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The literacy-related knowledge of the children in two Western Australian preprimary centres and the literacy-related practices in their homes

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The Literacy-related Knowledge of the Children in Two Western Australian Preprimary Centres and the Literacy-related Practices in Their Homes.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates both the literacy-related knowledge of two groups of children beginning their preprimary education and the literacy-related practices identified by their parents as taking place in their homes. The two groups of children were attending preprimary centres located in different suburbs of Perth; one was in a low socio-economic status northern suburb and the other was in a high socio-economic status inner metropolitan suburb. The results of a questionnaire about family literacy practices showed that there was a wide range of literacy-related practices and materials available in the majority of the households involved in the study. The results of assessment of the literacy-related knowledge of the children showed that the children had begun to develop knowledge in some areas of emergent literacy which have been shown by previous research to predict success in learning to read. These areas of knowledge were: recognition of letters of the alphabet, vocabulary, environmental print, concepts of print and grammatical and phonological awareness. Statistically significant differences were found between the mean scores for both groups of children for each of the assessment tasks measuring literacy-related knowledge. Observation of the parent responses to the questionnaire, indicated that there were also differences between the home literacy practices of the two groups in the frequency of joint book reading, the number of classes (other than preprimary) attended by the children, computer use and the parents' expectations of their child's eventual level of education. Several aspects of the children's literacy-related knowledge (identification of letters of the alphabet, vocabulary, phonological awareness and grammatical awareness), were found to have statistically significant relationships with the home factors of frequency of joint book reading, teaching the

letters of the alphabet, playing word and letter games, computer use and parent's level of education. The results of this study have implications for teachers who are attempting to implement early intervention programs or planning for individual children in their classes. The methods of assessment of young children's literacy-related knowledge need to be carefully chosen to be appropriate to the age and developmental level of the children. The tasks involved should measure specific areas of knowledge identified as predicting success in learning to read. The results of this study indicate that teachers may have children with a wide range of literacy-related knowledge entering their preprimary classes. In order to build on the skills and knowledge which these children bring with them, teachers need to acknowledge the rich and diverse context of home literacy practices rather than attempt to overcome the differences.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material

previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material

previously written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature

Date _10 · 3 · 1999_

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Two recent Australian government initiatives, <u>Childhood Matters</u> (Australian Senate Inquiry, 1996) and <u>Literacy for All: The Challenge for Australian Schools</u> (DEETYA, 1998), address the important issues of literacy in the pre-school and early school years and the role that parents and schools can play in fostering the development of literacy in the early years.

<u>Literacy for All</u> explains the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan which aims to develop fundamental literacy and numeracy skills in all children (except those with severe educational difficulties) to a minimum standard within four years of commencing school (DEETYA, 1998). To achieve this goal, the Plan recommends "assessment of all students by their teachers as early as possible in the first years of schooling" and "early intervention strategies for those students identified as having difficulty" (p.10). The Plan recognises that:

> ...*there is a wide gap between those who enter school well prepared*
>
> *for learning, and those who are least prepared. Unless this gap is*
>
> *closed in the first years of school, it will widen, limiting the opportunities*
>
> *for some children to fully participate in education. The diversity of*
>
> *children's experiences in language learning in the first five years of life,*
>
> *before they enter school, is a significant factor in relation to their later*
>
> *literacy achievement (p.15).*

The importance of the role that parents play in their child's language development is acknowledged in the Plan, as it is seen as facilitating the child's acquisition of

literacy in the early years of school. It is recommended that education and training programs be made available to parents, teachers, carers and those working in child care centres to enable them to facilitate and enhance the emergent literacy knowledge of children before they enter kindergarten.

The Plan also recognises the diverse nature of children's early language and literacy experiences and that these may also be affected by socio-economic status, whether or not the child's first language is English and whether their culture has a strong oral or literate tradition, "Not only does this highlight the importance for schools and teachers of recognising and building on the diversity of children's early language and literacy experiences, but it also has implications for valuing the language repertoires of all children" (p.15).

This diversity is emphasised by reference to the wide range of achievement among Australian school children in Years 3 and 5 as seen in the <u>National School English Literacy Survey</u> (ACER, 1997):

> *This wide range of achievement highlights the complexity of the*
>
> *task of teachers in planning and conducting classroom programmes*
>
> *which provide appropriate learning opportunities for all children.*
>
> (DEETYA, 1998, p.16).

The Plan aims to address educational inequities by identifying children who are "at risk", that is, in need of extra support, and by providing programs of early intervention to address the needs of these children. Intervention can take place as soon as the child enters school or even before the child enters the school system, through adult education programs aimed at the parents of babies and toddlers. The document states that research shows parental involvement to be very important for the success of

intervention programs in the early years of school.

An earlier government document, the Australian Senate inquiry entitled Childhood Matters (1996) addressed similar issues. It examined research dealing with early influences on a child's ability to learn in formal school settings, the impact of early childhood education on school success and the role of parents in teaching their children cognitive skills in general, and literacy skills in particular.

The first recommendation by the Committee was that a National Centre for Research into Early Childhood Development, Education and Care be set up to carry out "studies into the cognitive, emotional and social development of children from birth", and to "contribute to the development of theory on child development and on early childhood practice from the perspective of Australian research findings" (p. vii).

The report also emphasised the need for greater collaboration between parents and teachers to promote student learning, a partnership seen as crucial to student success in the early years. A submission by the New South Wales Chapter of the Australian Early Intervention Association advised that parents should not be used as teachers in literacy programs, but rather should be encouraged to recognise the value of their ongoing interactions with their children and to see these interactions as providing a natural context through which they could optimise their child's development.

These two Commonwealth government documents, Literacy for All: The Challenge for Australian Schools (1998) and Childhood Matters (1996), give great emphasis to the importance of home literacy practices and the role of parental involvement in the preschool and early school years. Further, the Western Australian Education Department has set up a program called SAER (Students At Educational Risk) to be

used in all government schools to identify and assist those children who may be at educational risk. This program also emphasises the importance of parental involvement. The term "at risk" is used in <u>Literacy For All</u> in reference to students needing support for a variety of reasons. "The major factors which are usually seen as placing educational outcomes at risk include socioeconomic disadvantage, poverty, low parental expectation, disability, language background other than English, family or personal difficulties, geographic isolation, Indigenous background and gender." (p. 6).

One of the main findings of the National School English Literacy Survey (1997) was that there was a wide range of achievement among children in Australian schools at Years 3 and 5. There was also clear evidence that there are groups of students who do not achieve levels of literacy which will enable them to make further progress in their education. The survey found, as has other research (Freebody & Ludwig, 1995), that there are differences in achievement according to socio-economic status and gender, and for students who have a language background other than English. It also found that higher achievement in reading is associated with higher economic status. The literacy and numeracy benchmarks within the National Plan set expectations that all children can succeed and it is no longer accepted as inevitable that a significant proportion of students will not achieve literacy skills at the minimum level.

In order to maximise teacher and parent collaboration in the development of early literacy and in early intervention, it seems important for Australian teachers to know more about the family literacy practices, routines and activities that may have contributed to the literacy-related knowledge of the children in their classes. It also seems important to examine the literacy-related knowledge and skills which children

have when they start school. If teachers have this knowledge, they should be better able to identify and support children who may experience difficulty in learning to read and write, and to plan more effectively for all children in their classes.

1.1 AIMS OF THE STUDY

Many studies have examined the cognitive literacy-related attributes of young children (for example, Bowey, 1986; Tunmer, Herriman & Nesdale, 1988; Rohl & Milton, 1993; Blackmore, Pratt & Dewsbury, 1994). Other studies have examined home literacy practices (Heath, 1983; Breen, Louden, Barrett-Pugh, Rivalland, Rohl, Rhydwen, Lloyd and Carr, 1994; Spreadbury, 1994) but few if any, have investigated the two together. The aim of this study is to examine relationships between cognitive literacy-related variables and home literacy factors in two groups of Western Australian preprimary children.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study was designed to answer the following research questions:

(a) **What do the parents of children attending two WA preprimary centres identify as the literacy practices in which their children are engaged at home?**

(b) **What is the literacy-related knowledge of children attending two WA preprimary centres?**

(c) **Is there a significant relationship between these literacy practices in the home and the children's early literacy-related knowledge?**

(d) Are there differences in the literacy-related practices and knowledge of the children at the two centres?

In Western Australia, children begin their preprimary education in January of the year in which they turn five years of age. Most of the children attend school for the equivalent of four days per week; some may attend only four half days. These children may or may not have attended a kindergarten program of two half days per week in the previous year.

Overview of following chapters:

Chapter Two presents an overview of theories related to cognitive, social and emergent literacy. Working definitions of literacy and emergent literacy are included in this chapter as are definitions of phonological awareness and grammatical/syntactic awareness. Research concerning the role of parents in the development of their children's literacy and the relationship between parental input and school success is summarised.

Chapter Three presents details of the subjects of the study and the materials, method and procedure involved in the questionnaire and in the assessment of the children's literacy-related knowledge.

Chapter Four records the results of the parent questionnaire and the assessment of the children's literacy-related knowledge.

Chapter Five examines the two data sets for possible relationships and looks at the differences between the results for School A and those for School B for both data sets.

Chapter Six contains a general discussion of the results of the study. The research

questions are reviewed with a rationale and discussion of the limitations of the study,

implications for teachers and implications for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter examines various definitions of literacy, presents an overview of the cognitive and social aspects of literacy, and explores the concept of emergent literacy. As this study is concerned with some of the social practices and conceptual knowledge involved in the development of literacy in young children, a review of the literature concerning the role of parents in language acquisition and the development of literacy related skills is included here. The relationship between literacy and school success is discussed, as are the cognitive skills related to learning to read.

2.1 LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

Anstey and Bull (1996) point out that literacy is closely related to language:

> *Language as we have defined it, refers to the signs, symbols and*
>
> *conventions which a given community learns in order to construct*
>
> *meaning. Literacy, or literacies in their various forms and types,*
>
> *refers to the social practices which are employed by a community*
>
> *to learn about themselves and their world (p.42.)*

This means that language and literacy will vary between communities according to their knowledge and social practices.

Many researchers, including Sulzby and Teale (1991), have shown that the development of language and literacy occurs simultaneously and along a continuum and that learning to read and write is reinforced by and reinforces learning spoken language. This close relationship between language and literacy was acknowledged in

the previous Labour government's <u>Australian Language and Literacy Policy,</u> which

defined part of being literate as having the ability to:

> *"read, write, speak and listen well enough to accomplish everyday*
>
> *literacy tasks in our society in different contexts"* (DEET, 1990, Vol 1, p.4).

Thus, literacy is seen as social practice which has specific manifestations in

different contexts (Cairney, 1994). Children learn from the literacy practices of

their own social group, which may differ from those of other groups. Children in a

literate society acquire language and literacy within social situations very early in

life.

