages to hold jobs that support their life together. He appears very committed throughout the interviews and is open about my questions and my presence. When I first met this couple, I often met with him. He was always open, candid and funny.

At times I read my own responses to him as offhand. I am impressed by his willingness to take on the responsibility of three children. He expresses an open attitude towards her with a tremendous amount of caring added.

And then, I don't know, it really is an excuse, but the house doesn't get cleaned. And then P gets upset cause she is the only one cleaning. I can't blame her. I would rather hire a maid for her. J

She appreciates his qualities. Her reflections on the fathers on her three children is not favorable. The father of the oldest, she never mentions. She describes the relationship with the father of her youngest two with this comment.

Well, he [J] was really good friends with G. And G was my other half for a really long time. G is the father of my one year old and my three year old. He turned out to be pretty much a nobody. So we left. J and I were friends the entire time that me and G were together. And if I met J first G never would have had a chance.

Each adult brings a web of family relations to their present moment. T and A both have older children of their own from their first relationships. Their contacts back to families of origin are slim but pepper their lives with uncles and aunts and older child obligations. T's grandson lives with them. They had to fight for custody of him. It was a joint effort. A supported having the child live with them. They continue to negotiate the difficult emotions of raising him while hoping his daughter will align her life with the care of her son.

And I'm raising him. We're raising him because the other part of our family doesn't do what it is supposed to do. T

yup A

Laughter

True. It really is true. I had to tell Dylan yesterday, because every time he talks to his mother on the phone he goes through moods and changes. Either he is whiny or he starts doing his baby talk. T

yeah A

He does have a bit of baby talk. L

Yes he does. It has been coming up a lot since he has been going to school. And I told them, we already went through that with him. When he first came to us, you know what I mean. They kept him.... T

Like a baby so he would be easier to live with. A

Now he uses it for attention. To get attention, or if he is blue. T

He's sad. L

Sometimes I have to figure it out, if he is just trying to be a whinebag cause he needs a nap or whatever or if he is feeling upset because of his mom. Cause his mom is in his face a lot now, she calls every day because she's waiting for something in the mail. T

Ohh ahh Linda

So he's had more contact with her since she got out of jail this time then he's had since he got taken away from her. That's a lot of contact. T

He has said that he does not want to take full custody away from his daughter. He wants to allow her the respect of believing she is able to pull her life together enough to bring her son back to live with her. It is clear that he carefully observes his grandson. It is consistent with his observations of all people. He and C are caring adults who have built an intentional relationship with H, his grandson.

His two older sons have spent time in jail. The relationships he has with his older children are present in his life now. He takes a tremendous interest in their welfare but recognizes that he is limited in what help he can offer now. Families are proud to be able to offer the support of always being able to come home. The imposition of state rules on this tacit promise diminishes the tie. Events became stories with T telling them. During one interview we discussed the limited options for the son getting out of jail.

It's just like my own kids. I can't help them when they get out of jail, right? Because I am on a government program If I let them stay with me, they are convicts, I lose my section 8, they go back to jail. Now how do you help somebody? T

Right A

See I try to be a good guy and still help my other kids out, you know what I am saying. I let my son S come and stay here. His PO wanted to come, they want to search your house and go through a check when they are on probation. If you move in with somebody or you move in with your own self, they want to come by and check any time they feel like it. I am sorry but I am not on parole or nothing. I didn't do anything wrong. And if I am helping out somebody, I shouldn't be disrespected in my house, checking my personal stuff. You know what I am saying. He is my son, what am I supposed to do? He is going to get whatever he wants anyways. He is a

grown man, you know what I mean? Geez. It is just a reason to intimidate, That is what it is intimidation. Anyways, he told them he moved out. He told his other PO he moved out and they switched him to Manchester. Remember I told you they dropped him off at the bus stop. See ya, maybe tomorrow. That is how the system does things. They don't care about you. Unless you push it, you got to push down doors and do the paper chase. T

Having spent time in jail affected P and J as well. J had done time. It made it difficult for J to find a job or keep a job. I am sure there are many sides to prison release but it seems that when the punishment has been served and a person attempts to reenter the mainstream it could be easier from the descriptions I heard from families.

He [a boss] fed J a line of BS, and said he had a raise and promotion, the boss just wants to ride around to job sites and check on them, so J's in charge of a crew and a truck, and more money and at 6 o'clock that night we were home saying how great it was and the next thing you know he gets a call saying you are canned. That's nice. We have three children and he's the only one working. P

Rude. J

yeah L

Plus it is hard for S to find a job cause of his record. P

I'm a felon, not stealing anything, just what I did. J

I never was quite sure what he did and, trying to be respectful, I resisted asking. I noticed that it came up frankly in conversations. He was quite open about his having a record. Each job lost, applied for or gained was somehow impacted by the record. In this case the impact has been an instability in daily living for the children.

We interviewed for three months. In that space of time P and J went through one job after another. He would find a job, then lose it or get laid off. He seemed to connect with a group of construction workers that moved from job to job and company to company. He always seemed motivated to work and he found work. He wanted to help fund the household. He always expressed an interest in learning more and holding his job.

She would look for a job when he lost one. I never quite perceived what the disconnect was.

Groceries may not be an obvious support for literacy, as housing may not either. They are elemental needs. There is no argument but food and shelter make for a happier family. In NH we need heat in the winter as well. We suggest parents to use grocery shopping as a tool for helping children recognize patterns or words. All families in these interviews reported that they shopped out of town for groceries and often when the children are not with them. Acknowledgement of travel for food also meant transportation was important. As I mentioned in the description of the town, there is one chain grocery store which is noted to be more expensive than others.

Yeahhh we think so too and stuff but the one in _____ is so much just so much better because even in pop tarts, I figured it out. I only pay 99cents for pop tarts at Market Basket but at Shaw's they are 1.99. for their generic kind. So just normally I buy 6 boxes so the 6 dollars I am saving, right there is the gas money. M

But other than that we'll go drop 400 dollars at Market basket before we drop 400 at Shaw's. T

At Shaw's you go in there, they give you a card, they give you a discount but it still don't match up to the savings at Market basket. A

I get them locally about half the time, I would say. Shaw's but where J works so far away now and I drop him off a couple days a week and I have to bring my three year old M to preschool and I have to bring her and pick her up, there's no bus, I have to go through _____ anyway. I try to hit Walmart because it is cheaper. P

There was calculation and planning involved in this task. Reliance on transportation and adjusting to schedules for childcare and school made the simple task more complex. Some families I worked with did rely on walking to the store or relatives for that important transportation. Trips had a weekly schedule that took precedence over

all else. The time required to go out of town, schedule transportation and mesh schedules translates into unavailable time.

Healthcare is important for the adults as well as for the children. It is important to a sense of well being as well as the objectivity that access to care can provide. Because of access to Healthy Kids from the federally funded State Children's Health Insurance Program, children can receive care but adults are often not insured. Lack of adult access to health care may have unintended consequences in limiting children's.

Two families had had negative experiences with the local medical offices. Both stemmed from the same cause. It is a small town and there was the feeling that the staff is not confidential with family records. Privacy is of great importance to all families. Two adults are on disability and receive their healthcare through Medicaid. The mom who is not insured also is not married to the father of her children. She does not have care. She recognizes health needs she currently has but is limited in her ability to take care of herself without the insurance to do so. The costs of care are way out of line with any budget the family may have.

One family moved to the area because of a connection to the doctor at the local medical office. This relationship has been cited as a support to her. She relies on the advice of the doctor with whom she has developed a quality relationship. I cited her reference to the doctor as a reason to move to the area earlier in this thesis. The other two expressed problems with the local clinic.

All of the children in this study were covered by Healthy Kids Gold. The access to federally supported healthcare for all of these children is open. It is well accessed. Applications are available through the school nurse, the medical center, Head Start and

there is help offered for filling out the form. It often is not the form itself but the paperwork that goes with it, as wage slips, etc, that deters enrollment. Since all children do have it, one cannot fathom how much more difficult health care would be without the insurance.

Each family took their children to the doctor and followed routine physicals. I noticed the one family where the mother did not have insurance, her reliance on the doctor was more strained. Her youngest went without immunizations, she resisted having an Early Intervention evaluation. She maintained she forgot but often noted that she knew how to avoid the sharpest questions. She seemed to protect herself from feelings of inadequacy by not seeking medical care.

Well, they make me scared anyway because every time I go there they tell me they found all this stuff. The eye thing, theyand I say hello, he is like this every day.

If I am not doing this well enough who is to say I am going to get everything right after surgery.

Plus they asked if he had trouble with ...and I am sitting there thinking about how he chokes, they got back to me if he had open teeth or heart problems or... he is a 1 ½ and they are like... does he complain about pain or discomfort? And I am like he is a 1 ½ and he

Is he allergic to any medications...I don't know...so it is the whole question of inferring, it is not like wm who can say ok this hurts. So it is like, ok what if he is allergic to something and I don't know. If there is something I am supposed to know and don't know... so it is nerve wracking to send your kid in for surgery. *Laughter.* M

She did not boldly say she did not go but implied and told me stories of missing appointments and avoiding consequences by knowing better how to do that than to suffer the feelings engendered by the above quotes.

It is clear that SCHIP is a boon for all children. The limitation comes for adults who fall through cracks in services. Ongoing medical care, or at least access to care, seems to provide a pillow of comfort to those who have it but a festering hole for those

who do not. Since it is mostly adults who do not have access and, in this case, it is clear that her access impedes the children's care, one wonders how effective programs that deal only with the children can be improved.

Mental health counseling is more challenging yet. A local office had been opened in town several years ago. It moved to offices in the next town when kept appointments dwindled to an unacceptably low level. With a reorganization of mental health services, enrollment for counseling is now 25 miles away. The counseling itself may take place more locally. Questions about mental health services elicited varying responses.

I have been sent for it too when my kids were young. Because that is what the system does, they will send everyone all together. When I had panic attacks, I had to go for mental health counseling. For a while, just to make sure we were addressing the right situation. Which is fine with me, every once in a while, you need to spit out your guts, you know what I mean? To someone you can walk away from and not go see again. T *chuckle* L
Sometimes you can do that and it takes a lot off your chest. T

You have looked for mental health...L
I haven't actively for me; I did for her [daughter who had been sexually traumatized by the father's brother]. I need to get more on the ball, but I don't have health insurance. I'm a little,,ah,ahh, I can't do it. But for her, yeah. M
Yeah and you found a counselor through Riverbend, right, you have a counselor there, right. That worked out, right, no problem hooking up? L
No..It's just the distance thing though M

.....I'm thinking about counseling for my seven year old just due to the fact that we are having troubles disciplining and keeping tabs and keeping her in line. I think she needs a little extra somebody or something to talk to outside the household. P

uhm uh huh Is that easy to reach? I know there is Contoocook valley.L
Yeah. I've been calling Contoocook valley. I guess I need to go to Concord the first time, then they will put her in here. Closer. P

The distance became a barrier and kept this family from counseling.

When mental health issues impact school performance or an ability to function in the school environment it becomes a basic need to address. Currently, the Endowment for

Health has launched an initiative to provide grants as local communities seek ways to ensure access to mental health services for children. All levels of mental health are affected.

Children carrying the effects of inconsistent expectations, boundaries and living situations learn in highly structured schools with more difficulty than their peers.