As well as being seen as social practice, literacy has also been defined as involving

a variety of skills and abilities. The relationship between print and literacy is

discussed by Venezky (1995), who points out that literacy "requires autonomous

engagement with print and stresses the role of the individual in generating as well as

receiving and assigning individual interpretations to messages" (p142). This view of

literacy takes a cognitive perspective focusing on the information processing involved

in reading and writing.

As Lo Bianco and Freebody (1997) have shown, there are many different definitions

of literacy ranging from skills-based conceptions of functional literacy (for example,

competence in a special field, such as computer literacy), through to very broad

definitions which integrate social and political empowerment.

Downes and Fatouras (1995) have suggested that literacy should not be defined

exclusively in terms of paper-based texts and that the concept of literacy should be

"broadened to include control over the processes and understandings required to

participate effectively in an electronic world" (p.3). As pointed out by Lieberman, Chaffe and Roberts (1998), books have been replaced by computer games, television and the telephone as the dominant recreational media of many children in the western world. There are also many multi-modal texts in our daily western lives which combine at least two of the spoken, written, non-verbal, visual and auditory modes, for example, comics, magazines, newspapers, signs, posters, television, film and computers (Elliott, 1994). The existence of multi modal texts needs to be considered in current definitions of literacy.

The study described in this thesis is concerned with some of the social practices and conceptual knowledge involved in the development of literacy in young children. The learning of literacy has been researched in different ways and from various viewpoints. Two of these viewpoints, the cognitive and the socio-cultural, are particularly relevant to this study because one relates to the cognitive abilities which have been shown to be closely related to the development of literacy and the other, to the social context; that is, the role of the family and wider community in the shaping of literacy practices.

A cognitive approach focuses on what children learn about language and the mental processes involved in such learning. It examines the information processing which takes place during reading and writing and the metalinguistic skills involved in being able to read and write, for example, grammatical and phonological awareness.

A socio-cultural or 'social construction of literacy' perspective (Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983) defines literacy as the ways in which communities use written language in their daily life. This socio-cultural view sees literacy as culturally and socially specific: thus different social and cultural groups are seen as using distinct forms of

literacy. Nevertheless, Teale (1986) has challenged the view of literacy which groups literacy practices by class, race or enthnicity, by claiming that literacy practices vary widely within social groups and therefore can not be classified by these variables. This view has been supported by the results of research by Breen et al, (1994) that showed a wide variety of literacy related practices within Australia from families of both high and low socio-economic status and within cultural groups. Thus, the social construction of literacy should be seen as taking place within family units rather than within social or socio-economic groups.

Solsken (1993) sees this social construction of literacy as developing very specifically within families. She argues that children enter the school system with an orientation towards literacy which has been constructed within their family through the functions and social relations of literacy, based partly on that family's experience of work and gender issues. However, the literacy knowledge with which a child enters school can be very different to the literacy of school; thus some children are advantaged and others disadvantaged within the school culture.

Over the last ten years there have been significant changes in theories about how children learn to become literate. One such theory, that of emergent literacy, seems to contain elements of both cognitive and socio-cultural approaches.

2.1.1 Emergent literacy

The term "emergent literacy" has come to mean different things to different people.

> *Depending on researchers' backgrounds and interests, emergent literacy*
> *has been associated with everything from language learning to specific*

classroom activities, from early reading behaviours to skill acquisition,

and from cognitive processing to social relationships (Crawford, 1995,

p.71).

Historically, it was thought that children needed time to develop maturity and

prerequisite skills before they could learn to read (Gesell, 1925) and in the 1960 's,

standardised tests were developed to measure reading readiness (Durkin, 1966). The

concept of school or reading "readiness" was disputed by Clay (1966) who found that

children had already developed meaningful knowledge about reading and writing

before they started school. Clay apparently first coined the term "emergent literacy"

which Sulzby (1994) later defined as the development of reading and writing

concepts, behaviours and attitudes which form the foundations for conventional

literacy.

Emergent literacy is related to cognitive/developmental psychology and

developmental psycholinguistics. According to Solsken (1993), research from the

emergent literacy perspective seeks to:

> *identify the knowledge and processes that individuals possess,*
>
> *the order in which they are acquired, and the environmental*
>
> *conditions which best support their acquisition.* (p. 3).

An emergent literacy perspective thus sees the cognitive development involved in

literacy as taking place within a social context, with certain types of experiences and

exposure to literacy-based activities favouring its development.

An emergent literacy model suggests that literacy development begins as early as the

first months of life (Weinberger, 1996). Within this model, children are seen as taking

an active part in their literacy learning which develops and "emerges" over time with increased experience. Children are thought to become literate within a social context by being surrounded by print in the form of advertising, packaging, newspapers etc. and by seeing the people around them reading and writing. Further, some emergent literacy theorists also consider cognitive skills which are thought to be related to early literacy. Sulzby and Teale (1991) include the development of phonological awareness in children as being an important part of emergent literacy.

Teale (1995) proposes that in schools, literacy instruction from an emergent literacy perspective, immerses children in a print rich environment and involves them in reading and writing activities from the first day at pre-school. Reading and writing are seen as functional and are involved in all aspects of work and play in the classroom. Written language is embedded in daily classroom activities and children are involved in group storybook readings, letter and sound activities such as songs, finger plays, rhymes and word games. Some of the cognitive aspects of literacy, such as phonological and grammatical awareness, are developed through language games, nursery rhymes, songs and poetry.

Literacy has been shown to be related to general achievement at school (Snow, Burns & Griffith, 1998). School success is generally related to the level of literacy achieved by the child. School literacy until recently, has been mainly concerned with reading and writing, although viewing is now recognised as an important part of literacy and is included in the Western Australian Outcome Statements for English. Many children interact with print, computers, television and video as part of their everyday routines at school as well as at home. Nevertheless, research on the cognitive variables involved in literacy, especially metalinguistic awareness, has focused mainly on

reading and spelling.

It will be seen that a broad definition of literacy includes those skills and abilities which are involved in being able to speak, listen and think critically within reading and writing in various social contexts (DEET,1990). In this study "literacy" will be used to refer mainly to the skills, knowledge and abilities related to the reading and writing aspects of school literacy. The term "emergent literacy" will refer to the development of the literacy-related cognitive and social skills which takes place in the years before school and the early years of school.

2.2 LITERACY LEARNING IN YOUNG CHILDREN

Two important aspects of emergent literacy are the social (environmental) and cognitive factors. Some important factors included in these aspects are:

(a) family literacy practices, including the role that parents may play in the child's development of literacy; and

(b) predictors of early reading and writing success, that is, the cognitive skills that children may need to become literate.

2.2.1 The role of parents in language acquisition

Family literacy practices such as book reading, or just looking at pictures in books, is a customary way in which children in a literate society can learn about language as a system of representation; this in turn may benefit the later acquisition of reading and writing. The interactionist theories of children's language development advocated by Vygotsky (1987) and Bruner (1983) place great importance on the role of adult involvement. Garton and Pratt (1990) show how language acquisition usually takes place in a continuous meaningful context through interaction with parents or

significant others in everyday situations.

How parents may facilitate this learning was explored by Cazden (cited in Garton & Pratt, 1990) who described three types of indirect maternal assistance in language development. The first is "scaffolding" (Bruner, 1983), where the mother extends the child's language by questioning and by providing a predictable framework for language development through routines, such as bathtime. The mother may talk to the child during the bath, naming objects and activities, for example, " I'm going to put you in the water now. Is it nice and warm? Have a kick, splash, splash. Now let's find the soap." The second type of assistance is the language model provided by the adult who corrects the child's language, for example, a child who says, " Goggie", might be corrected by a parent who says, "Yes, look at the *dog.*" The third is that of direct instruction where the child is told exactly what to say, for example, "Say, 'Thank you for the present', Andrew."

The possible effects of such early maternal language input on children learning to read and write at school was the subject of a study by Wells (1986) in Bristol, UK. This study focused on the importance of the language development which occurs in the years before the child begins school. It explored the relationships between the importance placed on talk and literacy in the home and literacy and reading comprehension achievement at school. Wells' research indicated that children who had been read to at home were better able to "crack the language code", had an understanding of the value and symbolism of print and were experienced in the imaginary world of stories and books.

2.2.2 The relationship between parental input and literacy development

Many of the studies which have looked at the role that parents may play in the

development of their child's literacy knowledge have tested the hypothesis that parents help emergent literacy development by reading to their pre-schoolers. Research over the last twelve years has shown a significant relationship between parents reading books to preschoolers and their children's later literacy development (for example Bus, Ijzendoorn & Pellegrini, 1995; Spreadbury, 1994; and Wells, 1986).

A quantitative study undertaken by Bus, Ijzendoorn and Pellegrini (1995) focused on the relationship between the frequency of parent-preschooler reading and the acquisition of literacy. This study set out to test empirically, through meta-analysis of 41 studies, the hypothesis that book reading is the most important activity for developing the knowledge required for later success in reading. The results showed that book reading does indeed assist the development of language and literacy, although the size of the effect was not as great as might have been expected.

In the United Kingdom, parental involvement in reading to children was shown by Hewison and Tizard (1980) to be highly predictive of future reading success. It was found to be a better predictor than intelligence, even across socio-economic groups and was independent of the home language. Harrison (1995) described several programs which involved partnerships between parents, teachers and other community members, all of which appeared to have been successful in promoting literacy in children.

Here in Australia, Spreadbury's (1994) naturalistic research which followed the literacy development of her son from birth and recorded her observations of the language she used as part of her family's daily routine. She discussed how talking and reading to her son, even before he could talk, provided an important foundation for his

language development. She claimed that she increased his vocabulary by naming the things around him and putting the characters and events of books into context by relating them to his own life experiences. Spreadbury discussed how, by reading to him, she was in fact teaching him about reading.

The large differences in home literacy environments indicate the need for long term studies of the effects of the home environment on later literacy development. Other family literacy research by Spreadbury (1993), a five year longitudinal study of 25 Brisbane families, showed that the level of participation by parents in their children's literacy development was a good predictor of their child's later reading ability. Those children whose parents had fostered an interest in literacy were more likely to be good readers. These parents had, she claimed, informally "taught" their children to read in response to the child's interest in books and print in their environment.

A more recent longitudinal study by Leseman and de Jong (1998) looked at the relationship between home literacy and school achievement. This study considered home literacy as a "multifaceted phenomenon" consisting of opportunity, instruction and parent/child cooperation. The subjects of the study were 89 children from multiethnic, partly bilingual families who were studied at 4, 5 and 6 years of age. Measures of home literacy were taken by means of interviews with the parents and observations of parent-child book reading interactions. At age 7, by the end of Grade 1, after nearly one year of formal reading instruction, vocabulary, word decoding and reading comprehension were assessed using standard tests. Results of correlational and multiple regression analyses supported the hypothesis that home literacy is multifaceted.

Leseman and de Jong adopted a social constructivist approach and selected facets or

ingredients which they believed to be responsible for the relationship between home literacy practices and developmental and educational outcomes. The three important facets that emerged from the study were: exposure and modelling, that is, *opportunity*; the transmission of knowledge and skills, that is, *instruction*; and an affective experience involving *cooperation* between parent (or other adult or sibling) which leads to motivation, which was measured in terms of "social emotional quality".

Leseman and de Jong found that the three facets of home literacy, when considered together, were more predictive of language and achievement levels of the children at 7 years of age than each facet separately. They found that these facets remained statistically significant even after controlling for the effects of early vocabulary and home language.

The relationship between home literacy and language and literacy development cannot be shown to be a causal one with a correlational approach which does not control for alternative explanations. Leseman and de Jong found that home literacy determined school literacy achievement even after effects of prior language development and home language were statistically controlled. However, the context of home literacy was also found to be very important.

Home literacy research has often viewed the context of home literacy in terms of socio-economic status, race or ethnicity. Leseman and de Jong's study considered the issue of the context of home literacy and found that home literacy cannot be separated from the social and cultural contexts constituted by parents' education, work, social networks and wider cultural and ethnic communities.

Results of these studies all indicate that there is a relationship between the

importance placed on literacy in the home and the development of children's reading and writing skills at school.

2.2.3 Linguistic and Social Capital

As Cairney (1994) has shown, literacy is a social practice which has specific manifestations in different contexts. Young children learn from the literacy practices of their own social group, which is usually the family. However, the literacy practices of home and school may be different. Schools have their own specific discourses, that is, social, cultural and linguistic practices which may not match with some families' home practices. Some children will start school with an advantage because they bring "linguistic and social capital" (Heath, 1983) from homes which have similar social, cultural and linguistic practices to those of the school. Teachers in schools are often from middle class backgrounds so that the linguistic, social and cultural practices perpetuated in classrooms also tend to be middle class. Thus, many children from middle class backgrounds are likely to have experienced some school-like practices at home. Further, Auerbach (1989) claims that schooling is a cultural practice and the range and variety of student achievement reflects the differences between school resources and teaching methods, and the cultural practices of home. It appears then, that the children most likely to succeed in school may well be those who are from a similar linguistic and cultural background to that of their teachers.

A nine year ethnographic study of the literacy practices of three rural communities in the Piedmont Carolinas described the very different ways that language and literacy are perceived by different groups (Heath, 1983). In this study, Heath described a mismatch between the literacy practices of home and school for two of the communities which apparently did not advantage their children's school performance.

Such evidence has been used to justify family literacy programs which instruct parents to use school-like language and activities at home to prepare their children for school.

Many such family literacy programs have sought to follow a "transmission" model which Auerbach (1989) argues is designed to transmit school practices to the home. This model, however, looks at the context of home literacy in terms of socio-economic status, race or ethnicity and assumes a deficit in that the homes of children deemed to be at risk of having difficulty learning to read and write. These homes are seen as lacking in literacy-related practices.

However, such assumptions cannot be made only on the basis of socio-economic status, race or ethnicity as research by Breen et al (1994) has shown that there is a wealth of literacy practices within homes across a range of communities. In order to identify children who may be at risk of having problems learning to read and write it seems that it is necessary to examine more closely the specific home literacy-related factors which are thought to contribute to success in the early years of school.

2.3 HOME LITERACY-RELATED FACTORS IN EARLY READING SUCCESS

2.3.1 Family Literacy Practices

Questions arise as to what role, apart from reading books and 'doing school literacy', parents may play in the development of their children's early literacy and what they might be teaching their children about literacy. By exposing a child to a variety of literacy experiences in their daily routines, parents may be helping their children to develop a familiarity and confidence with language and print. Parents may be

informally teaching grammatical awareness by reading frequently to their child and reading the same book many times, thus exposing them to more complex grammatical constructions than those used in everyday oral language. By teaching the child nursery rhymes and songs, parents may be helping children to develop an awareness of alliteration and rhyme. Games such as I Spy may help to develop an awareness of the first sounds in words and encouraging children to give whole sentence answers may help them to focus on the sentence as a unit of meaning (Rohl & Milton, 1993). These practices are important because they have been shown to be related to success in early reading. When children are learning to read they draw on their knowledge of grammar and the sound units of words to help them guess and decipher new words (Tunmer, 1990).

Hess and Holloway (1984, cited in Snow, Burns & Griffith, 1998), identified five broad areas of family functioning that may influence reading development which are:

1. *Value placed on literacy*: parents give value to reading by reading themselves;

2. *Press for achievement*: parental expectations for their child's school achievement and response to the child's interest in reading create a 'press for achievement';

3. *Availability and instrumental use of reading materials*: a home rich in books and reading and writing materials is likely to encourage literacy experiences;

4. *Reading with children*: parents read to preschoolers and listen to oral reading;

5. *Opportunities for verbal interaction*: parents contribute to a child's

vocabulary through language-rich experiences and the quantity of verbal interaction (Snow et al, 1998, p. 121).

Other studies have looked closely at home literacy related practices in an attempt to identify a relationship between family literacy practices and the acquisition of reading and writing skills in young children. Baker, Serpell and Sonnenschein (1995) identified the following categories as possibly related to early literacy development:

Participation in daily routines

Joint storybook reading

Visits to a library or bookshop

Independent use of print where the child role plays reading and writing

Explicit instruction, for example, teaching the letters of the alphabet

Music and singing, especially Nursery Rhymes.

The Elmswood Study by Weinberger (1996) looked at the literacy experiences and achievements of 60 British children from a wide variety of social backgrounds and aged from preschool to age seven. This study found that all the children in the study had learnt something about literacy and had developed some literacy skills by the age of three. However, Weinberger found that the literacy practices that children experienced at home were often more varied and different from those which they would later experience in school. He found that children can learn "useful social and cultural lessons about what it means to be a reader and writer in our society" (p.43) from the literacy practices taking place in their homes.

The results of research carried out by Breen et al (1994) to examine the literacy practices of a wide range of schools and communities, suggested that, in fact, families use a wealth of literacy related practices in their everyday life. This research found

that the literacy environment of the home is not just confined to books; there are other literacy practices and models in the home such as computers, discussion around TV and at mealtimes, help with homework and religious practices which may also contribute to literacy learning. Breen et al found that within some socio-economic and cultural groups there were families who engaged in few school-like behaviours and others whose home culture was similar to that of the school. It would therefore seem incorrect to assume, as some creators of family literacy programs have (for example the Head Start Program), that all parents within a low-socioeconomic community would need to be shown school-like behaviours to transmit to their children.

These "school-like" behaviours in literacy practices occur in varying degrees within families of young children in Australia. The DEETYA Children's Literacy Project (Hill, Comber, Louden, Rivalland and Reid, 1998) focused on the connections between literacy prior to school and in the first year of school of 100 children at five research sites across Australia. As part of that research project, Reid (1998) characterised the differences between the prior-to-school literacy experiences of those children in terms of "the material, social and cultural resources that their families have available to them in their everyday lives and that which the children take up as their own part of 'themselves' "(p. 234). This project, in accordance with some other national literacy research projects funded in Australia (Gunn, 1996), found that literacy practices within homes varied considerably more than literacy practices in schools, which were found to be similar, regardless of the location or clientele.

Similarly to Leseman and de Jong (1998), Hill (1998) noted the relevance of context to learning literacy, that is, what is available to children in their homes in relation to literacy (opportunity); how the children engage or participate in literacy related

experiences (cooperation); and the content, or what is learnt. The 100 Children project found, in Reid's words, "yet again [...] that economic and cultural advantage continues to predetermine school success and risk of school failure" (p.235) and that "there is no stereotypical child emerging from our observations and analysis of these children and their literacy practices" (p.244).

Unlike those who advocate the "transmission" style of family literacy programs, Reid (1998) suggests that teachers should acknowledge the potential benefits of social diversity in language and literacy. From either viewpoint, it seems important for teachers to know more about the home language and literacy practices and cultural capital of the children they are teaching in order to achieve what Vygotsky (1987) calls "intersubjectivity", that is "the shared focus of attention and mutual understanding of any joint activity" Cairney, Ruge, Buchanan, Lowe & Munsie, (1995).

Thus, teachers wanting to work in partnership with parents to build upon the knowledge that children already have before they begin school, would need to know about the family literacy practices of the children in their classes as well as what it is that children need to know in order to become successful readers. When considering what it is that children need to know in order to learn to read and write, we need to consider the predictors of reading success.

2.4 CHILD-RELATED FACTORS IN EARLY READING SUCCESS

2.4.1 Predictors of early reading success

Research into what it is that children need to know before they can become effective readers has looked at predictors of school success or failure in learning to read

(Adams, 1990). Knowledge of alphabet letters was identified by Chall (1967) and Bond & Dykstra (1967) as a strong predictor of success in early reading. Later studies such as that by Tunmer, Herriman & Nesdale (1988) suggested that both grammatical and phonological awareness are important in early literacy learning and there is evidence that phonological awareness is a necessary (but not sufficient) skill in learning to read and write (Tunmer, Herriman & Nesdale 1988; Rohl & Pratt,1996).

2.4.1.1 Knowledge of letters of the alphabet

An extensive study by Adams (1990) which reviewed 20 years of cognitive research, identified letter knowledge as one of the best predictors of reading achievement. Adams found that just teaching children letter names was not enough, it was the child's familiarity with the letters which seemed to be important. Familiarity with letters is usually developed before the child enters school so it seems that for many children, familiarity with print comes from home literacy practices.

Snow et al (1998) discussed the results of longitudinal studies since 1975 which showed that being able to name letters shown at random appeared to be nearly as successful at predicting future reading, as a complete readiness test for kindergarteners. Nevertheless, Adams (1990) found that alphabet knowledge was not enough to guarantee reading success; both letter knowledge and phonological awareness were necessary.

2.4.1.2 Phonological awareness

The ability to reflect on language as an object of thought is known as *metalinguistic awareness*. There are several forms of metalinguistic awareness which are thought to be related to success and failure in learning to read, one of which is phonological awareness.

Phonological awareness is the ability to recognise the sound units of language and manipulate them, for example, to recognise that words are made up of syllables, that *cat* and *bat* rhyme, and that *bat* and *ball* start with the same sound. The ability to create new words from segmented sounds is called phonemic awareness and develops after the other phonological skills (Stahl,1992). This involves being able to identify the phonemes in a word, for example, *p-a-n*, and knowing that by taking out *a* and replacing it with *i* will form, *pin*, and that *pan* can be rearranged to make *nap* (Ericson & Juliebo, 1998).