Perceptions are different, assumptions can prove

incorrect.(Geenspan1997;Bronfenbrenner,1970;Friere,2000, Payne,2005).

Efforts to encourage resilience and adaptability in all children can have profound effects on performance.

Often people find help through the church or the fellowship of the church. It is often assumed to be a component of family life. I asked questions about the church and spiritual life. Answers varied and often showed up when answering questions other than a direct involvement with a church. I found a spiritual philosophy was an underpinning in most homes. Some articulated their beliefs more easily.

You were both raised catholic? L

Yeah, but I never made my confirmation C...I did all that and I do believe in God, I believe that is the reason I am still here. I believe that, I was just telling her yesterday, I believe we all have a position in life, in God's book. We can make changes in our life, make it better or worse, but this is like a trial, this is a test, this life, that is what I believe this life is... Are you going to be a good person or are you going to be a bad person? T

are you part of a religious community? Church? L

Nooo. Positively. I haven't found one that goes with my belief. Which, I just believe that everybody is equal. Yeah, see that is my thing. And they are all.. just.....old fashioned. M *hesitations throughout conversation*....

You can kind of tell, just in the way that they dress....M

Yeah right. L

So I'm not just really..*humph sigh*, I'm a very open, just let everybody be who they are going to be, do what they have to do kind of person. M

Yes. L

And I don't want to go to a church where they are just sitting there telling me everybody is wrong. M

Laughter

I don't think that is what God put it there for, you know. M

No,,,,,,I've never been involved in religion too too much. I believe in almighty God above, but I've never put myself into a particular group, Mormon, Christian, Catholic...*uhmmm*, gone to a few different churches just to see, go, what they are like, family wanted us to be there, mothers' day, Christmas, Easter, whatever. Never really committed myself to anything like that. P

Oh yeah. I was a deacon. (*He was a Mormon*) I was a priest too. Because at a certain age you become a priest. A deacon is like 12 years old and a priest is 16. Yeah, I had to go to class, learn to give sacraments, teach people stuff like that. Doesn't mean anything else but that. J

They are hypocrites, any place you go they are going to be hypocrites, that is how they pushed me away, I brought a bunch of friends to play basketball. They backed away, they said I brought friends and we were all drug dealers. The bishop said that is what we were, they really marked us, so...that is when I started not going and taking off. J

There is an evident hesitation to be involved with a formal church with the various expectations it brings but a belief in a larger purpose to life is not far from anyone's heart.

I had not asked specifically about jobs. It was clear in the reading of the transcriptions and in the regular home visits how a regular income affects daily life. This isn't a leap of the imagination for anyone. I knew one family received disability. The consistent receipt of an income impacted their stability. They adjusted their living to the standard and did the "paper chase" to maintain it.

V worked and stayed with his job the whole time I interviewed M. M and V relied on his job to make ends meet. I met them once when the electricity was off. They had

paid the bill but not before the utility truck was out to shut them off. It was an embarrassing time for them but they accepted my presence without difficulty. It was clear though that this was a private matter. She later explained a computation error had led to the shut off.

M started work for a subsidiary of a local plant but found childcare and transportation defeated the regular schedule required. Though she never complained in our interviews, the management of day to day living took precedence over all else, as would be natural.

P and J were changing jobs regularly. The job search, the daily income hassles, the transitions and scheduling changes affected them and the children daily. P worked at DD regularly and listed a number of other places she worked. She would have problems at DD and leave, then get rehired. The manager knew her. She worked a 3 to 11 am shift for most of the time we interviewed. She did finish her GED with us and wanted to go on to earn a BA. In her dream goals she could see a degree hanging on her wall.

We think of filling forms as one aspect of reading. The forms are one aspect but interpreting the questions, responding, revealing and gathering information become “the paper chase.”

The theme of needing to do the “paper chase” to get the help one needs is apparent in most conversations. There are programs and supports offered in communities that help provide the food, shelter, fuel needed to keep life together when a job or income is lost. My interviews were not about access to those systems. It was inevitable to hear about some programs in the interview process. It is apparent however that the help provided through these programs helps set families up for basic success. There is a

significant “chase” to enroll, participate, qualify, be eligible and maintain. This is a literacy task.

The town food pantry and clothing closet were open Tuesday evenings from 6-8. It is a popular place with lines stretching out the door. No questions are asked and families receive a bag of groceries from a mix provided through area churches and USDA surplus. I didn't ask about its use but heard that it was in answers to other questions. It was not unusual for adults to leave a Tuesday night class to go to the food pantry.

WIC is a resource for families with children under 5. Both Family 2 and Family 3 had WIC vouchers which allow for the purchase of eggs, orange juice, cheese and other healthy foods. The clinic which offers nutritional advice, weighs and measures babies, checks for growth in young children is hosted by a local church monthly. Appointments are needed and must be kept.

Yeah, WIC works M

Yeah Wic works because they come here. L

Yeah, well, not to your house but the Church. M

Well, I mean they come locally. L

Yeah, but even that sometimes, it is not always easy because you can't go to the office. The office is hard to get to and if you miss one date, you have to figure out where they go next. They are only a monthly thing. M

Though I didn't question survival programs like welfare, I know the town will provide some help to those in need even if they are married. Single moms go to Concord to fill out the paperwork for TANF. The TANF system has changed and it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the details of the changes as they affect families. I can only touch on it here with the one family that was accessing the system. I stay away from the word using the system since it implies something else. I am not sure anyone can use the system now.

No one in these interviews was getting town welfare. P and J moved on and off TANF. Access to TANF was through an enrollment procedure in Concord. I knew of families for whom the trip was too far. Their reliance on help for transportation affected this connection.

It is an easy target to fault services. Services are available but schedules and reliability, often interpreted as trustworthiness, affect participation. P and J used TANF and tried to follow through on TANF expectations. From their own accounts, the clearest and simplest help in meeting day to day needs came from their own juggling of complex timetables. My coming to them prevented their having to miss our appointments.

They had many difficulties in meeting social expectations but were so involved in making daily life work they had difficulty rising to the next level of completing their educations. P did but J said he was too tired to go back. P was also very close to completion. She saw her education as a barrier to reaching other goals she dreamed of. My home visiting helped keep her remembering in the midst of the many demands of her daily life.

As I continued to interview them and check what they did and what they used, it became clear the more I reflected on them that they were limited by their daily struggle. This may be clear to all who think about the needs of families in contemporary America but since I am plotting this against a framework of expectation that a community can support all families and all children, I think there are aspects to building resilience and participation for all families evident in these conversations.

P had a caseworker and was expected to do job searches for her monthly stipend. She had a book of expectations and goal planning that I helped her work through on my

Even Start home visits. Finishing her GED helped her move to a better slot in the system. They were willing to help get her training for a steady job. She had options to choose from and thought going for a CNA would suit her interests and give her credentials for regular work. The other pieces of community support enter into the picture here.

At times the help from TANF was necessary, at others it was more work than she could do. As part of her work preparation she was required to interview and check local childcares to find one that she liked for her 3 and 1 ½ year olds. The expectation from the state program was that she would know what to look for when she went to look at care for the children. This expectation was a mystery to her. The practical necessity of having someone to care for the children vastly outweighed her need to make sure the facility provided quality care. She relied on neighbors, friends and relatives or juggling schedules.

What quality looks like in childcare remains a mystery for most families. The state licensed facilities are few. The necessity of work and having the children cared for someplace often outweighs the quality quotient. M had left her children with a relative and trusted this person to provide the care. Unfortunately her daughter had been abused to the extent she was suffering from PTS. It had proven to be a multi faceted problem since counseling was elusive for such a young child and access to counseling requires some belief in adequacy of services. The broken trust remained a block to engaging childcare again.

Do you use childcare at all? L

No. M

Just your mother in law?

Yes, well, we are starting to trust V's stepsister. She is 16, I think. Not sure...laughter, she is in her late teens. After you know the kid for long you

forget their age. Like the night we went to Beauty and the beast, she is the one who came. M

For A and T, they don't use childcare. They manage the day to day activities in the time the children are in school. They go places together and since neither are working nor looking for work, this style works very well.

Child care proves connected to literacy by the environmental language they hear in care. Questions about how much language they hear, whether it is in conversation or not, as well as activities they engage in are not the subject of the thesis but worthy points of consideration. The expectation that parents assess for quality seems a stretch when health, safety and availability are foremost concerns.

Transportation proves to be a predictable impediment. The town lies 25 miles from the city where services are accessed. Distances within town can be in the miles. Day to day living in a rural town is dependent on vehicles or terrific hardiness and determination. A and T keep two cars on the road to ensure one will be available. T does most of the work on the car to keep it on the road. A does not drive.

If the car's not acting up...sometimes I don't like to make a run cause I can be late for the kids... T
yeah he's got to get out at 12. A

M's van developed engine problems and V needed his truck to go to work in _____. Her ability to attend ES night classes, as well as other programs, became a matter of juggling cars and schedules.

For a while, you just had the truck.? The van was down. L

Yeah M

So that was a challenge because V needed the truck to go to work and you didn't have a way to get around. L

Yeah but it was only a challenge first thing in the morning, like getting F to school. that was just not going to happen by 8:30. Cause he got out at 8, in Concord and 8:30 he's not here. A never really made it to school until 9M.K

It was difficult for F always to be late for a small preschool class.

P and J had one small car for 5 people. He worked in Concord and she often drove him there and picked him up or arranged to trade children and car in time for her working schedule. It was a complicated system but it worked for them. They purchased a truck with the hope it could plow but it was junk after one run. They bought back a second car from a friend who had bought it from them but ended up spending time and money to get that one on the road. The first car developed a piston problem and they took it apart to fix it.

There is a web of connection to literacy here. It becomes inextricable for families to have to rely on transportation, childcare or public services. Though there may seem to be a stretch to literacy in this lengthy description, the amount of energy a family puts into running the basics of life affects the ability to make use of the more delicate supports. The family that seems best suited to manage other aspects of life has their housing, income and food managed to a degree they can rely on. Their children settled the most easily in school.

The purpose of probing for depth in the basics was not to prove or disprove what is obvious. We make assumptions about systems and then judgments about how and when the system is accessed. It seems that if you are not using what is available, the fault, if there is such a thing, lies with the potential user. I see here a non involvement for other reasons. Some like transportation would be predictable but others like following through on requirements for finding and assessing childcare where there is little are less obvious.

Conclusions or what I learned about a base. On reflection and through a careful reading of the transcriptions, I found some simple but interesting facets of family life that

support literacy. Building a structure to allow for art at the top requires a strong base. One would suspect that all families do not gain an equal footing in basic family life support. The most complicated family lives are less likely to climb up the pyramid without a solid base in place. I was looking for aspects of complicated families that lent themselves to literacy.

The families I asked to participate in this study seemed to have something that was elusive on casual contact. An objectivity is presented through the interviews to assess basic supports by hearing their responses. There was much in common listed above. In reviewing I was surprised by a couple consistent positives that are outside basic survival needs.

To be a literate society we assume people have books. Easy access is obtainable through the library, for those of us with the time and inclination to use it. Schools assume children have books in their homes.

Library cards are free to residents of the community in which they live. Lots of benefits go with the library card. Story time for preschoolers at the library is open in all communities with a library. Book discussions sponsored locally are offered at night. I found the same problems that complicated more important and fundamental tasks did the same for the library and story time.