The International Reading Association (Reading Today, June/July 1998, p.26) distinguished between phonemic and phonological awareness in the following way:

phonemic awareness refers to an understanding about the smallest

units of sound that make up the speech stream: phonemes. Phonological

awareness encompasses larger units of sound as well, such as syllables,

onsets and rimes.

Many studies have shown that instruction can enhance the development of phonological awareness. Further, this instruction has been shown to transfer to reading acquisition (Lundberg, Frost and Petersen, 1988). Research has shown that the most effective methods of teaching phonological awareness in terms of later success in reading and spelling are those which combine phonological awareness with learning the letters of the alphabet, suggesting that the two skills are inter-dependant in early literacy learning (Adams,1990; Ball & Blachman,1991; Bradley & Bryant,1983).

A most stringent test of whether or not any variable is important in learning to read

and write is to teach it to a group of children to see if it makes a significant difference to their reading. It is also important to include in such studies a control group of children who are not taught the skills in question, but who spend the same amount of time in other reading related activities. Then, if at the end of the training period the experimental group's reading has improved significantly more than the control group, it can be said that the skill appears to be necessary for reading.

Phonological awareness has been shown in many studies to be an extremely strong predictor of later reading ability (Adams,1990; Blachman, 1989, 1991; Stanovich, 1986; Yopp, 1995). Phonological awareness has been shown to be a better predictor of later reading success than IQ tests or reading readiness (Adams,1990; Blachman, 1989,1991; Catts, 1991; Stanovich,1986; Yopp,1995). Those children who can break words up into sounds (phonemes) have been shown to be more likely to be better readers than those who cannot (Bradley & Bryant, 1983, Lundberg, Olofsson & Wall, 1980).

It has been shown that phonological awareness can begin to develop at different ages and that the level of awareness varies among children (Maclean, Bryant & Bradley, 1987). This knowledge is apparent in children as young as 3 years old who have been exposed to alliteration, rhyme and nonsense rhymes through such activities as nursery rhymes, for example. Phonological awareness develops sequentially and in distinct stages. It develops slowly in many children because the phoneme is an abstract concept and phonemes are not heard as distinct from each other in spoken words (Liberman, Cooper, Shankweiler, & Studdert-Kennedy, 1967).

In the development of phonological awareness, it seems that children are first able to segment words into syllables. In this stage a child may be able to clap her name, for

example, *E-liz-a-beth*. She may also be able to hear onsets and rimes such as

d-og, and identify words that start with the same sound, for example, *dog* and *duck*.

As children develop more advanced forms of phonological awareness they are able to

break words up into individual phonemes, for example, *d-o-g* and put them back

together again to make *dog*. Awareness of phonemes normally does not develop until

children are able to read some words (Rohl & Pratt, 1996).

Research has shown that phonological awareness is very important in learning to

read and write (Adams, 1990); it has been shown to be one of the pre-requisites for

learning to read (Rohl & Pratt, 1996).

2.4.1.3 Grammatical awareness

Another form of metalinguistic awareness which seems to be related to the

development of reading and writing is grammatical (or syntactic) awareness (Garton

& Pratt, 1990).

Emmitt and Pollock (1997) state that "the term 'grammar' as it is used by linguists

today refers to that body of rules that describes or explains how a language operates"

(p. 101). Grammar can be seen as a description of the patterns of language, although

modern linguists now attempt to describe not only the language but also the mental

competence which enables us to use a language (Harris & Hodges, 1995). The rules

of grammar are, in this sense, that aspect of our abstract mental competence which

we apply systematically and predictably in order to use a language. This might be

referred to as *grammatical awareness* and is sometimes used interchangeably

with *syntactic awareness*.

Grammatical or syntactic awareness is "the ability to reflect on the syntactic structure

of language and to regard it objectively and separately from the meaning conveyed by the language" (Blackmore, Pratt & Dewsbury, 1994). This metalinguistic awareness may be measured by the ability to recognise and correct ungrammatical sentences and to know that two grammatically different sentences may have the same meaning, for example, "*The girl was chased by the dog,* means the same as, *The dog chased the girl"* (Rohl & Milton, 1993 p. 158).

Grammatical awareness continues to develop during the early years of school and some researchers have noticed that good readers are more sensitive to syntax than poor readers (Bowey,1986; Ryan & Ledger,1984). Grammatical awareness seems to help children to make sense of text when they are learning to read and to help children predict unknown words in text, thus helping them in their decoding skills (Tunmer, 1990).

Grammatical and phonological awareness have been shown by many research studies to be important to the development of early literacy (Adams,1990; Tunmer, Herriman & Nesdale, 1988). In the classroom, it seems that children may learn grammatical awareness from whole language programs which involve the teacher reading to the children every day and repeating the reading of the same stories, practices which are based on the home reading practices of the bedtime story (Holdaway, 1979). By becoming familiar with the text, a child may be able to recite the appropriate text and make a connection between the spoken word and the printed word.

The few attempts that have been made to teach syntactic awareness to beginning readers have shown that the experimental group's reading has not improved significantly over that of the control groups (Milton, 1992; Milner, 1994). So it is yet to be shown that grammatical awareness is a sufficient variable in learning to read.

For the purposes of this study, I will use the term *grammatical awareness* to refer to the knowledge or awareness of how language works and the ability to manipulate the internal structure of a sentence to create or change meaning.

2.4.1.4 Concepts of print

"The term 'concepts of print' refers to a general understanding of how print can be used rather than knowledge about specific letters" (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998, p.115). It appears to have a moderate correlation with reading ability in the primary grades (Snow et al, 1998). Stuart (1995) found that higher correlations were present when two types of print related measures were used: one related to understanding how print can be used; and the other related to letter naming and letter-sound correspondences.

Part of being able to read is having knowledge of the conventions of book language. This knowledge is learned through social and cultural experiences. Books are written in a language which is often different from spoken language and are about events which do not arise from the young reader's own experience; that is, they are 'disembedded' (Donaldson, 1986). It is through a familiarity with book language that children learn to make sense of new texts, anticipate what might happen next and recognise different genres. They may, for example, recognise that stories which start with "Once upon a time", are not true.

Weinberger (1996) claims that as children learn to read they need to understand certain aspects of how print works. They need to understand that print has meaning, can represent sounds and words, has directionality, conventions and punctuation. This understanding is learned through behaviours which happen through daily contact with environmental print and by participating in literacy related routines such as going

shopping, signing a birthday card and being read to.

Children who are read to may learn such concepts of print as that books are read from front to back and from left to right and that print is made up of letters (in groups or alone), spaces and punctuation.

2.4.1.5 Environmental print

Environmental print is the print and other graphic symbols in the physical environment which are seen on packaging, advertising material, billboards, television, signs on buildings and street and traffic signs. Children learn to give meaning to these forms of print in the early phases of emergent literacy development (Harris & Hodges, 1995). By the time they are two or three, many children can identify signs, labels and logos they see in their homes and communities (Goodman, 1986; Heibert, 1981; Kastler, Roser & Hoffman, 1987).

In a literate society, children are surrounded by print and see others interacting with print in a social context and on a daily basis. The more children interact with print and observe others reading magazines, books, newspapers and letters, the more likely they are to develop an understanding of print. It seems that children may make sense of environmental print almost imperceptibly and without conscious adult instruction, however, an understanding of print is more likely to happen when a child's growing awareness is reinforced by an experienced reader.

Various studies have shown that young children are more likely to recognise print from its environmental context and meaning than from the words (Taylor, 1983, Heath 1983, Hiebert, 1978). For example, a child might interpret the McDonald's logo as "hamburger" rather than read the word or give it the correct name because to her it

is a symbol of the place where she eats hamburgers. In the same way, the Coca Cola trademark may mean "drink" to a small child.

When young children "read" familiar signs and logos in their environment they are said to be at the logographic stage of word identification (Frith, 1985) which is recognising print as a visual form. At this stage, a child who recognises the Coca-Cola symbol is probably not using alphabet knowledge or phonemic awareness to decode the print, but is simply remembering the visual (that is, logographic) image which has the meaning "Coca-Cola" or "drink" to the child. As children develop more advanced forms of phonological awareness they are able to divide words into individual sounds and letters that make up each word, referred to as the decoding or deciphering stage (Gough & Hillinger, 1980).

2.4.1.6 Word identification

Before children can break words into syllables and phonemes they need to be aware of individual words as units of language. Skillful readers appear to recognise whole words at a glance. Frith (1985) identified three stages in the development of word reading: the logographic stage which uses images of whole words, the alphabetic stage where children use sound-to-letter correspondence in spelling and the orthographic stage when children recognise that spellings do not always directly reflect pronunciations and that "reading requires attention to word specific orthographic information" (Snow et al, 1998, p.72). As familiarity increases, children begin to identify words as unique visual patterns (Ehri, 1991). Word identification has been shown to be highly related to comprehension of text.

2.4.1.7 Expressive and receptive vocabulary

There is a strong link between oral language and reading ability (Snow et al, 1998).

Comprehension of text relies heavily on the reader's oral-language ability and, as has been shown, language development in the preschool years has been related to reading comprehension and later reading achievement. Vocabulary appears to be necessary to the development of reading and writing. Receptive and expressive vocabulary measures have been explored as predictors of reading achievement. A receptive vocabulary test usually assesses the child's ability to point to a picture which most accurately represents a word spoken by the examiner. Snow et al (1998) examined 20 prediction studies and found that the mean correlation between receptive vocabulary scores in kindergarten and subsequent reading scores in the first three grades was .36.

A test of expressive vocabulary usually assesses a child's ability to name objects or drawings of objects. In examining the results of five kindergarten prediction studies Snow et al (1998) reported that the studies produced consistent results with a mean correlation of .45. These results suggest that expressive language is a reliable but relatively low predictor of future reading success. It should however, be noted that, compared with tests of receptive vocabulary, tests of expressive vocabulary place greater demands on verbal memory and phonological skills which may account for the stronger effects of expressive vocabulary.

2.4.1.8 Summary

It is very difficult to establish causal relationships in reading research. As Snow et al (1998) have pointed out, a causal relationship has been shown for only a few of the measures that best predict early reading ability. There are however, several measures which in combination, may be successful in predicting future achievement levels in reading. These factors are: individual, familial, and demographic and thus are related to family-based (or social) and child-based (or cognitive) factors. It seems that there

have been few studies carried out which have examined the relationship between family and child-based factors for children beginning preprimary. These variables include family literacy practices and the child's literacy-related knowledge, that is, overall language development, phonological awareness, grammatical awareness, letter identification and concepts of print.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

3.1 SUBJECTS

The subjects of the study were the children and their parents from two preprimary centres in Western Australia, one in an high socio-economic inner metropolitan suburb and the other in a low socio-economic status northern suburb of Perth. Two schools were selected in order to obtain an initial sample of 50 children. These two government schools were chosen because I had had contact with both schools and hence co-operation from the parents, staff and principals was readily arranged. The children were aged from 50 to 69 months with an average age on the first of March of 56 months.