Story Hour at the library? Have you ever taken part in any of the activities? L
No. I keep forgetting about it. Isn't it awful? It's just it's just ...Especially
during summer. Weekdays. We are rushing around trying to remember what I
have to do. I would love to, I just keep forgetting. M

Our home visiting program supplied books to families. It was a tool that opened doors for us. Many families did not have the extra money to buy books. It was always apparent that there were few books in the house. It was frustrating as a home visitor to

hear of homework that relied on books in the home. I have found that even well educated and well endowed homes do not always contain books or support reading. The gift of books for the children was always welcome in every home I visited.

When I asked where families got books. I had expected to hear “from the library”. I was surprised to hear about these exchanges.

Where do you get books? You read a lot. L
Most of the ones I have were given to me. A
Or you trade them off down here in the laundry. T
They get switched at the Laundromat? L
Yeah, the one down here on Bridge street. On the windowsill. We bring them home and trade them off. A/T
I trade them downstairs too. A
Yeah, she started that. T
I brought some books down there and left them on the table. They disappeared and then they started coming back. A

Where do you get books? L
The library and swap shops. M
Swap shops...like the one at the dump? L
Yeah, *softly* and the food pantry. M
I haven't been to the dump one for quite a while. Is there a regular pile there?
L
Ummm sometimes. Every so often someone will come in with huge boxes of books. So generally there are a couple there, sometimes there's not, it's just empty but every time we go there is usually a box of books. M
How about the clothing closet? L
Yeah. They have a lot of books there. M
I used to go regularly. Do they have kids books too? L
Uhhuhuh. There's a whole wall of....umm, what do they call them...yeah a book case. *Laughter joyous*. Yeah, I kept trying to say book mark, but book case with kids' books. They have a couple shelves of toys and stuff. M

How about books, where do you get books? L
Ummm, well.. you Linda, P *laughter*
Alright, that's good L
Some books, I used to live in Canterbury with my dad while I was having a tough spell and there's the dump. They have a swap shop there, it's called the Canterbury Swap shop. There's anything from furniture to books to knickknacks, and you name it in there and We go there every so often and

there's a whole den of books and we pick out lots books. Sometimes we buy books. P

Uhhhhuh L

We try not to spend too much money on books. There are so many other places, you can rent them from the library, not rent, borrow. P

It was a pleasure to realize that there was an independent streak at work here. It was not a program. There is no sign in or out. Books were left and books were picked up.

What was interesting to one may appeal to another. It was a simple and clearly meaningful way to move books into homes. It indicates that people do read and look for books. It also suggests a value placed on books and their contents.

This exchange seemed a simple solution. There was no need to alter it. The only improvement may come through an intentional effort to leave books at the Laundromat or the dump or to include children's books in the collection.

One family also mentioned the HDES summer Library Limousine. She said that the children loved having it come to the park. They looked forward to it. The books and toys were greatly appreciated. The Library Limousine is a summer outreach bookmobile from the elementary School. It travels to all areas of town bringing two cheerful adults with books and toys for the children from toddlers through elementary school. Sign up for the service comes before school gets out in the summer. It is a free program associated with the school, not the public library. Funding for the bookmobile is grant driven.

Another surprise came buried in my expectation about family. I assumed family provided some level of social interaction and support. Each family recited a difficult history with family. A and T, Family 1, had each raised a family before the one they were currently raising. T had left school early and recounted many instances of not attending but being "on punishment." He attended schools for obstinate children but also lived with

a mother he described as crazy. Family life affected each adult's school experience in fundamental ways. I had expected to hear that there was also support in the relationships we keep with our families.

How about your school experiences T? L

Mine... wonderful, let's see. The first school I went to I lived right next door to. When I was on punishment, I could look out the window and watch the kids playing in the schoolyard. I was on punishment most of my life. T

Punishment from your parents or from school? L

My parents. T

A rocky family life precedes some school dysfunction which leads to all manner of problems. For too many potential or enrolled students in a family literacy program the issues started at home. This slant drifted through the conversations with all the adults.

The family in each case obviously affected the school experience. There have been changes to the system that provoked this kind of alienation but the impact on generations of poor policy, lack of objective and quality guidance or parenting skills is retold over and over. The form changes but the substance remains. Reliance on family often is an expectation that is not met by these families. Their parents were not available.

No, my mom and dad divorced when I was 1 to top that off. And then we got taken away from my mother because back then if you had a mental illness the state could take you even though you are not being abused. An "Unfit parent" is what they called her. Because of her mental illness. P

But she didn't actually do anything. L

She screamed a lot. She had her melt downs where she lost it but she was not abusive. P

Divorce, death and illnesses of parents affected these families but I also heard it from the other families in the program. When one is not doing well in school and a family member becomes ill, it makes sense to leave school to help provide income or help.

Children notice very early when a parent's advice and counsel is misleading or inconsistent. Appropriate expectations are assessed by even the youngest of children who translate that information to their interactions with adults caring for them.

The surprise came from the depth and length of friendships. It is an extension to think of the social learning implicit in Vygotsky's research to include friendships we make in the context of early learning. However, I was surprised by the number of times adults said friends had helped them out of difficult situations. I had not anticipated the extent to which we rely on our friends. I had not allowed for questions about friends but realized on reading answers to other questions how much a network of friends can impact our lives. Friends help us relieve our own stresses.

I used to go over there,...should I say, T
yeah A..

I used to go over there, my wife died, I was depressed, my family broke up, it was a depressing time of life... you know what I mean...

agreement from A...

It's hard to adjust, all of a sudden you got a whole bunch of people around you, even my environment had changed, we had moved up here, we only lived here three months before my wife died. And my kids didn't come up here with us, they went off to do their own things. It was hard. When Ann died, all of a sudden it was like bam....., here I was all by myself. I lost all my medical for a year,..... So two days before Christmas I was broke, stone dead broke. So it was hard.

...so I used to go over to her house for laughs. I used to go because they were so whacked, man, in the brain. T

The power of laughter brings us relief. Friends can provide an objectivity and humor to smooth the rough spots. They assist when we are lost.

The Buick has a sentimental story behind it. I don't like bringing G up, but when I was with G and I was pregnant with N. ...what happened to my...*car name*...there was something wrong with it, it wouldn't inspect...so we didn't have a vehicle and my friend J gave me the car. P

Wow. L

She gave me the Buick. Handed it right to me. Keys, car, didn't want nothing for it. Just to be a friend. P

If it hadn't been for her at that time, my life would have been a mess. I lost my job, I was pregnant. It was horrible. P

Friends stick with us for years. They come in and out of our lives and provide a mast for the sails we fly. M recounts caring for a friend's child. She reconnects with this friend regularly. Old friends offer a base to build from.

Three or four years ago I spoke to the girl, there was another girl we hung out with so it was the three of us basically, that friend will pop up every so often ten years or so. She gave her my number and she called just once then we lost track again.

another girl I mentioned from school her son, she married into V's family. All my kids are friends with my friends from HS. It is too funny. M

I noticed as well that a home visitor provides the friendship and objectivity that friends can provide. In my case, it is me, and through interviews I can hear the message. There has been research to show that the positive effects of home visiting are a product of the strength of the relationship.(Schorr,1988; Even Start Family Literacy). I have read it but didn't really understand it until I saw the written word.

I have situation I need to talk to you about too. I just don't know what to do. Nothing to do with my household or me. Well, it does have to do with me. It is my family, but not with my immediate well being or us. P

Linda, Do you think T may have a sleeping disorder? She doesn't sleep. She will be up all day, all night, she will sleep for a couple hours, then wake up. J

I had introduced P and J to a community member from a local church that wanted to be available to families in the community who needed help. The Church had helped a homeless family the year before in fundamental ways that are defeated by more publicly funded programs. I called one day when I received a call from a family asking me if I knew any way for them to borrow money to get oil in their tank which was out on a very cold December day. The local small town welfare office was closed and unavailable for

three days at least. I called the contact I had and was lucky to make a connection which enabled them to have the heat they needed.

It was not so much the connection or the follow through by the church but the realization that we lean on people in times of crisis. Some have a tighter network of supports than others. Family history and living on an edge lead to calls that seem to come in crisis. For many of us these times are more secretive when our established connections can aid us. Helping families construct a network of support outside social agencies seems like a positive method of coping with difficult times.

Jean called on the day our tank ran out. Right out of the blue. She asked how it was, and I'm like well, I'm not going to lie to you, I'm going to tell you the truth.. we just barely ran out of oil today. I'm not too concerned about it cause we have heaters we can use. P

It ain't that cold. J

It is the end of winter. And I don't want to ask for any more help. She's well, you are not asking for any more help, I'm butting in. She's like I will have a truck out there as soon as I can. P

Leading early childhood educators see the development of friendship as essential to early education. (Paley,2005) Friendship defines an early childhood classroom.

Watching and assisting young children as they enter into play or find a friend in the classroom setting or even learn to converse and include a teacher in their day will often indicate a solid ground for children to continue with their progress through school. It seems that the ability to make and keep friends has a lasting impact. Friends may well be a source of strength and resilience through adulthood. Helping young children make friends by learning how to enter into play is an elementary skill we emphasize in preschools and through all school life as a preventative measure for life.

The other part of that is allowing a friend to enter life. Building a trusting relationship is again the work of early childhood. It is a developmental milestone.

Encouraging friendship, developing trusting relationships can be emphasized as a resilience factor for life. Recognizing the interdependence of our lives and the resilience that comes with both long term and new relationships is an insurance policy. It is built through interaction. Can it also be built in literature?

Reading can bring contact with emotions and life situations that are shared nowhere but on the page. Deep reflection and imagination are natural extensions to the reading of literature. When we start with our youngest, reading powerful stories to them with expression and emotion to teach the power of words captures a story that moves the imagination to make connections with text. A wide range of human situations and emotions are available between the covers of quality children's literature. It behooves us to share the story as the first enticement to community for young children.

As adults it is possible to find resilience in literature. Reading human stories stimulates our imaginations to reflect on our own lives and difficulties. Art provokes reflection. Discussions help connect readers with the process others go through in appreciating a story. Is it possible to encourage resilience in children with literature that provides a strong story while providing meaning to the world? It is another avenue to explore in the hopes that the art of words can have such a profound influence on lives.

I am intrigued by the essence of quality in friends expressed by these adults. It is almost unexpressed and came in the reading of the transcripts as a surprise. Friendships in adulthood as a source of strength and humor increase the importance we place on building the skill in young children. In the best of all worlds, their lives are enriched by developing friendships or the ability to make friends with their earliest education. It is adults we are building when we send them out to the playground. Encourage their

entering a playgroup. Help them respect others. Help them develop basic sharing and empathy to result in resilience, empathy and humor.

There is clear evidence that friends and relationships provide information. This is consistent with *The Framework for Understanding Poverty*. A fundamental value is placed on friends. The discovery implicit in the interviews here is tied back to the research done on large groups of low income people.

Friends provide encouragement to participate. I remember one family I visited in the very beginning of my work lived miles from downtown in a simple cabin without running water or electricity. I offered my program. Before I got back to town, a friend had been called and encouraged to connect with me and she did. Some of the connectivity we assume comes through the internet is available in a traditional form of a friend in the house. Home visitors fall in the category of friends. Encouraging the development of friendships with the youngest children through to adults helps build a literate society by funneling conversation, shared ideas, connection and common stories through a medium accessible to all.

The positive effects of long term friendships implies that by increasing the activities which help children develop friendships can have a lasting implication for the healthy life of society. Encouraging communication about programs has been researched and implies that some of our best tools to soften the entrance and use of programs is word of mouth. (Gladwell,2000).

I found that families connected most easily with this program by hearing about it from friends. Word of mouth was the best advertisement. A friend telling a friend. We also tried a "Do you want more information?" form in each elementary student's

registration packet. Two families in this project were contacted after they returned the form. Each family received an initial home visit and were interested in enrolling in the program. It is a testament of some kind, maybe adventure, that families respond to this simple flyer.

There is evidence that conversation is a building block. Where can it be found in family life?

Here too was a surprise. All families also mentioned eating together, long known to be a strong support of literacy by encouraging shared conversations. Each family noted times they ate together. Even while watching TV, conversations are held and support learning. This act of living together creates a picture of family life by finding ways to share time and the expectations of knowing each other.

I was brought up that way. We sit together. no matter what. Unless it is just sandwiches or we are eating late or whatever we will sit in here to eat but most of the time we are at the kitchen table. And that is for most meals, if it is something else, people just come and go, know what I mean. T/A
When we are having a prepared meal, we are all at the table. We could all sit there for breakfast. T

At least once a day we have a meal together. T

Our big thing is to have a big breakfast. We do it once a weekend. Last weekend we did it twice. M

Do you eat dinner together? L

When we are here we do. It is usually four of us here on Friday and Sat. Friday and Sat we eat in the living room. We need another chair. We need another chair for my table. H's high chair, I just got rid of it. P

Again, a surprise was found in current events. I noted all families did pay attention to the news to some degree. Whether it comes from the TV or the newspaper or magazines, a conversation about events and their reaction to those events was possible.

Clear opinions on events were fun for me to plumb and usually elicited conversation about how the world works.

You need new stuff cause it is happening. You keep up with the times. If you have to do something to get through life easier than you have to learn it, if you are going to keep on living. I put one foot in front of the other and if I fall down I get back up.that is how I go through life. T

I read the home page. When I read the newspaper, it is the Concord Monitor, News9, and the town papers. Except the Speak out, she tends to be biased. M

How about reading? Do you read for pleasure ?L

I don't read at all. J

You're full of it. You read the newspaper and magazines. P

I'm more into the pictures. J

He just ordered us 5 magazines. P

But I am not a book reader. J

Not a book reader but a paper reader. L

Yeah, I will look at whatever interests me. I don't read the whole paper. I read headlines, I read whatever interests me. Other than that, no. J

Family 1 talked about watching the news of TV. They followed the news but with the same distance detectable in those who feel there is something to it but it barely relates to them or their lives. I had an extended conversation with them after the Virginia Tech shootings. They had strong feelings about how the tragedy would play out for the gun control lobby.

See that is going to put a big dent in the rights of the legal people. The last time the gun laws got heavy was when the Pres got shot. What I know, as sure as my name is T, is that if something goes down here, and someone goes crashing through my door, and they are going to be violent to me or my family, by the time the police get here, ninety percent of the time the person that has done the damage is already gone. Understand? So who is going to defend me and mine? T

There are predictable problems when a family struggles to solve some of the basic elements of life. Housing that changes or is unpredictable, lack of access to a grocery supply that is reasonable, reliable transportation to obtain a job or services, health care that can be managed for the whole family impact the level at which a family can and does organize its resources to provide further learning. This is a tiny group of families but it is clear that the more stretched a family is to provide basic necessities of life the less able they are to support the expected learning of their children.

However from a more positive perspective, these families each had something that seemed to indicate they had raised themselves beyond just fighting the circumstances. They all found books, talked together, shared friends and the value of friendship. They all laughed and enjoyed humor whether in storytelling or on TV. There was a clear interest in the world around them. These are all aspects known to support literacy either directly or through the effort put into making these pieces work.

How about Adult Education? Finishing school or moving on with a job ? I chose the three families I did because the adults had not finished high school. One father was unwilling to be interviewed as mentioned above but supported the process for his wife. I wanted to be clear about what school had been like for them and possible reasons for not finishing. Too often I had noticed a disconnect between what we think are the reasons for leaving school and the reality. The connection back to the family though seems underrated.

Actually I went to the convent school. Through 6th grade then the Dearborn middle school in Roxbury then I went to a Special school they had in the boy's club.. that's where I left from. Then when my mom got sick I stayed home to take care of her and the kids. A

The only thing is that I feel I could have gone further.. It was the personal tragedy thing that made me not graduate. Other than that I was actually having the best days of my life. M

She was one of those ...stories when she was a kid. Both her parents were alcoholics, she was taking care of all of them, I don't even remember how many kids there were, eight or nine kids that were taken away from that family and my mother got pregnant young and got married young, so she ended up dropping out. M

Well, I loved school. It wasn't ...I loved school, I loved learning, loved to socialize. I got moved around a lot, so I didn't get to keep seeing friends cause I was a ward of the state. Foster homes, group homes yadayadah... I finally had gotten promised to go home to my family one summer and that didn't happen so I got moved back to a group home and Dover high school, and it wasn't the school I left. It wasn't that I didn't like it; I left school to be with my family. P

When I took off originally, I was angry with the state for not letting me live with my family. I ran away, moved with my sister in Georgia, cause she was down there. She is my best friend, still is. My mom was still living here in NH, and I thought I said I had enough of this running thing, 17 years old, came back, still a ward of the state, went to court, my mother got her custody given back to her, because I basically told the judges, there is nothing you can do to me, I am not a criminal, I am not going to stay in a criminal facility for kids. So the only option is I take off or you give me to my mom. P

I knew that the father in Family 2, who did not want to be interviewed, family problems had been a struggle in school as well. His parents had been alcoholics and the family was visited by many social workers. His own difficulty learning to read was assessed but written off as "family problems". The workers who came to the house apparently were perceived as making the problems worse by exposing the children to gossip as stories of what was happening in the home reached the school. This information was related to me by M.

Questioning authority and resisting authority were mentioned in our discussions as well. J considered himself ADD and basically unable to sit in one spot. T also was a questioning child.

They couldn't handle me cause if I couldn't get my way I'd go cause problems. Even in high school they wouldn't let me stay past 11 unless I picked up some kind of activity. J

And then you get caught looking out the window and get slapped upside the head. "what are you doing over there? You know you are restricted. Get over there on your bed." And then I went to the next school. Dudley school in Roxbury. All boys up to 6th grade. Then graduated from there and went to junior high. I went there for about three months, and then I went away to reform school for stubborn child. T

How can you not cooperate from your room? T

Laughter...A

They have a big stick, of course you are going to cooperate. My mother was mentally ill. She hated me. T

She had the power to send you away? L

Oh yeah. She told them she couldn't handle me. She was too sickly, so they put me in reform school. T

Stubborn child you said, now they call that something else. Opposition defiance. A

They send you for counseling now. T

I wondered how they saw the impact of not finishing school on their lives now. It may seem obvious but I thought given the chance to speak for themselves with what they know now, there may be some insight I could not perceive from my position.

Since you didn't finish school...how does that affect your life? L

Actually, it doesn't make too much of a difference. Still doing what I want to do. A

No different? L

Not really. Sometimes I wish I had finished school. A *silence.....*

I just asked A. now you...do you think not finishing school impacted your life in any way. L

Course it did. Do you see any...what do you call it...? Any shining sparkly things around here? Just the one on my finger, that is about it. Every thing else I could walk away from. T

Even if you had that stuff you could walk away from it. A
Yeah but I am just saying, I made peanuts for a paycheck. That is how it impacted me. I live in an apartment instead of a big beautiful house with a backyard I could go hide in every now and then. But because I am handicapped and I am home on a 24/7 basis I get to participate with my family and enjoy it more than most people do. Not having the education right now is hard to say whether it hurts or it helps because we are doing okay. We are doing okay. T

How does not finishing school impact your life now? L

Long silence....no way. I would probably still be a stay at home mom. I would still be with the same people. M

The only thing is that I feel I could have gone further.. M

Do you think not finishing school had an impact on your life? L

Greatly. Greatly . Just hard to find a decent job. People don't look at you.. everyone is supposed to be created equal but...society today, that is the biggest lie I ever heard in my entire life. Without education people look at you like you are a waste of space. Why be here, they look down on you like... . you are not as good as them. Really the huge impact is that you just can't make any decent money. I mean if you get into a place young enough and work there long enough, there may be a chance, cause I have seen some stories where people haven't graduated and they are making all kinds of money. P

At one time it didn't make a difference. And high school was more important than a GED but now it doesn't matter. It is either GED or high school, it is all weird. If you look in the paper, they just ask if you have knowledge in this.. and how many years. Given thirty years, schools will be no more. It ain't going to matter. J

I thought as I asked this question I was almost embarrassed by it since there seemed to be such an obvious answer. It was then with some surprise to me that two mothers noted life would not be different. Their answers made me think again.

I have discussed how jobs were difficult to obtain and hold onto. P and J went through jobs often. The changes made scheduling harder for them. They coordinated their use of the car, the childcare, pick ups and all the events of day to day life. J had an even harder time without a high school diploma and with a record. P worked most regularly for DD

In a night slot from 3am to 11:30.

I can drive fork truck, log truck. Any job I have ever gone to I have always wanted more. J

Do you get a certificate? L

I have a license with the company. I have to call the company up. Usually when you work for a company you can say you did this and they can call the company up and get the record on it. They don't hand out certificates.

Usually when you work for one company and they will check with the other cause they know you have to do that training. J

I've learned a lot, I can wire a house, install camera systems. You know I have learned a lot, but...every job I've had I've learned. I pick up what I can. I learn as much as I can. I still haven't found what I really want to do yet. J

I've worked a lot of places and DD takes the cake. I worked at a grocery store, I worked as a baker, hotel as a house keeper, I worked in a daycare, I've worked at McDonald's. .

Where else? Perkins as a waitress.

But DD took the cake for drama. P

These two had to run the fastest to keep working in the job world. For others, the balance seemed smoother. M was a stay at home mom. Even though their money was scant, they made the sacrifice for her to be home with the children. A and T had worked but their basic needs were taken care of since they both were on disability. They sorted their needs out and managed to live happily on the monthly sums they got. This solid base of elementary needs being met seemed to ease their life. Philosophically they saw themselves as satisfied. Furthering their educations was a personal goal.

I was curious to know if training that might enable someone to develop skills or keep up with job expectations was available. I mentioned J's restless learning at whatever job he took up. P mentioned earning a certificate at DD that she could not take with her without paying the company for the workshop. At \$400, it was not a moveable credential. On the job training was rarely mentioned as available.

I asked about jobs that had been held and what was the best. T was a natural storyteller. It is a delight to imagine him with this job.

The best job I ever had was for the government. Yeah, I worked in an elevator. I ran the elevator. I talked to FBI agents, lawyers, judges all day. It was the best job I ever had. Downtown Boston. I loved it. People used to come in and be in a good mood cause of me. I was like black coffee man, wake you right up. It was a hand crank one, not push the buttons. I loved it all day long just socialize. Running my mouth. Get paid for it and get laughs too. Knew everyone in the building. By name pretty much. They all knew me. T

T and A had worked in many different positions. Their ability to do the work and not be the work was refreshing.