School A is close to a university and major teaching hospital. A high proportion of families attending the school own their own homes. Many of the parents are self-employed and most of the families have at least one parent employed on a full-time basis. The principal commented that there is an increasing number of children from single parent families attending the school. There is a wide cross section of occupations amongst the parents and many work in professions such as medicine and teaching with some employed either at the hospital or the university. The majority of students continue their primary education at the school, with some leaving to attend private schools in years 5, 6 and 7. There is a small number of students from non-English speaking backgrounds entering the school, some of whom speak little or no English on arrival. The school community is very supportive of the school and has a strong Parents and Citizens group which organises regular fundraising activities

including a school fete.

School B is in a low socio-economic area with a high proportion of rental properties and Homeswest accommodation. A third of the pupils in the school have single parents and close to half of the families are receiving welfare benefits. Sixteen percent of the students are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island descent and 15% of the students at the school are identified as being from a non-English speaking background. There is a significant transience rate due in part to families occupying and then vacating rental properties (statistics from the school profile in the School Development Plan). Most of the children continue on to the local high school rather than to private schools for their secondary education.

Of the 50 families approached, 48 children, 20 girls and 28 boys took part in the study. The preprimary class at School A consisted of 24 children, 11 girls and 13 boys. Four children came from home backgrounds in which a language other than English was spoken (Serbian, Tamil, and Vietnamese), but all were fluent in English and they spoke little if any of the other language. There were no children of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island descent in the class. At the time of testing the average age of the preprimary children at school A was 56.75 months.

At School B, the preprimary class consisted of 26 children, 10 girls and 16 boys. There were three children of Aboriginal descent and four who spoke a language other than English at home (one Vietnamese and three Macedonian). These children were not fluent in English and so the results of their assessments were not included in all analyses. At the time of testing, the average age of preprimary children at school B was 57.5 months. All of the 24 children from school A were assessed and 22 of the

26 children were assessed at School B due to absences.

3.2 MATERIALS

Data for this study was collected through a questionnaire that provided reports of

the level of participation and frequency of literacy related activities in the home and

through assessment of the children's early literacy related knowledge at the beginning

of their preprimary year.

The questionnaire was handed to the parents of all children attending the two

preprimary centres. They were asked to either complete the questionnaire on

reception, or to take it home to complete and return as soon as possible. Forty-seven

parents (24 from School A and 23 from School B) completed all or most of the

questionnaire and returned it to the teacher or researcher.

3.2.1 Questionnaire

The aim of the questionnaire was to collect data on:

> (a) the literacy related practices in which the preprimary children were
>
> engaged at home as identified by their parents;
>
> (b) the level of participation in family literacy related activities;
>
> (c) the frequency of literacy related activities in the home.

The questionnaire consisted of a demographics section to identify the respondent

(mother, father or other) and the parents' level of education and teacher training.

This section was followed by 33 questions (based on the findings of Baker, Serpell &

Sonnenschein, 1995) in the following categories:

> Joint storybook reading

Visits to a library or bookshop

Participation in daily routines

Explicit instruction

Independent use of print

Other categories not identified by Baker et.al, but considered to be

important literacy related practices were:

Computer use

Music and singing

Parental expectations of education.

The questionnaire took the form of multiple-choice questions on a five-point scale of

Always, Nearly Always, About Half the Time, Not Often, Never, and *Yes/No* answers.

The headings in the questionnaire were *Demographics, Joint Book Reading,*

Participation in Daily Routines, Explicit Instruction, Computer, Role Play Reading &

Writing and *And Finally...*

3.2.1.1 Questionnaire Design

A questionnaire was chosen as the appropriate means of data collection as the subjects

were from two geographical areas. It was an economical way of collecting data in

terms of time and money, and, as the respondents were able to take the questionnaire

away to complete in their own time, they were not likely to be influenced by the

interviewer. The questionnaire was limited to 33 questions so that it would not be too

long for the respondent. The respondents were all guaranteed anonymity. Generally,

the parents in both schools were interested in the content of the questionnaire and

expressed a willingness to participate in anything related to their child's entry into the

school system.

The questionnaire was piloted before being distributed. A section on television and viewing was considered for inclusion but was not added due to the overall length of the questionnaire. At the time of distributing the consent forms to teachers, principals and parents, it was planned to include a diary for recording the literacy practices of each family over three consecutive days and to carry out case studies of three families in each school. However, it was decided that the diary and case studies were not necessary for the purposes of this study. The grammatical awareness tasks were found to be difficult for the children in the pilot study so it was decided to cut down the number of tasks from 10 to five in both the morpheme deletions and the word order changes sections. Minor modifications were made to the wording of some questions in the questionnaire. A copy of the questionnaire as distributed to parents in the study is included in Appendix A.

Questionnaire, Page 1, Introduction and Demographics

The cover page of the questionnaire carried a brief explanation of the study and reasons for the questionnaire. The participants were asked to answer the questions honestly. This was followed by a demographics section that was designed to identify the person who completed the questionnaire (mother, father or other) and their level of education. The third question in the demographics section was included to identify parents with teacher training as this training may have influenced home literacy related practices.

Questionnaire, Pages 2 and 3, Joint Book Reading

This section related to the collection of data on the frequency of literacy related

activities in the home, specifically, joint or shared book reading and parental involvement in this activity. As shown in the literature review, research by Hewison and Tizard (1980) indicated that parental involvement in reading to children was a significant predictor of the child's later success in reading and the literacy programs involving parental participation described by Harrison (1995) resulted in an increase in children's reading development.

<u>Questions 1-3</u>

1. Who reads to your child?

2. How often is your child read to on average?

3. Who reads most frequently to your child? What is this person's main

reason for reading to the child?

Respondents were asked to indicate frequency on a scale of *Every day, 5-6 days a week, 3-4 days a week, 1-2 days a week, Never* or *Other (please specify).*

Questions 4 to 12 were related to the type of books read, the person who chose the book, the source of the book and the type of interactions that may occur during reading. Research by Spreadbury (1994) showed how parents can increase their child's vocabulary and foster reading development by relating the characters and events in books to the child's own experience. So, it seems that parents who discuss the book before, during and after reading and respond to the child's interest in books and print may be informally teaching their child to read.

<u>Questions 4-8</u>

4. What type of books or literature are read to your child?

5. Who is primarily responsible for choosing the books which are read (eg. the child, mother)?

6. Does the reader discuss what a book could be about before, during and/or after

reading it with your child?

7. Does your child borrow books from a library? If so, how often?

8. What is the main source of books that are read to your child?

Questions 9 to 12 related to the re-reading of books. As already mentioned, it is

through this kind of repetition that children begin to make sense of the print on the

page and associate words and meaning. Familiarity with print has been shown to be

more significant than being able to name and recognise letters in improving reading

ability (Adams, 1990). It seems that children may learn grammatical awareness from

repeated reading of the same stories.

Questions 9-12

9. How often does your child ask for a favourite book to be read?

10. Does your child ask for a book to be read more than once at a sitting? If

so, how often is the book read again?

11. How often does your child memorise the text of books?

12. What is your child's favourite book?

Questionnaire, Page 4, Participation in Daily Routines

Questions 13 to 15 aimed to identify the types of routines that took place in the home

and other classes and activities in which the child participated. The respondent was

asked to identify literacy related household routines in which the child participated.

This information was sought in order to discover what the parents identified as

literacy related activities.

Questions 13 - 15

13. What sort of family or household routines does your child participate in

which involve some sort of literacy (eg cooking, shopping)? Please specify.

14. Does your child participate in any classes outside preprimary? If so,

which?

15. What other activities does your child take part in (eg. Religion, sport)?

Question 16 was related to one of the assessment tasks, environmental print,

and whether the child recognised signs and print in the environment. The child may

have been taught to recognise these signs or may have made an association with the

symbol that gave it meaning, for example she may have associated the McDonald's

sign with eating hamburgers but not identified it as meaning or "saying" McDonald's.

Question 16

16. Does anyone draw your child's attention to signs (eg. BP, McDonalds)

and print in the environment? Please elaborate.

Question 17 was included to identify the range of writing related materials available

to the child in the home. This could have been seen as relating to the level of parental

participation in the development of literacy related knowledge by reflecting the

importance placed on the child's use of such materials.

Question 17

17. What drawing and writing resources are available to your child at home?

Questionnaire, Page 5, Explicit Instruction

Questions 18 to 22 were related to activities which require parental participation and

are intended to develop the child's literacy related skills. The respondent was asked whether the child was using pre-reading or literacy packages, was being taught to read at home, was being taught the letters and sounds of the alphabet, numbers and words and playing games which involved letter, number or word recognition. Prereader's knowledge of letter names was reported to be a very good predictor of early reading success (Chall, 1967, Bond & Dykstra, 1967). Through games such as *I Spy* children can develop an awareness of the first sounds in words. Phonological awareness has also been shown to be a highly significant predictor of reading and spelling (Adams,1990) and sounding out words may help children to understand that words are made up of phonemes. By encouraging children to give whole sentence answers parents are helping them to focus on the sentence as a unit of meaning (Rohl & Milton, 1993).

Questions 18-22

18. Does your child use any pre-reading or literacy packages? If so, which

ones?

19. Is your child being taught or has been taught to read at home? If so,

how?

20. Has someone taught your child the letters of the alphabet? If so, who?

21. Does someone sound out words to your child?

22. Does someone play number, letter or word games with your child? If so,

which games?

Questionnaire, Page 6, Computers

Using a computer can be seen as a literacy related activity so the following questions were included to ascertain the level of use of computers by the preprimary child, the

length of time spent at the computer, the frequency of use, the type of use and if the child was accompanied or alone. Question 25 was related to parental participation and level of involvement.

Questions 23 - 25

23. Does your child use a computer at home? If so, how often? How many hours per day on average?

24. How does your child use the computer? (Choice of games etc.)

25. Does your child use the computer alone? If not, who sits with your child whilst using the computer? How often is your child accompanied at the computer?

Questionnaire, Page 7, Role Play Reading and Writing

The questions in this section related to the example set by parents when they read or take part in literacy related activities. The child may develop an interest in reading and writing through watching the parent and copying or role playing the adult activities. The Elmswood Study by Weinberger (1996) found that children often experience a variety of literacy related activities in the home that are more varied than and different from those experienced at school. In the home the child is often exposed to more adult writing and reading behaviour which provides them with valuable models.

Questions 26-29

26. Does your child attempt to, or pretend to write at home? If so, please elaborate.

27. Does your child attempt to, or pretend to read at home? If so, please elaborate.

28. Does someone draw your child's attention to the print in storybooks? If so, who does?

29. What sort of literacy related activities does your child see you engaged in? Please

describe.