I was a laborer. No just laborers...both of us. No training. I did maintenance, transportation into the hospital, pushing people in wheelchairs from place to place. Making circuit boards, drilling holes, whatever. I did that when I first got out of the hospital when I got shot. Mattress companies, I worked in two of those for a couple years. Flipping mattresses, bagging them, making them up, uhh, that was exciting. T
Especially at lunch time when you can take a nap. T

But he was also funny as A talked about her favorite. Though his response could be offensive in some couples, it is a tribute to their easy relationship that she laughs with him. In answer to what her favorite job was I transcribed this exchange.

I think working at the company that made medical gloves. Working on the machines. A

Ahh conveyer belt system? T

I lost a lot of weight on that cause you changed positions on it every thirty minutes, every 20 minutes. Okay, you would be setting up a table, counting gloves and putting them in boxes. A

Boring T

Then 20 minutes go by and you take the gloves off the machine. A

Boring T

Then you switch again, but it was hot, the machines are so hot you lose weight. A

Boring T

There were three people on each machine. So you couldn't talk too much cause of the noise which was good. I worked with a lot of Portuguese people and if they got mad at you, you never knew what they were saying. It was one of the better places, cause I worked in a lot of factories. A

None of the men in this study participated in the adult education classes offered either through Even Start or Project Lift. The women did. They enrolled and met with me for home visits. Both T and J attended the home visits when they were related to the program. Both agreed to participate in the interviews for this paper. Both were inquisitive men who seemed quite able to follow through on their education but had not made that decision for themselves. I invited their participation but respected both their decisions not to pursue. Responses to some questions often left me with the reasons not to ask further.

Nope, I only read if it is necessary. Or if I want to, if I want to read something and I need to know something or I want to know something and I have the information in front of me, I'll put my glasses on and go through it.
T

P earned her GED. She was able then to take training through the NH Jobs program for a CNA license. On our last visit her intention was to pursue this training but she was not sure how to handle childcare. She expected she would rely on neighbors rather than find the transportation to get the children to Head Start. In the Fall when I met with her, her daughter had been accepted to Head Start but was not attending. Transportation and scheduling had interfered.

A was sickly enough to be prevented from attending GED classes as she hoped. We offered her transportation which she accepted. She is a witty but quiet person who makes candid observations of people. Her participation in the program was a result of the small requests we sent out in the school packet asking if parents wanted more information about Even Start.

Her description of her employment at McDonald's and an encounter with a customer who was seeking a date with her was very funny. It would be unexpected by those who don't know her but very much reflective of her thoughtful, planned responses.

So I waited until there was a whole line there and said, "You don't have enough money." He said "How do you know how much money I have?" I said "I don't know, you just don't have enough for me." Everybody was cracking up laughing. A

You can get your point across to someone, cut them to the bone without disrespecting them. You just got to find the right words. T

She enjoyed the book discussion group we offered. While she attended, the boys went to the after school program. She enjoyed reading and used to get totally absorbed by a book. As T tells it, she doesn't even notice what is going on around her when she is absorbed by a book. She tells me she enjoys all kinds of books.

Once in a while a love story I'll read, not so much as I used to. Mostly mysteries or like, true stories. Like take someone interesting and they write a book about their life or whatever. Sometimes I can get into them too. I used to love reading true detective books. A

H was in Head Start but by agreement with the staff he played with the after school program while A was at book discussion. We thought this was a great way for him to be with his brother and in the school environment, getting ready for his enrollment next year.

M was challenged to keep up with our night classes. We offered her transportation but when the car was down she felt it was easier to stay home. Childcare helped and she brought the four children. We also provided dinner which was welcome for all who attended. When she was not making the progress she needed to take her GED as she wanted to, she accepted tutoring. We were accountable to federal standards for a level of

participation that would lead to accomplishment. She earned her GED in the fall after the end of the program beyond the time we could count her accomplishment in our data.

I have reviewed elsewhere how I was somewhat taken by surprise when everyone described staying current in some form with the news. We often discussed events and political consequences of events. I also have mentioned the use of computers. It seems in this cyber culture that everyone is connected but it is evident that we are not.

Assumptions get us in trouble. I have noticed that everywhere I went publicly people are staring at a screen. These families are not, sometimes by choice.

You gain all this electronics but you lose your natural abilities to go out and live. T

Once you start a family and manage the implicit structure of caring for young children, day to day life takes on a form that makes further education a challenge. It is a natural extension to learn on the job or through the job. There were no explicit revelations from these interviews about adult education. It makes sense to be able to learn on the job and take your learning with you. Managing childcare, transportation and access to individual training is a challenge. Opening schools in the non-school hours, providing childcare and access to dinner and transportation even as a network of available rides makes better use of the investment communities make in these facilities without leaving behind the motivated but working families.

The Parent Child level or What do parents and children do together? Do they take part in activities in the community? Do they invent their own? These families all live in a small town perched on a river with many beautiful lakes, streams and ponds throughout the area. There are playgrounds at the elementary school and the local baseball/skateboard park. There are several wildlife preserves with trails. There are many

snowmobile trails. It is a popular sport in the winter. Four wheelers and dirt bikes are mentioned frequently as recreation tools. Fishing is popular with both sexes and hunting has many adherents.

There is no local movie theatre or entertainment center. The small town supports changing businesses in the downtown. Flea market shops seem to predominate. Three churches are downtown. The Mainstreet status has brought renewed interest in beautifying an attractive downtown.

There are activities from the local churches, sports and outdoor recreation. The library hosts a story hour. The school sponsors many events for families to participate in. I was curious to know what people do with their children during those hours when they can be together.

Whether they are "up North" in the trailer they own 40 miles north of town or at home locally, S&C encourage their children to spend time outside.

Tree swings, I made them a tree swing. Mud puddles I let them play in. I teach them how to clean them out so the water will flow better. And they got toads on the porch right now that they caught up there this weekend. T
That they need to get rid of. A
They need to let them go. I let them keep them for a couple days. Whatever creatures they catch I let them keep them for a couple days then I make them set them free. T

Do they play outside up north?
From the moment their eyes are open they are out the door. A
Yup we got to make them stop to eat. We don't even look at a watch when we are up there. T
They run around, find snakes. A
Cut trails, play in the swamp, brook, ride the four wheeler. I put a tree swing up for them. Role a tire down the hill. T
So they are outside all day?L
Yeah all day every day. T/A

Like I said they don't even want to eat. We have to actually tell them, sit down and eat. They don't want to come in until the adults are coming in. A

A and T had purchased a trailer North of H for pleasure. It was clear in all conversations with T that the outdoors was very meaningful to him. He communicated that value he placed on being outside to his children. He recognized that the environment had changed his life and he assumed it would make a difference for his children. As we were talking about change in life he acknowledged the major changes in his own life that he believed came with a connection to the outside.

Yeah, The only reason is that our environment changed. That changed our life style. Which changes your personality. T

Their trips up North were all about spending time together and sharing a common interest. T found the outside to be ever interesting and changing. As one would expect, the boys could not help but appreciate the same.

M encouraged her children to spend time outside but did not go there with them.

They are generally outdoors, most days they are out the entire time. when they get home they love to go outside generally, and they stay there until I call them in to go to dinner and I call them in. M

I found that families used the outdoors. It was a source of play and entertainment. For A and T it was a lifestyle; for M it was relief for the children. The outdoors represented the freedom to do as they pleased once they came home from school. For P and J, it was a source of entertainment.

We like to play outside, we like to get out of the house. Go to _____, go to parks in _____. Here, I don't think they have any parks to go to. P

It has become a national issue of concern to note the numbers of children who do not spend their time outside. Rising obesity rates are an end product of listless children

who spend or are encouraged to spend time inside sitting quietly. Play outdoors need not be overly governed or assessed but the simple exposure to the weather, the fresh air and the territory to run and play in can build a set of experiences to talk about and to share. It may be important for community to develop the dialogue as a simple tool to build conversation between adults and children.

Outside play seemed to be a part of these three families lives together to an extent possible to build on. There may be an opening here to encourage families to do what comes naturally and is free. Take advantage of the outdoors. There is no tremendous research base needed to understand how much background knowledge, imaginative content and connection to text can be gained by spending and encouraging time spent outside. Nature is a fine teacher. Listen carefully. If one needs to, parse nature with a guidebook, and field charts, maps and explanations. With our youngest learners in hand, let's make going outside a equalizing part of the day again.

I asked about TV. It is everywhere and often on. Is it shared? I have visited homes where each person has their own TV tuned to their own show.

How about TV? I know you watch TV together. The movies you rent. The kids watch too? L

Sometimes. It depends on what it is. If we rent a family thing the kids will watch it too. T

And sometimes we let them watch it first and we watch it later cause they will talk so much through the movie. A

Yeah E asks a lot of questions. L

Yeah he does. T

It is okay, I will watch it again later when they are not watching it. A

Watching comedies. M

you like to watch movies together? L

yeah M

Yuh, we all watch movies together. We don't watch too much TV. I am not much of a TV person. TV is a waste of time. I like the news and I like to watch.... Not sitcoms, unless they are really worth watching. Some of the stuff on the history channel is pretty good. Discovery channel too. S recorded one of the history channels I haven't watched yet. It is about cities underneath cities that have been forgotten. I can't wait to watch that. P

It became clear that in the watching of TV families talked. (Parker-Pope,2007).

Aand T found the many questions P had made it hard to follow the story themselves. I had experienced his questions on a ride back from a show we went to. P talked for twenty five miles, telling stories, asking questions. His mother and I raised our eyebrows to each other as he kept up the monologue. I understood the reasons they kept some movies to view again later.

The stories families watched reflected their interests. Intense stories of mystery and drama were popular with Family 1. With M it was comedies. I had enjoyed this mom for her terrific sense of humor, and there again I was reminded that she enjoyed a good laugh. P was serious and took her movies to heart as a place to learn.

It seems possible to build an ability to recount into daily life through discussion of what is viewed on TV. All families talked about watching TV together and talking about it. T and A had to watch a movie a second time because P talked so much, asked so many questions. It would be difficult to remove TV watching from daily lives, but it is possible to recognize the power of a shared viewing to engage in discussion. Asking questions or making comments about what is watched brings the show home. Encouraging parents to discuss what has been seen, to give it life from their own experience and values brings their expertise to life. It is empowering as well as an active encouragement of literacy.

Conversation interested me after reading the studies of Hart and Risley (1995). I wondered how much the children were engaged in expressing themselves and their thoughts or telling daily stories. Since all the interviews were done with parents, though children were around at times, it was their recollection that provided the basis. It was supported by observation.

T told stories with drama and emphasis. He used words in a unique and characteristic way. A enjoyed the stories and in her witty way added, laughed or appreciated his “way with words.” Their natural compatibility seemed to encourage his story telling. His delivery which is missing from a written report was delightfully amusing, punctuated with emphasis and voice changes.

The ability to tell a story is an early childhood indicator of an understanding of seriation, the natural flow of events. It can be interpreted as an early literacy skill. (Rogoff, 1990). The practice the boys in this family gained by listening and natural modeling contributed both to their observation and recall abilities. P practiced telling stories.

He said Tuesday is his favorite day because he gets to tell his story. A
He tells a story from camp or one he makes up? L
Sometimes he makes them up and sometimes he tells something we did. A
He has a story cause we go out and we do stuff all weekend. Then he will tell the class or whoever he tells it to. T

I hope it is clear from the quotations I have included that with T as a model the telling of the story was exciting. His vocabulary and use of words was delightful and far beyond his acknowledged reading ability level.

In the first grade they [P's class] used to go read to the k kids. That was pretty cool. I thought it was pretty cool. He can read better than me. Which is not too hard, but I mean. T

The telling of a story was a basic part of this family. It was part of the reason to include them in the interview process. Storytelling is a fundamental human characteristic, a way to make sense of our experience. It is a valuable characteristic in most groups and has been isolated as a defining and sought after quality among low income people. (Payne,2005).

The ability to share a story in this way seemed a block for building literacy that had no bounds in academia. It all depended on the teller. The excitement of telling conveys a use of words, a sense of timing and consecutive events as well as the color the teller weaves into his narrative.

I checked with the other families. What kind of conversations did they have with their children? It is a good place to build a story from.

Trickier to get a story with F? L

Yeah, though she will remember names. W will not remember anybody's name. I ask W who her friends are and she is finally remembering names. She wants someone to come over but she has no idea what their names are. I can't really help her. F knows names. I am horrible at remembering names but F is pretty good at it. If you ask her in the moment then she will remember. Like with her speech therapy, she will come home and tell V what games she played and how. M

He says nothing. He is a little more difficult in dragging it out. If I do one on one and keep nagging him, then he will come to me. Unless it is a really cool trick, boy, then he will come to me. M

Trying to find new ways to trick them into telling me is kind of tricky. But on the other hand when I am with them, they make sure I look at very little detail that they do. Very in the moment children. They could care less what they did at school but what they are figuring out now. M

She comes home and blabs to me about it all the time ...Mommy we did this, Mommy check this out. We got her a bike and she is just now learning without training wheels. She shows me every second. We finally got rid of

the chicken. She refused to try it without them until this year. I think that was a bit of encouragement from someone. P

Here is a research based observation from the interviews. Conversation becomes an art form in storytelling containing many of the elements of literacy that are encouraged through school academics but separate from academics. Storytelling is available to anyone. Given the floor and the attention, can you hold the audience and make an event into a tale? (Payne,2005) . It was clear that the children and parents in these three families enjoyed conversation, the telling of events of their days but it had not always risen to the level of turning an event into a story.

Nonetheless, each adult had a charm in their ability to describe or their delivery. P described things with surprising analogy as M did with humor. P refers to Dunkin Donuts as filled with the story of soap operas, enough to call it “As the Donut Turns.” Or she refers to her neighbors as “Mory on one side and Jerry Springer on the other.” M is noted in the quotes as laughing regularly in our interviews. Her descriptions emphasize the humorous. The characteristic use of language translates to the children in the conversations they have with their parents.

Our best storytellers may not be our best readers. There is a simple tradition to the spoken word as a source for endless stories. Understanding the importance of the prestige and imagination brought to the teller of stories by his family and friends becomes a tool to enhance and build in classrooms. The quality of words, life and emphasis available to the tellers of stories is important to bridge to text when helping students engage with reading. The read story, the told story are dramatic events. It is a tie to home.

Again, it was clear from these three families that scheduling and transportation were impediments to participation in many local events that were intended to promote parent and child interaction. These were the community supports. The concert at the school, story hour, programs that occur once.

I have noted that the Library Limousine that pulled into the park on a regular schedule was very popular with both children and adults. It is fortunate that children of all ages were included in the inventory. It was also noted that the programs that were free were gladly accepted. Tennis lessons for the children, day camp at Manahan Park, if it was possible to take advantage, they did.

I think it is so cool they have these free programs. M

It is important to isolate elements of the life of the family. Play outside, eat together, talk and tell stories even while watching TV are attributes that lend themselves to develop vocabulary and background knowledge.

The Child level or What happens in school by family report, strains to understand each other. On the next level of the pyramid is the support we offer our children by way of a school and the academics they are taught there. It is easy to wash our hands of it and assume that what goes on there is out of our hands, especially if we are not fully comfortable with school anyway. We want to think that the administration and the teachers know what is best for the children. We as parents watch what the children bring home from school. I wondered about the axis created between the school and the experience of the children in it as it relayed back to the parents in this study. How does it align with our expectations for them ?

Children use their parents as the model. (Greenspan,1997). Parental understanding of what is happening in school seems a point for further dialogue. Learning to read need not be so complicated that it cannot be understood. There is a process and even busy parents contribute to the progression. I had many questions related to the school experience of the children and the parent perception of it.

I asked about how the children were doing.

P and H were both doing fine with school. H was in Head Start and adjusted to the classroom environment and expectations easily. For T, his attitude affected their attitude.

Yeah, they like school. They are doing good. None of my other kids ever did. I believe it has to do with the environment, mostly. T [environment in this case meant the outdoors.]

It was harder for Family 2 and 3's children. P had one child in HDES. They were new to the school district. Her daughter had struggled with the new expectations, new teacher, new classmates that are inevitable when moving from one town to another. P's daughter T had been very difficult to manage for the beginning months of the school year. She tested al the limits again and again. Her teacher had sought lots of help in managing her. It seemed that once there was a flag over T, it was difficult to bring it down or align what was important to what was not. P and J had kept a daily log with the teacher noting what was happening at home with what she did at school.

For a while that book was good but then it seemed like Mrs N seemed to start writing down everything T did, if she spit wrong. J
Yeah, I can understand her writing down like when T is doing a little crawl or trying to get out of something, but when she is just talking in class. I don't want to hear about it. P
No big deal. L
It is getting down to her giving her a yellow or orange star for just talking, she is nit picking at her. I understand she is going through a tough time, her

mom was sick, she passed a way but some of it is just kid stuff, I just trying to ignore some of what she says to me cause it is just kid stuff. P

For P, she knew her daughter needed extra help. She advocated for her in the beginning of the school year. By her enrolling in this program, I was able to add the weight of our intervention to the assessment. She tested at a borderline level for extra help and was not eligible until she was noticed for other reasons.

It is just the writing and the reading. She was in special classes. I believe she still has a touch of dyslexia. She still writes backwards. She misplaces the letters, so she will get all the right letters but they are not in the right order. Her e will look like a 3 and 3 like an e. and she rushes. P

The point of looking at the interaction between the school teacher and the parents is for the room there is for misunderstanding. It is easy to see how stretched this family is to provide the basic necessities of life for their children. Their sense of what is important will inevitably vary from the sense of a teacher who has the responsibility of the day to day education of a child. Different environments often promote different behavior.

I observed a number of times that children fell off the eligibility criteria. I knew students who made great early progress with academics, the skills of learning to read, but the ongoing vocabulary acquisition and background knowledge needed to keep pace would be a problem as they advanced. (Juell,2004;Snow 1998).

M had observed her children and seen that academics were not going to be their area of success. She exemplified a very accepting attitude towards all people and kept her expectations for her children in line with a clear objectivity about who they were and what she thought they could do. When speaking about her son, this observation expressed her frustration.

He has never said anything negative about school but he is kind of driven into the idea that he is never going to be that good. And stuff. M

M mentioned the same of her daughter. She clearly expected them to struggle. She assessed who they were and fit her expectations to what she was seeing from them.

When he was in first grade he was held back. And stuff. And we explained to him that he needed more help and he had no problem with that. Anybody asked him what grade he was in, he was like I'm in first I was held back because I needed more help. He was always okay with that. He has no problem telling me he has learning problems. He gets real excited when he learns new ways of how to do things. And I can't help him very much cause I have no idea how he is learning. He has shown me what he is learning and I can't figure it out. M

Things that he learns at school? L

Yeah. And I have no idea how he is just getting the right answer. M

For W it is just the confidence thing. She can't seem to get past it so I am thinking next year she is going to be in homework club too. M

The years of not quite getting it had undermined both children's confidence. M knew that this was the struggle but did not know how she could help. She was well aware that they did not have the confidence that she was sure they needed to rise to their potential but was mystified by how to nurture it in them. She recognized their individual strengths.

S's not reading is bad but it is not as bad as I sometimes feel with W. Only because I know she loves doing that stuff. And stuff. [Lots of starts at saying what she means here.] And I know with that play Seussical she needs to be able to read to do that. So I see it affecting her more. S will...hummmm, sometimes I keep forgetting S's ten. He'll play with his action figures. He'll play with ...cubes and stuff. But with W, the no reading thing affects S, that poor child, he couldn't go on with Spanish..he gave it to me and I couldn't figure it out. And where I had...I had no clue. I am sitting there going why can't I read this. It doesn't affect S as much as I think it would W, Her difficulty. Her confidence. I wish she would learn more just because more of what she is interested in heads towards reading. And stuff. S he ...it is not where his interests lie, not yet. And stuff. W she is a more dramatic person... I can't see her going through life..... She could be an actress. M

M told me she felt both children thought they were stupid and they are not. They may not succeed with the expected academics but both were capable in their own way.

S and W are not stupid but they are almost made to look that way. Because they don't have the resources they need to learn the way they need to learn. So they are just kind of made to look stupid ... M

The disconnect between the school and the families was evident in all the interviews. Misunderstanding rules or expectations made it difficult for parents to be fully supportive of the school.

Let's go to the playground and no running. You can only walk fast. T
P chimes in that he can't run at school.
Are you serious? Can you walk fast? They can't talk in the cafeteria either, they put the lights down for the little kids and then they can't talk. T
What ?L
You didn't know that? T yeah A
Most parents have been irate about it. They get too loud and rowdy. T
The first time I went there and I seen them shutting the lights off all the time. A
It is their break, they should be allowed to socialize. Break time, lunch time, it is a time to release. T

They have a three day fever rule too. If your kid has a fever the day before yesterday, he can't come in for two days. T
Then they mark them absent so....A
Yeah well he isn't there T
Yes but instead of one day he gets three....A
You can have a fever and not even be sick. Get over the fever. T
Time piles up when you are out. A

The cafeteria should be pretty much a place of freedom of speech. You can't be throwing food and jumping across the table but you should be able to socialize. It is going to get loud. You get a hundred kids, it is going to get loud. T

To probe the connection to school further, I asked if they had any sense of how reading is taught. Now, I didn't know how to teach reading when my son was little. I

suppose I thought if I just read to him enough, he would absorb the skill. I have learned much with lots of study and reflection. I was curious to know what these parents thought.

It was clear that the parents in these interviews were clueless about how reading was taught at school, when asked.

I know she is getting a little one on one in a reading group in school. But other than that not really, I don't know what the teacher herself is doing. I know her teacher aide or her reading aide works with her one on one. And they have special books that they do. P

I have no clue. I know they are not doing phonics, well they might be doing phonics. I actually asked Mrs R if that would help W, if I went out and bought the phonics stuff. [She said] W doesn't seem to get the rhyming. It wouldn't help W very much where she can't rhyme. That surprises me. A lot of the stuff I'm not sure, I am willing to accept that I see things because I see them every day and I am willing to accept that maybe my depth perception is off when it comes to them. M

How about do you know how reading is taught in the school? L
Do we know how it is taught in school? [Said slowly after a long silence].....what do you mean...like what T
Like what do they do to teach P to read?
How the words are read? T
There is other stuff, techniques they use too. Like identifying certain things, certain things they can identify with. A

I am happy to note that A participated in the book discussion group we offered which emphasized the strategies the children were learning in school. The adults were reading a book and applying a strategy that the children were learning to help them with their children as they apply the strategy at home.