Questionnaire, Page 7, Music and Singing

This question was included to collect data about the types of songs, Nursery Rhymes

and jingles taught to children in the home and the level of participation of parents and

children in this activity. Through songs and rhymes, children may develop a

knowledge of alliteration and rhyme and a familiarity with language (Maclean,

Bryant and Bradley, 1987).

Question 30

30. Does someone (outside preprimary) teach your child songs or rhymes? If

so, who? What sort of songs or rhymes are taught?

Questionnaire, Page 8, And Finally...

These questions were related to parental expectations of the preprimary year and of

the child's ultimate educational achievements. Question 31 asked whether the

respondent believed that reading stories to a child would help him/her to become a

better reader. The question was related to the motivation or intention of the parent in

reading to their child and also asked for reasons for the answer given.

Question 31

31. Do you believe that reading stories to your child helps him/her to become a better

reader? Please suggest reasons for your answer.

32. What do you hope that your child will get out of his or her preprimary education?

33. What level of education do you hope your child will eventually achieve?

3.2.2 Early Literacy Related Assessment Tasks

The following assessment tasks were selected to give a detailed profile of each child's literacy-related knowledge.

- #### 3.2.2.1 Letter Identification. Clay (1993)

This task was administered in order to assess each child's knowledge of the letters of the alphabet in both upper and lower case. It was based on Clay's (1993) Letter Recognition task which is part of An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement. The task was changed slightly from that of Clay to suit the age of the children. Her test is intended for 6-year-old children who have attended school for one year. Instead of a printed list of letters, Duplo blocks (plastic cubes) were used because they could be easily handled by the children. Twenty-six upper case and 26 lower case letters of the alphabet on the 3-D plastic cubes were spread out at random in rows of approximately 6 in front of the child. Clay included 2 fonts for 'a' and 'g'. These were not considered appropriate for these young children and were not included.

The child was asked to find the first letter of his /her name and then to name any other known letters. As in Clay's test, the child scored a point for correctly naming the letter, a word beginning with the letter, or the sound of the letter. Each child was asked, "Do you know what these are?". If the child answered correctly that they were letters the child was then asked, "That's right, they're letters. Can you show me which letter your name starts with?" If the child said that they were numbers or was unable to give them a name, the researcher said, "They are called letters. Can you show me which letter your name starts with?" (Upper case letters were shown first.) Then the child was asked, "Do you know what any of the other letters are?". After

the child had been shown the upper case letters, the lower case letters were displayed and the child was asked, "Do you know any of these letters?"

- ### 3.2.2.2 Ready to Read Word Test (Clay 1993)

This task was used to assess the child's reading vocabulary. Each child was shown Clay's List A of 15 words common in early texts and reading materials and asked if s/he could read any of the words. This task was administered and scored as directed by Clay, the only change being that the words were typed in large print. The child was asked, "Do you know any of these words?" A point was given for each word read correctly. The words were: *I, Mother, are, here, me, shouted, am, with, car, children, help, not, too, meet, away.*

- ### 3.2.2.3 Environmental Print

The purpose of this task was to assess whether the child could give meaning to print and symbols in the environment, for example whether s/he associated the word "MILK" in isolation with the word as seen on a milk carton, or the McDonald's trademark with the symbol on a McDonald's building. The words were cut from magazines and cartons so that they were in the same form as seen by the child in the environment. They were out of context in that they were not in their usual environment such as on a milk carton, a shop front or street sign , thus they were disembedded. This is a more difficult task than giving the correct meaning to print in its usual "embedded" context, for example, recognising a McDonald's shop by the big yellow "M" trademark displayed on the roof, but as Donaldson (1989) has shown, many classroom tasks are dependent on "disembedded" language.

The child was asked if s/he recognised any of 11 signs and symbols on a sheet of

paper. The signs were those of popular shops, take away foods and traffic signs:

Coca Cola, Hungry Jack's, McDonald's, Police, Bananas in Pyjamas, Stop, Exit, Target, ABC, Milk, and Myer. The signs and shop names were carefully chosen to be common to the surrounding environment of both schools. "Bananas in Pyjamas" was chosen because it is a very popular toy, book and game trademark for preschool children and is also seen on television at children's peak viewing times.

The child scored a point for each sign recognised. A point was given if the child said the exact word or if she gave the correct meaning. Thus, "coke" and "drink" were accepted for Coca Cola, as were "burger" for Hungry Jack's and McDonald's, "shop" for Myer and Target and "toymarket" for Target.

- ### 3.2.2.4 Test of Phonological Awareness (TOPA) (Torgesen, J.K. & Bryant, B.R., 1994)

This task measures children's ability to isolate individual phonemes in spoken words. The Kindergarten version of the test was used to assess awareness of beginning sounds in words, that is, single phoneme onsets. It was composed of 20 items, in two different subtests of 10 items each. In the first subtest, the child was asked to find the one word out of three which started with the same sound as a word given by the examiner. In the second the child was asked to find the word which started with a different sound from three others. The child was shown a set of four pictures each representing one word and was asked to point to the appropriate picture as the word was spoken.

The procedure for test administration differed somewhat from that given in the TOPA

manual as that version was intended for group administration and the instructions were considered too complex for young children. In the manual, the children were required to mark which one of three words began with the same sound as a stimulus word. The test was modified by presenting the children with a strip of pictures, the stimulus word and three other words (one set of pictures cut into a strip), instead of using a student booklet with five sets of pictures to a page. Rather than ask the child to mark a box next to the picture by drawing a line to join two dots, the child was asked to put her finger on the picture which was her choice of answer. This was considered to be a less complicated procedure for children of this age to follow as it would make fewer cognitive demands on the young preprimary children and so would be a more 'pure' measure of phonological awareness. The child scored a point for each correct answer. The question was not repeated if the child's first answer was incorrect. The two subtests were given on different days rather than together as directed in the manual, as it was considered confusing for the child to first identify the same sound and then the different sound in the same session. For each subtest there were three practice items with corrective feedback.

The following instructions were given:

Subtest 1. Initial Sound - Same.

The examiner said:

"Look at these pictures. (Demonstration A).

The first picture is *bat;* the other three pictures are *horn, bed, cup.*

Put your finger on the picture that begins with the same sound as *bat.*

(PAUSE)

You should have put your finger on *bed* because *bat* and *bed* begin with the same sound (/b/).

Now look at these pictures. (Demonstration B).

The first picture is *car*. The other pictures are *cake, rice, box*. Put your finger on the one that begins with the same sound as *car*. *(PAUSE)*.

You should have put your finger on *cake* because *car* and *cake* begin with the same sound (/k/). Let's try one more for practice.

Look at these pictures. (Demonstration C).

The first picture is *gate*. The other pictures are *pig, cow* and *gun*. Put your finger on the one that begins with the same sound as *gate*. You should have put your finger on *gun* because *gate* and *gun* begin with the same sound (/g/).

Now, let's try these ones." (The cards containing the first 10 sets of items were then presented individually.)

Subtest II. Initial Sound - Different.

The examiner said:

"Look at these pictures *bed, bus, chair, ball*. Put your finger on the one that has a different first sound than the other three. (Pause.)

You should have put your finger on *chair* because *bed, bus* and *ball* begin with the same sound /b/. *Chair* begins with a different sound /ch/.

Now look at these pictures *knife, fork, neck, nest*. Put your finger on the one that has a different first sound than the other three. (Pause.)

You should have put your finger on *fork*, because *knife, neck* and *nest* all start with the same sound /n/. *Fork* begins with a different sound /f/. Let's try one more for practice.

Look at these pictures *glass, horse, hand, hat*. Put your finger on the one that has a different first sound than the other three. (Pause.)

You should have put your finger on *glass*, because *glass* has a different first sound than *horse, hand* and *hat*.

Now let's try these ones." (The cards containing the next 10 sets of items were then

presented individually.)

Scoring was based on the number of words identified correctly as beginning with the

same sound (first 10 questions) and as beginning with a different sound (next 10

questions).

- ### 3.2.2.5 The Kaufman Survey of Early Academic and Language Skills (K SEALS), Kaufman & Kaufman (1993) – Receptive and Expressive Vocabulary – subtest of 40 items

The Kaufman Survey of Early Academic and Language Skills is designed to provide

an overall view of the performance of a preschool child in receptive and expressive

language. The vocabulary subtest was used to assess receptive and expressive

language skills in the children participating in the study. In the K-SEALS manual

(p.8) it is claimed that vocabulary tests are well known "as excellent measures

of general intelligence and as one of the best predictors of success in school".

In the K-SEALS Vocabulary Subtest there are 14 recall items which assess expressive

(naming) vocabulary and 15 recognition items which measure receptive (hearing)

vocabulary. Overall, the expressive and receptive vocabulary components of the test

contain almost equal numbers of nouns and verbs (15 objects and 14 actions). There

are also five receptive and six expressive riddles which require the child to identify a

concrete object by integrating information about its characteristics. The Vocabulary

Subtest was administered according to the guidelines in the manual. Assessment was

discontinued after five consecutive item scores of zero.

- ### 3.2.2.6 Concepts of Print

This task, used to measure the child's knowledge about various concepts of print, was

adapted from that of Clay (1993) in view of the young age of the children. In Clay's test, the child is read the book "Sand" or "Stones" and asked questions related to the pictures and text. The books were considered outdated as they were printed in 1972 and somewhat inappropriate for children of preprimary age. John Burningham's book "The Dog" was used instead of "Sand" or "Stones" as it was considered that the story and pictures were more interesting for children of this age. The simple pictures and text of "The Dog" met the requirements of the task. One page was inverted to cater for two of the questions.

Clay's items 10 to 15 and 18 to 24 were deleted as they were considered too difficult for 5-year-old children and Clay's research showed that these concepts were attained by few 5-year-olds. Items 1 to 9 were chosen because results of research by Clay (1993), showed that they were passed at a 50% rate by European children at or below 5.6 years and so were considered suitable for the children in the present study. Items 15 and 16 were used to include some simple punctuation.

The items included assessed the following concepts about print as identified by Clay (1993):

1. Identification of the front of the book.

2. Print contains a message.

3. Where to start.

4. Which way to go.

5. Word by word matching.

6. First and last concept.

7. Response to inverted picture

8. Response to inverted print

9. Meaning of question mark

10. Meaning of full stop

11. Given upper case M, find lower case m

12. Given upper case H, find lower case h

13. Given upper case T, find lower case t

- **3.2.2.7 Grammatical Awareness**

Grammatical awareness has been shown to be related to early reading (Tunmer, Herriman & Nesdale 1988). It is defined by Tunmer and Hoover (1992) as "the ability to reflect on and manipulate aspects of the internal grammatical structure of sentences" (p.35).