There are many aspects that are not very complicated and can easily be shared with parents. As simple as reading with your children can seem, it is not necessarily seen as a strategy to ensure their reading for themselves. Drawing conversation out of text or making a connection between what they have done and what they are reading about may be elements of a school-family conversation that can support the work each family is

already doing in the raising of their children. Even promoting conversation about day to day events around the dinner table can promote reading. Imagine using conversation around what we watched on TV to support more vocabulary or critical thinking. This is a natural part of family life. Linking family conversation to academic success can help support what comes naturally. It is an affirmation for families.

There are many areas where families engage with their children. Even when the play is not specifically literacy oriented, the knowledge that children gain by the doing and the conversation about it ties literacy back to home from which it first comes.

Happily the school and all the teachers are available through the internet. The flaw here is that not all the parents are equally accessible. It is a great assumption that information is available to all with the internet but it was clear from these three families that we are not all reliably online. One family used the internet infrequently and mostly to print forms or play games. Another was on and off the internet. Lastly, one family had been given a computer that was so old, it could not support the internet.

The tentative nature of answers in this section helped me sense that this significant disconnect serves no one. Better bridges can be built with some specific strategies linking the quality inherent in families to positive outcomes for children. Continuing to build on strengths that are activities families do together -play outside, eat together, discuss what they do- that authenticate their work in developing literacy in their children promises the most success.

What happens on the parenting level of the pyramid- Do we observe the children around us as well as our own? In the Even Start program, we had a component called parenting which was often misinterpreted to be a behavioral management tool. It was

more clearly defined to be what parents can learn and do to instill literacy in their children. The knowledge that many activities we naturally engage in promotes good reading is terrific support to play more with our children. Talk more. Cook more. Good parenting in the framework I have in mind also included an interest in the development of other children, neighbors and the community.

By raising children with qualities of literacy, interpretation and connection to the human story, it seemed we would be raising the level of interaction between people. Interest in the lives of those around us seemed to take on a shape of literacy. In the long run, raising children with quality literacy experiences seemed like it would enhance interconnectedness for all future children.

I asked if parents took an interest in the children that came to their houses or played with their children. Answers followed the same lines as one would expect from household time.

We see everybody a lot. There is a lot of activity there.[next door neighbor]
She is a party girl. T
The little one, he comes over every day. Every day he wants chips. I keep chips for him. A

He [neighbor child] jus messes with me cause he likes me. He would shoot me all day long. [Noises for imitation]... He will stand there for ten minutes doing that until I get tired of bouncing around. I think I am quite dead. Go play with the kids. T

You put on quite a performance for him then. L

Yeah he doesn't get out. He was outside yesterday riding a bike with the kids, he doesn't have that much energy. Sick little boy. Spoiled rotten though, but not with me. I tell him how it is. He tells you off too. Cause he gets away with it. T

You have a lot of conversations with the kids... L

Right. T

Both of you do.

Right. T

We don't have too many kids come and stay over here. And our kids don't really go and stay over anywhere, cause we don't really trust people. The last time P was out I didn't like what I heard when he came back. T

The answers after that were mostly about not having the time to have other children over and then watch them play. This in my mind was the upper reaches of the community pyramid. To participate in a community with the openness of helping others may be a stage of altruism that is engendered by having the needs of life met. In theory we model good practice by living. (Greenspan,1997). We are taught good practice in school and carry the lessons into life to share with those around us.

To teach children to engage in discussion is a practice of good early childhood education. T uses a neighbor to help P see beyond his own needs. The wonderful piece is that P retains the lesson. He describes the exchange.

Yeah, cause he is almost 6 years old, you know who he is? He always messes with me cause I tease him. But you know what, I told P that he probably was going to die, that little boy is really really sick cause if you think about it he is your age, and he is like why is he so little, cause he's got a disease and they haven't found a cure to help him. He probably won't even live to be ten years old. And ever since I told him that, C can't do anything wrong. He will defend C against anybody. T

Whether that engagement comes through lessons at school or through parental modeling, the effect on community involvement can be the same. The emotional attachment to follow whom one loves is evident in the example. As an element for literacy it is a more difficult connection except through the strategies we use to make reading meaningful.

Many stories can be found in quality children's literature. Literature is the basis for the most meaningful dialogue. The gathering of young children for a story is universal and compelling. When we have run dry of our own stories, it is possible to pick up a quality book in very short form complemented with artful illustrations to engage children

in a larger picture of life. Knowing the stories are there and it is in literature that we gain more than what is printed on the page that real parenting for literacy meets its goal.

It is useful to read to learn how to do...make a cake, plant a garden, fix a car but when we read about human situations that have a core meaning to our own lives, we are engaging in art. We are engaging in a storytelling that has meaning in all cultures and with all people. It is the top of the pyramid of support a community can offer its residents. Book discussions that bring together interested readers around a book, can be a means to further art in life.

Art or Where did I find art, how did I ask about it. I found art to be the trickiest piece to interview. I think part of the reason was my own lack of definition of what I was Thinking about. I also felt intimidated by the needs of families in this context and the luxury art seemed to define. I do not think this is the case but asking a struggling parent about the time they might spend reading and discussing books did seem elitist and inappropriate. I solved the problem by asking tamer questions and noting the aesthetic appreciation many families engaged in. I am sure this is a shared area but my own access to my thoughts about it inhibited my interviews here. It is worth revisiting.

I had not expected to find lots of art activities. Being the culmination of the pyramid, small measures can cover the need. I had the feeling that with a solid structure beneath the top, there would be community activities in this area as well as personal.

One thing I did note was again the use of the TV as a unifying medium. TV may not be art but it does provide stories and a rapt audience. It was not unusual for each family to sit together, to watch together. There was rarely a family I ever visited that did not have a TV. I can't think of one, even the families in the most remote homes with the

least access and perhaps even lacking electricity. Art can happen on TV. Storytelling was the medium the TV was used for whether as a comedy, tragedy or non-fiction account.

Art was intended to mean the aesthetic reason for reading but it included the visuals we associate with art.

P is drawing a little bit. He has been trying to draw like Sponge Bob and Patrick. And characters. A
And he is using color. T
That is good. You encouraged it. L
Yeah you have to encourage it. T
But E didn't really like coloring or anything. A
Yeah he didn't. and I used to say to her, isn't it strange little kids that don't want to color and draw? I remember them throwing it in my face all the time. [the them being his parents] Here take that in the corner and draw. T
Yeah me too. Laughter A
Do you like to draw? L
Yeah. I used to. I used to be pretty good at it. T

I can get into a book, I look up once in a while, what is going on? A
Every once in a while she will come out and you can tell by the look on her face.. what is going on? Did I miss something? You missed the last three hours.T

I got to get another sketch book. When I do things I like to do them in an organized way. I am kind of a perfectionist. I prefer to have them in one book. Just drawing here and there on pieces of paper I don't like. M

I had a side hobby- I played violin from third grade to ninth grade. It was six years I played it then when I went to Dover high, they didn't offer it. That aggravated me. P

You like playing it then? L
Yeah I loved it. I still have two violins. P
I played trombone for like a week then I got thrown off. J

I asked about the recreational reading parents might do. I hoped to get a sense of what books people actually enjoyed. The comments were interesting, starting with A's from above.

the character's head. But I like the movie cause it just tells mewhen I read the book again. And I will reread books. M

Romance, fiction, science fiction. Mysteries although I cheat. M
You look at the end? L

Yeah *laughter*. I just sit there and I am baffled sometimes, alright who the heck is it? It makes me more observant when you are reading a book if you know who it is. When you are reading, okay it is not obvious unless you know who is doing it then you are okay why didn't you think of it the last time you were reading it. If I could I would go into my future.. when am I going to die? What is going to happen? What is Wm going to be? M

Do you think you get the same thing from watching it on television or reading? L

They work differently. I was watching a movie yesterday, actually if there is a movie about a book I do like watching it. Or if I know there is a movie about the book, I enjoy watching it. Only because the book goes into more details, or there are different details. But the book I do tend to like better cause you get more into

A lot of people appreciate other peoples' lives by reading, watching movies....what does it for you? L

Music. P

What kind of music do you listen to? L

I like all kinds. I got some music that is just relaxation. Just a breeze. It really depends on what mood I am in. and I like to be outside listening to the birds. Another reason I like it out here. You don't have that huge traffic beep beep siren crap. P

There is a little of both in the quotes. Music, art, theater play a part in all the lives.

It is not always a clear correlation but I am satisfied that there is a reach beyond our selves. Sometimes that reach comes in the form of a quest for larger meaning.

My own thinking about art is how it edifies our lives. In terms of the pyramid a community need not offer lots of art but some does satisfy that part of our shared condition that allows us to acknowledge what is common among us.

It is again beyond the scope of this thesis to plumb the depths of personal philosophies regarding purpose and meaning in life but it is interesting to reflect on S's comment about his recovery from a shooting that compromised his life:

Well, I had a couple years of sitting in a wheel chair, and a hospital bed to think about it too. First year it was just thinking about revenge. Then the second year it was thinking about adjusting. Yeah surviving, you know what I mean. And then the third year it was like making myself better. Out of the chair, getting rid of this getting rid of that. Now it is just, whatever comes, I will deal with it. I got life. and if it is good I will go looking for it. T

We did not discuss his revival in more detail but it summed up for me a quality that I found in all these families. It will take a more complicated and extensive study to assess how one arrives at believing in the goodness of life and moving on from our disasters.

CHAPTER V

FINAL DISCUSSION

Statement of the significance of the study including potential implications for Early Childhood Education or how do families participate in the literate life of the community?

Families are the nurturers of a literate life which does not necessarily equate with wealth and privilege. It has been important to me to search out what is inherently strong in low income families in order to find the means by which a community can provide simple but fundamental extensions and validations for the work families already do. Through the family or extensions of what families already do, we can promote literacy as a building block for the society we believe we live in. Rather than look for what is not happening, I found what is and theorized how it connects to life in a community.

I chose families that seemed to embody some characteristics that set them apart. Each family also was articulate about their thoughts and experiences. I had noted that in my work and used that in my requests for their participation. It made more interesting interviews for me. Humor, storytelling, aesthetic appreciation indicated a sense of the world from which literacy can grow.

My field work was designed from the leveled support that a framework like a pyramid suggests. I wanted to pin my thoughts down, not necessarily to validate an idea

I had used but to define what strengths families naturally exhibit and can be built on. The responses to the interviews I hoped would help sort out through their own words where families participate and what they naturally do that supports literacy growth.

My work in the Even Start program which had begun with respect for the theoretical underpinnings of the work changed in the course of the interviews. The theory of opening access to education for the whole family remained valid but the emphasis on program mandates left out elements of life that were of equal importance to the growth of literacy in life. There was an implied structure to community that needed to be built before the theory worked well.

When I heard T tell a story, I understood that he would be embarrassed to be asked to read the same. Yet I knew that his children were fine with language and fine with school, I learned that as educators we can emphasize the literacy tool storytelling is or recoil at an inability to read. By choosing wisely we validate the contribution of the father. The emphasis is on knowing the individuals.

This is the field of early childhood. It is developmentally appropriate practice. We seek to design our curriculum for the strengths of the children. Recognizing the interests of each child and bringing out their strength while encouraging new growth as we move them forward in their thinking or their play. Our bonds of caring for the children, just as the bonds to their parents, helps learning occur. It is no different for adults.

This reminded me of why it was so hard to implement an Even Start program. Individual variations resist mandates. There are adults for whom furthering their education is not the way to support their children best. They may already be engaging with their children in ways that encourage their language. The pleasure to be had by

eating dinner together, sharing a compelling movie or teaching children how to dam up a water flow eludes the counter. Our work needs to address all families and individuals through access and stability.

There are many ways access can be offered. A home visitor can be a part of the circle that draws families in. The relationship a home visitor develops can be objective and consistent. It has been shown that the home visitor can be perceived as a friend. Respect is usually a two way street. Consistent scheduling and a firm interest in the wellbeing of the family, all members, becomes a tool for change. The access, connections and knowledge of resources furthers the relationship.

Home visiting can be an effective means to deliver a multi leveled system of intervention and connection in a time when we want to diminish the differences between expectations for all children. The long term changes inherent to connecting people back into a community may offset costs.

Stability is harder to achieve. The Even Start program was grant funded. At the end of the cycle, we left programs in place but not unified under one heading. It was clear that programs come and go at too frequent a level. The inconsistency leads us to reinvent programs over and over. Collaborations and communication across programs is a key to stability. This is an administrative and political task.

At this point, I look back at a pyramid of literacy and think, with all seeing eyes, we would look at our communities and see where the gaps are. For instance, lacking access to mental health means more children are in school struggling with issues that could be managed. It also means that if we find there isn't a bookstore in town, how surprised should we be if children do not have books in the home. Our strengths as a group can lie

in what we support locally. The effects of what we do will be felt in the community probably taking its largest toll on those with the least.

These interviews were intended to intersect with each other providing a few moments of insight. It seemed that with common points, conclusions could be drawn on simple strategies to enhance the well-being of young children as they strive to make themselves heard and understood in the literate world. The conclusions are not what we can do to make families read together more but what educators and a community can do to support the ongoing literacy gains of its members.

I found storytelling, the outdoors and friendship to be profound pieces of adult and family life that were directly linked to quality early childhood education. These aspects of family life lived in the words of the interviews. I was reminded of the power we build when educators encourage young children to enter into play. Just as problem solving with pals in the block area may translate into building in adulthood, so do other developmentally appropriate experiences for young children. I wonder sometimes if the numbers of home building supply stores is not related to the pleasure adults found in the predecessor in their early childhood education.

Early childhood educators can learn to tell stories. This ancient tradition lines up well with the research in this thesis. An exciting telling need not be the territory of professionals. It can be done with retelling from one's own life, or a classic tale from mythology or even a rendition of something seen or read. Think of "To Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street." An ability to tell a story is a prized skill. The translation to literacy is the ability to follow the story, learn the language and then apply it to the printed word.

Encourage children to do the same. We can remember T's son whose favorite day in school was the one when he could tell his story. All children benefit from the mental processing of speaking about an event, telling a story. Teachers need to take the time to listen to each child and have it recognized as a powerful tool for expanding literacy.

It follows then that classrooms should not be silent places. Engaging conversations should be carried on. Again research would bear out this finding. Children need to hear and respond to more conversation, even if the noise level is heightened. Make sure there is plenty of time for laughter as well. Humor is a tool from home.

Teachers should use high quality children's literature as a source for learning and sharing. Simple powerful books we read to children are an effective way of promoting all the juice a child needs to learn to read. Literature emphasizes the connections to lives through storytelling. Read out loud or acted out loud, quality stories compel attention, develop conversation and build vocabulary.

In literature we find the heroes and mythmakers of life. Here children can hold onto a drama or learn about an adventure that helps them dream big thoughts. Teachers make the passages live. They build on the work of the spoken word. Here children learn the aesthetic reason to read. Here is the reason that keeps them coming back for more.

Book sharing through free donations. Keeping the bookshelves that occur naturally stocked is a simple encouragement to the infrastructure of community life. Make sure there are children's books available too. Maybe even host a volunteer reader on site.

Sometimes children do not get outside during a school day. As we can see from the interviews, they do when they get home. Reenergizing the outdoors with treasure hunts, explorations, challenging obstacle courses can bring a specific learning tool back to

education. Teachers can check with their local fish and game department for tool boxes to learn about the environment both vegetable and animal. Guides are filled with objects to look for and track. With an interest that provides so much stimulation as well as physical well being and is even shared by families, teachers may find parents ready and willing to participate in classroom activities.

As traditional as out door play is, by providing extensions to the classroom...what did you see, how did it feel, ..teachers can easily find ways to reconnect our inside children with the outdoors. It is there. It is loved. It is free. There is too much to be learned from the outside to leave it for a play station. It is easier to find homework in the outside than to ask children to research in the books in their home. It is a connection to home for them. Knowing that families share the outdoors and it is available, especially in rural communities, can spur the use of what is charged naturally.

Unfortunately even in the outdoors there is probably an administrative schedule to negotiate. Linking what happens outside with good educational outcomes can prove a quality link. It seems to be something we know inherently but must prove to ourselves and a system again.

Friendship in adults was a unifying point. Building friendship in early childhood is a tool for life. Enhancing and emphasizing the commonality of life through friends starting in the play of young children is a foundation piece for a strong community. It is fundamental to early childhood learning. Through those early friends, children try out language, test their ideas and learn from each other. Skill in the early childhood teacher helps the children build those friendships and pushes them to stretch their language,

conversation and ideas. Knowing that making friends also is a shield and protection for life should emphasize this aspect in all early classrooms.

Friendship can help teachers make the connections to elements in each child's life. It is in making friends and learning to keep friends that life lessons can be taught. Adults had kept their friends. There is a universal charm to the finding. It not only validates our early childhood education tenets but strengthens the resolve to maintain these powerful resources for all young children.

Using the power of literature in stories that resound with friendship helps young children think about, act upon and learn about others. Literature helps us invent ways to promote the spoken word and told story in an effort to find what connects us rather than what separates us.

Families can and do enhance many aspects of literacy just by the sharing of a day's events, the action in the sandbox or the questions that arise in the TV show. These are the unremarkable elements of daily life. But when we think back to the amount of language young children hear, it is here that the simplest strategies for elevating amounts of language can be found. By respecting the fact that life is complex but talk can accompany lots of it, teachers should educate parents that their daily interactions count for a child's developing literacy.

Through the activities we do for fun, we can also learn how we are building our children to be players in the educational world. This important bridge is simple to say and harder to realize. Teachers can ask for reports back on what was seen on TV at worst but also during a trip to the store. A simple explanation from the teacher can encourage

parents to find energy in this conversation with their children. It is a confirmation for parents.

I have been surprised by elements of these interviews. Reflecting on the qualities of the families as I have found their strengths to be borne out in disparate literature. Readings from early childhood education, poverty studies, literacy and its development intersect and are borne out with these families. Working across a curriculum that includes thoughts on what a family brings to the classroom, regardless of position, can help turn our heads from problems to be more inclusive of the context of children's lives.

I have the most profound respect for the families who participated in these interviews. Their words have helped me advocate in a thesis for the quality I see in their lives. It was not just an impression but the conversation they offered that has helped me identify strengths that only seemed like they existed before these conversations.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Community literacy questions- all questions are intended to elicit a response of more than a word or two. They will be rephrased if the question listed seems to fail.

Questions from the base of the pyramid which builds education, health, housing, food, transportation, employment, recreation and spiritual activities and on which all else is premised:

Tell me about your family: for instance, who is in it? How did you get together? Do you have more family in this area? How often do you get together?

How did you come to live here?

Describe what you have for Health care?

Are you a part of a religious community? Or tell me about your spiritual life?

How do you get groceries? What is the process?

Have you ever looked for mental health counseling? Or has anyone in the family ever needed or asked for counseling?

Where do you get books?

There is an assumption that people are on-line? Are you?

Can you get to the places you need to go? Tell me about transportation.

Questions from the adult level of the pyramid which supports adult goals while modeling the importance of literacy to the next generation:

Tell me about your school experiences?

If you did not finish, how do you see not finishing school impacting your life now? Does it?

Do you read for pleasure now? What sorts of books do you enjoy? Have you read anything you would recommend?

Tell me about your thinking about why it is important to read.

Can you get further training at work?

Have you received any certificates of advancement? Will your work pay for more education? If they do, can you take advantage of the opportunity?

Do you read the newspaper? Which one? Do you read national news? How do you get your news?

Are there educational objectives you have that are not available to you?

From the Parent-Child level which may be very important and subtle an influence because they are activities that strengthen parent-child bonds

Tell me about what do you like to do together as a family?

Do you plan these times? What kind of conversation do you have during and afterwards?

Tell me about visits with friends or relatives?

Do you eat dinner together? Is there time for conversation then?

Who cares for the children while you work?

Do you use any recreation in this area?

Do you read with your children? What kinds of stories? What age did you start at?

What kind of conversations do you have with your children?

Do you tell your history to your children? Do you tell a family history?

How do you play together?

Do you watch television together?

Do you talk about the television you watch?

What kind of movies do you enjoy? With the children? Do you talk about the movies you see?

The next level has to do with children, their education, care, language and adventures :

How is school going for your children?

If they are in childcare, who does it?

What does childcare mean to you?

Are there programs, like story hour at the library, that you take your children to?

Is a summer program available? What is it and do your children participate?

Do they read for pleasure?

How is reading being taught?

Can you participate in the instruction?

Do your children talk with you?

Do they tell you about their school, their activities, their thoughts or feelings?

Do they have outside activities?

Can you get them to school activities?

What games do your children play?

Do they play outside? Where? And with what?

Next is the parent level where parents may be teaching their children strategies that are useful to literacy acquisition. This support may also be available in the community through other people. :

Are you interested in how to help your children/other children learn?

Do you find ways to encourage them? How? By observation?

How do you enjoy observing/watching your children?

Do you think of some of the activities you do together as promoting their conversational skills or physical skills? Or another aspect of their growth?

Do you take care of any other children?

Do your children have friends come to the house? How do you plan that time?

The highest level of this pyramid is art: transformative work that enriches and relaxes while reminding us of the unity in the human spirit:

What do you do to relax?

What enriches your life? Is there work you enjoy doing for the pleasure of it?

Do you encourage your children to find something they can to relax with?

What do you think about?

Does literature/painting/music help you find meaning in life?

What helps connect you with other people?

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

University of New Hampshire

Research Conduct and Compliance Services, Office of Sponsored Research
Service Building, 51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585
Fax: 603-862-3564

13-Feb-2007

Graham, Linda
Education, Morrill Hall
8 Orion Street
Concord, NH 03301

IRB #: 3898

Study: Study of Community Literacy as Seen Through the Eyes of Families

Approval Date: 12-Feb-2007

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved the protocol for your study as Exempt as described in Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 46, Subsection 101(b). Approval is granted to conduct your study as described in your protocol.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the attached document, *Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects*. (This document is also available at <http://www.unh.edu/qsr/compliance/irb.html>.) Please read this document carefully before commencing your work involving human subjects.

Upon completion of your study, please complete the enclosed pink Exempt Study Final Report form and return it to this office along with a report of your findings.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,



Julie F. Simpson
Manager

cc: File
Hornstein, John