The purpose of this task was to measure the child's grammatical awareness by correcting mistakes in accordance with the rules of language in sentences spoken aloud by the researcher. The task used in this study was based on an assessment of syntactic awareness designed by Blackmore (1991). Blackmore's task was modified to suit the props available in the preprimary centres and the age of the children (for example, a farmer smoking a pipe was considered inappropriate for preprimary children and was excluded). (There is a list of items in Appendix B). Pilot tests suggested that this task was difficult for many children and as a result it was decided to reduce the number of tasks to five morpheme deletions and five word order changes. The child was shown plastic animals and people as props to help understand the meaning of five short sentences with incorrect word order and five with morpheme deletions. The props were plastic models of animals and people. They were placed on the table in front of the child and manipulated to give meaning to the sentence. The child was asked to correct each sentence. The examiner said, "This is

John. John saw pig.", and made the John doll look at the pig. The child was told that these sentences "don't sound right because someone made a mistake when they wrote them down". The child was asked to tell the adult how the sentence should sound. The examiner said, "John saw pig. That doesn't sound quite right does it? What would you say?". Whilst it is acknowledged that verbal working memory is involved in most verbal tasks, the purpose of this task was to identify the grammatical error. Thus a point was scored for either correctly repeating the whole sentence or for correcting the appropriate word or words, for example, "John has a red shirt", "red shirt" and "John has a shirt that is red" were all accepted as corrections for "John has a shirt red".

3.3 PROCEDURE

Principals and teachers were informed about the project and were given a letter of explanation and a consent form (see Appendix C). Parents were also informed individually at the preprimary centre, given a letter of explanation and asked to give written permission for their child to participate in the study (see Appendix D). Diary entries were not required, nor were the case studies. Questionnaires were given to all families and were completed either on the spot at school or were taken home and returned later. The assessment of early literacy-related knowledge was carried out at the preprimary centres during the first school term. These tasks were piloted by first administering them to three children who were not included in the study so that modifications could be made to the procedure if necessary.

Children were withdrawn individually to a quiet room adjoining the main playroom where they participated in assessment tasks for periods of up to 10 minutes. The total assessment time per child was approximately 30-40 minutes, depending on the length

of individual responses.

The tasks were administered in the following order:

Table 3.1
Order of administration of assessment tasks

SESSION	TESTS ADMINISTERED
1.	K-SEALS (expressive and receptive language, 20 items)
2.	Letter recognition (26 upper case & 26 lower case letters)
3.	TOPA (initial sound same) and Environmental print
4.	TOPA (initial sound different) and Ready to Read Word Test
5.	Grammatical Awareness (word order changes first)
6.	Concepts about Print

CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS

4.1 QUESTIONNAIRE

Of the 50 questionnaires distributed, 47 were completed and returned. All the questionnaires given to parents at School A were returned but one was not included in the study as the child left the school before being assessed; three questionnaires were not returned by parents at School B as their children did not attend school regularly during the assessment period. These children were not included in the study. As a result, the sample sizes were uneven: 24 questionnaires from School A and 23 questionnaires from School B. A questionnaire was completed by a parent of all of the children who were assessed for early literacy related skills. Some parents did not answer all questions, so the sample size for individual items varies. It is noted that the following presentation of results is based on parent's response and represents their perceptions of their home literacy practices.

4.1.1 Demographic Information

The questionnaires were completed by 39 mothers and eight fathers: 22 mothers were from School A and 17 mothers from School B; two fathers were from School A and six fathers from School B. Mothers' education levels ranged from below year 12 to postgraduate degrees. Education levels of mothers from School A ranged from Year 11 to postgraduate degrees. Fourteen of the 23 mothers from School A had university or postgraduate degrees. The education levels of mothers from School B ranged from below Year 10 to TAFE. Thirteen of the 23 mothers from School B had an education level of Year 10 or below and none had a university degree (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1
Mother's Education Level

Education level	Total	School A	School B
Below Year 10	1	0	1
Year 10	12	0	12
Year 11	3	1	2
Year 12	8	3	5
TAFE	8	5	3
University	10	10	0
Postgraduate	4	4	0
Total response	46	23	23

Fathers' education levels also ranged from below Year 10 to postgraduate degrees. Twenty-two fathers from School A had an education level of Year 12 or above and 17 fathers had postgraduate degrees. Four fathers from School B had an education level of Year 12 or TAFE, none had a university degree (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2
Father's Education Level

Education level	Total	School A	School B
Below Year 10	6	0	6
Year 10	7	0	7
Year 11	1	0	1
Year 12	5	3	2
TAFE	2	0	2
University	2	2	0
Postgraduate	17	17	0
Total response	40	22	18

Ten of the parents had some teacher training. Eight parents from School A had Early Childhood, Primary or Secondary teacher training. One parent from School B had done Early Childhood Studies in Year 12 and one was an Aboriginal Education Worker (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3
Teacher Training

Training	Total	School A	School B
Early Childhood	2	1	1
Primary	4	4	0
Secondary	3	3	0
Other	1	0	1
None	37	16	21
Total response	47	24	23

4.1.2 Joint Book Reading

Question 1. *Who reads to your child?*

This question identified the number of people who read on a regular basis to the preprimary child (outside preprimary). All children except one were read to by at least one person and some children had as many as five people reading to them regularly. Eighteen children from School A and nine children from School B had three or more people reading to them on a regular basis (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4
Number of Readers

Readers	Total	School A	School B
No-one	1	0	1
1 person	8	2	6
2 people	11	4	7
3 people	19	12	7
4 people	5	3	2
5 people	3	3	0
Total response	47	24	23

Question 2. *How often is your child read to on average?*

Only one child was never read to at home. Most children were read to at least every three to four days. Twenty-two of the 47 children whose parents participated in the questionnaire were read to in their home every day. Sixteen

children from School A and six children from School B were read to every day (see

Table 4.5).

Table 4.5
Frequency of Reading (per week)

Frequency	Total	School A	School B
Every day	22	16	6
5-6 days	8	4	4
3-4 days	11	4	7
1-2 days	5	0	5
Never	1	0	1
Total response	47	24	23

Question 3. *Who reads most frequently to your child?*

Mothers were named as the people who most frequently read to the children in the

study at School A and at School B. Grandparents, babysitters or others were not

named as the most frequent readers for any child (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6
Main Reader

Reader	Total	School A	School B
Mother	32	16	16
Father	6	4	2
Mother & Father	6	3	3
Sibling	2	1	1
Grandparent	0	0	0
Babysitter	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0
Total Response	46	24	22

Question 4. *What types of books or literature are read to your child?*

Storybooks (44) and Nursery Rhymes (27) were identified as the types of literature

most frequently read to the children taking part in the study. Only two families listed

comics, four listed poetry and five listed encyclopedias. Most children were exposed

to more than one type of literature. Other types of literature mentioned were:

alphabetical education books, Bible Stories, The Bible, non-fiction books, children's

magazines, for example, _Thomas The Tank Engine_, and toy and hardware catalogues.

Parents from both schools mentioned a wide range of literature (see Table 4.7).

Table 4.7
Type of Literature Read

Literature	Total	School A	School B
Storybooks	43	24	19
Comics	2	0	2
Poetry	4	3	1
Nursery Rhymes	26	15	11
Encyclopedia	5	1	4
Other	26	16	10
Total response	44	24	20

Question 5. _Who is primarily responsible for choosing the books which_

are read (eg. the child, mother)?

Eighteen people replied that the child was responsible for choosing the books read, 17

replied that the mother was responsible and nine said that both mother and child chose

the books. One person said that the father chose the books and one said the family

chose (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.8
Book Choice

Chooser	Total	School A	School B
Mother	17	9	8
Father	1	0	1
Child	18	7	11
Both	9	8	1
Family	1	0	1
Total response	46	24	22

Question 6. *Does the reader discuss what a book could be about before, during and/or after reading it with your child?*

All but five of the parents replied that they discussed what the book could be about at least half the time. Sixteen parents from School B and 11 parents from School A replied that they discussed what the book could be about always or nearly always. Ten parents from School A and two from School B said they discussed the book before, during and/or after reading about half the time (see Table 4.9).

Table 4.9
Discussion about Books

Discussion	Total	School A	School B
Always	9	3	6
Nearly Always	18	8	10
About half the time	12	10	2
Hardly ever	4	3	1
Never	1	0	1
Total response	44	24	20

Question 7. *Does yc r child borrow books from a library?*

About half of the parents (19 from School A and five from School B) replied that their child borrowed books from a library (see Table 4.10).

Table 4.10
Library Borrowing

Answer	Total	School A	School B
Yes	24	19	5
No	20	5	15
Total response	44	24	20

Question 7a. *If so, how often?*

Respondents indicated that if their child borrowed books from a library it was most

likely to be on a monthly or fortnightly basis. Of the parents who responded that their

child borrowed books from a library, nine parents from School A and three from

School B said they borrowed books at least once a fortnight (see Table 4.11).

Table 4.11
Frequency of Library Borrowing

Frequency	Total	School A	School B
Once a week	4	2	2
Once a fortnight	8	7	1
Once a month	7	6	1
Less than once a month	4	4	0
Other	1	0	1
Total response	24	19	5

Question 8. *What is the main source of books that are read to your child?*

Answers to this question indicated that books in the home were acquired from a

range of sources. There was often more than one source mentioned. One respondent

gave sources which were not included in the question examples as secondhand books

from swapmeets and garage sales. Eleven parents from School A and three from

School B said that their main source of books was from bookshops. One parent from

School A and eight from School B said their main source was the supermarket and

two from School A and 14 from School B 'ted department stores. Gifts were

mentioned as a main source of books by 10 parents from School A and nine parents

from School B (see Table 4.12).

Table 4.12
Main Source of Books

Source	Total	School A	School B
Bookshops	14	11	3
Library	15	12	3
Supermarket	9	1	8
Dept. Store	16	2	14
Gifts	19	10	9
Other	1	1	0
Total response	74	37	37

NB. More than one "main source" was listed by some parents.

Question 9. *How often does your child ask for a favourite or particular book to be read?*

Thirty-five of the 47 children whose parents responded to the question asked for a favourite book to be read to them at least half the time. A total of 20 parents from School A and 17 parents from School B replied that their child asked for a favourite book to be read at least half the time (see Table 4.13).

Table 4.13
Asks for a Favourite Book

Frequency	Total	School A	School B
Always	5	3	2
Nearly Always	16	7	9
About half the time	16	10	6
Not Often	7	4	3
Never	1	0	1
Total response	45	24	21

Question 10. *Does your child ask for a book to be read more than once at a sitting?*

Parents reported that most children asked for a book to be read again. Sixteen parents from each school answered "yes" (see Table 4.14).

Table 4.14
Child asks for Book to be Read Again

Answer	Total	School A	School B
Yes	32	16	16
No	12	8	4
Total response	44	24	20

Question 10a. *If so, how often is the book read again?*

Sixteen parents said that the book was always or nearly always read again if requested

by the child. Seven parents from School A and nine parents from School B reported

that they always or nearly always read the book again. Seven parents from School A

and five parents from School B said that they read the book again about half of the

time. Two parents from each school said that they did not often read the book again if

requested by the child (see Table 4.15).

Table 4.15
Frequency of Re-reading

Frequency	Total	School A	School B
Always	6	2	4
Nearly always	10	5	5
About half the time	12	7	5
Not often	4	2	2
Never	1	0	1
Total response	33	16	17

Question 11. *How often does your child memorise the text of books?*

Thirty-five parents, 19 from School A and 16 from School B, replied that their child

memorised the text of books about half the time or more often. Three parents from

each school said that their child did not often memorise the text of books. Two parents

from School A and one parent from School B said that their child never memorised

text (see Table 4.16).

Table 4.16
Memorisation of Text

Frequency	Total	School A	School B
Always	4	1	3
Nearly always	8	1	7
About half the time	23	17	6
Not often	6	3	3
Never	3	2	1
Total response	44	24	20

Question 12. *What is your child's favourite book?*

Books in the following categories were listed as favourites: picture books, storybooks,

Disney books, fairytales, classics (such as *Peter Pan*) non-fiction books and the Bible.

In all, 39 different books were mentioned; *The Jolly Postman* and *The Lion King* were

each mentioned twice. Five parents wrote 'none' or did not give an answer to this

question, two parents wrote 'all' and two wrote 'it changes'. There was a wide

selection of titles from both schools.

4.1.3 Participation in Daily Routines

Question 13. *What sort of family or household routines does your child participate*

in which involve some sort of literacy (eg. cooking, shopping)? Please specify.

The activities given as examples, shopping and cooking, were the most frequently

mentioned activities. This was probably because they were suggested in the

questionnaire as possible literacy related routines in which children might be

involved. Thirty-six respondents listed the suggested activity of shopping and 22

listed cooking (see Table 4.17). There were sixteen different activities or routines

identified by parents as literacy related. Only eight of these were nominated by

parents from School B, whereas 15 were nominated by parents from School A,

suggesting that either the children from School B did not take part in as many of these

activities as children from School A, or that the respondents from School B did not recognise them as literacy based activities.

Table 4.17
Literacy Related Routines

Literacy Routines	Total	School A	School B
Shopping	36	20	16
Cooking	22	13	9
Chores	15	7	8
Television & guide	5	4	1
Outings	3	3	0
Selecting CD's videos & books	2	2	0
Banking	2	2	0
Mail, newspaper	2	2	0
Church & family prayer	2	2	0
Board & card games, jigsaws	2	2	0
Computer	2	1	1
Taped stories & books	1	1	0
Drawing & describing	1	1	0
Reading catalogues	1	0	1
Magnetic letters	1	0	1
Home reading (siblings)	1	0	1
Total response	44	24	20

Question 14. *Does your child participate in any classes outside preprimary? If so which?*

Nineteen parents replied that their child regularly attended at least one class outside preprimary. Included in these classes were swimming lessons, gymnastics, ballet classes, piano lessons, music appreciation, tennis, an enrichment group for five year olds, Kindy Sport, speech therapy, daycare, a church club for children and Sunday School. Two parents from School B responded that their child attended classes: one was an occupational therapy class and the other was "occasionally Sunday School with Grandma". Twenty-six parents replied that their child did not attend classes outside school. There were eight parents from School A and 18 from School B who

replied that their child did not participate in any other classes. Three parents from

School A replied that their child participated in two classes (two went to gymnastics

and swimming and one went to a Church Club and Sunday School) and one child

attended three different classes outside preprimary (swimming, piano and

gymnastics). These four parents were from School A. All other children who attended

classes were attending only one class outside preprimary (see Table 4.18).

Table 4.18
Classes Attended Outside Preprimary

Classes attended	Total	School A	School B
Sport	13	13	0
Church/religion	8	6	2
Daycare	2	2	0
Music	2	2	0
Therapy	2	1	2
5yr old enrichment	1	1	0
None	26	8	18
More than one class	4	4	0
Children attending classes	24	21	3

Question 15. *What other activities does your child take part in (eg. religion, sport)?*

Twenty-five parents said that their child participated in other activities: 15 were from

School A and 10 from School B (see Table 4.19). Other activities which parents

listed were canteen and classroom roster, religious meetings, family activities such as

camping, bike riding, walking, parties, watching siblings play sport, visiting friends

and relatives, computer games, Monopoly, playing dolls, playing with a neighbour's

child, walking on the beach, any outdoor sport, bowling, basketball, cricket, fishing,

and kite flying.

Table 4.19
Other activities

Other activities	Total	School A	School B
Religion/social	13	9	4
Sport	19	10	9
Games	3	1	2
Total response	25	15	10

Question 16. *Does anyone draw your child's attention to signs (eg. BP, McDonalds) and print in the environment? Please elaborate.*

Parents reported that in 18 out of 47 families it was the child who drew attention to print. In five families it was siblings and in 13 families it was the whole family who drew attention to print. Seven parents said that no-one pointed out print in the child's environment. The responses from parents at both schools were very similar (see Table 4.20).

Table 4.20
Attention drawn to environmental print

Attention drawn by	Total	School A	School B
Child	18	9	9
Siblings	5	3	2
Whole family	13	6	7
No-one	7	6	1
Total response	43	24	19

Children from both schools were exposed to a range of print sources in the environment. There was no mention of print associated with television. Only one parent mentioned food labels. It may be that "environmental" was interpreted as pertaining to the outdoors as a lot of the answers were about print that would have been seen in the street and on shops. See Table 4.21 for print that parents listed as recognised by the children in their environment.

Table 4.21
Print Recognised by Child in Environment

Environmental print	
School A	**School B**
FOR SALE	*FOR SALE*
STOP	*STOP*
Street signs	Street signs
Alphabet letters	Alphabet letters
McDonalds	*McDonalds*
Take Away signs	Take Away signs
NO STANDING	Crosswalk
Shop windows	Shopping centres
Exit	*Target*
Billboards	*K Mart*
Car stickers	Holden Models
KFC	*BP*
Number Plates	Motor sport personalities
Traffic lights	*Bunnings*
Icecream	*WA Salvage*
Shops	*BMW*

Question 17. *What drawing and writing resources are available to your child at home?*

All parents reported that their children had at least three resources available for drawing and writing in the home. The items most frequently mentioned were pencils, colouring books and Textas. Other items listed, mostly by parents from School A, were magnets, craft materials, sticker and activity books, stamps, tracing paper, Magna Doodle (x 2), toys and computer (x 5, basic printing and paintbrush). See Table 4.22 for information on drawing and writing materials reported by parents to be available to children in their homes.

Table 4.22
Drawing and Writing Materials

Item	Total	School A	School B
Pencils	46	23	23
Crayons	42	22	20
Textas	41	23	18
Paints	37	21	16
Chalk & board	23	13	10
Stencils	24	16	8
Colouring books	44	24	20
Other	14	12	2
Total response	47	24	23

4.1.4   Explicit instruction

Question 18. *Does your child use any pre-reading or literacy packages?*

If so, which ones?

Eighteen parents from School A and 15 parents from School B said their child did not

use a pre-reading or literacy package. Eleven parents answered that their child did use

a pre-reading or literacy package. Six parents from School A and five parents from

School B said they used this form of explicit instruction (see Table 4.23). Two

parents from School A said they were using two pre-reading or literacy packages: one

was using Ladybird and Preschool Activity books, and the other was using Early

Learning Centre and Preschool Activity books. Four other parents at School A were

using Preschool Activity books. One parent at School B was using Ladybird books

and the other four parents were using Preschool Activity books.

Table 4.23
Pre-reading packages

Packages	Total	School A	School B
Yes	11	6	5
No	33	18	15
Total response	44	24	20

Question 19. *Is your child being taught or has your child been taught to read at home? If so, how?*

Thirteen parents replied that their child was being taught to read at home: six from School A and 7 from School B. Eighteen parents from School A and 12 parents from School B said that their child was not being taught to read at home (see Table 4.24).

Table 4.24
Parents Who Taught Reading

Taught reading	Total	School A	School B
Yes	13	6	7
No	30	18	12
Total response	33	24	19

Most of the instruction methods described by parents involved pointing to letters and words whilst reading a book to their child. Several parents said that they taught reading by teaching the letters and sounds of the alphabet. One parent replied that the child was being taught to read "by TV" and one child was said to be learning to read by copying her sister's Year 1 school work.

Question 20. *Has someone taught your child the letters of the alphabet? If so, who?*

Thirty-four parents answered that someone had taught their child the letters of the alphabet. Ten parents replied that no one had taught their child the letters of the alphabet (see Table 4.25). One parent answered "No, but he knows most letters".

Table 4.25
Children Taught Letters of Alphabet

Child taught alphabet	Total	School A	School B
Yes	34	19	15
No	10	5	5
Total Response	44	24	20

A range of family members were said to be involved in teaching the alphabet: mother, father, both parents, siblings and a grandmother. Other people mentioned as being involved were: Daycare, Kindy, Preschool, teachers, mother's friend, children's programs, junior computer and a 5-year-old children's enrichment centre (see Table 4.26).

Table 4.26
Person Who Has Taught Child the Alphabet

Teacher of alphabet	Total	School A	School B
Mother	17	10	7
Father	3	2	1
Sibling	6	3	3
Both parents	6	1	5
Grandparent	2	1	1
Kindy or Daycare	6	4	2
Television or computer	2	1	1
Other	3	1	2
Total response	34	19	15

Question 21. *Does someone sound out words to your child?*

Thirty-five parents replied that someone sounded out words to their child. Nineteen parents from School A and 16 from School B answered "yes" to this question. Five parents from each school replied that no one sounded out words to their child (see Table 4.27).

Table 4.27
Words sounded out to child

Words sounded	Total	School A	School B
Yes	35	19	16
No	10	5	5
Total response	45	24	21

Question 22. *Does someone play number, letter or word games with your child?*

If so, which games?

Thirty-six parents replied that someone did play number, letter or word games with their child. Twenty-one parents from School A and 15 parents from School B said "yes" and three from School A and six from School B said "no" (see Table 4.28).

Table 4.28
Number, Letter or Word Games Played

Games	Total	School A	School B
Yes	36	21	15
No	9	3	6
Total response	45	24	21

Parents were asked to indicate whether they played the following games with their child: UNO, I Spy, Snap, Scrabble, Boggle and other games if any. All of the games mentioned were said to be played by at least one child. Seventeen parents replied that they played other games with their child (see Table 4.29).

Table 4.29
Games Played with Children

Game	Total	School A	School B
UNO	11	8	3
I Spy	23	16	7
Snap	27	17	10
Scrabble	3	3	0
Boggle	2	1	1
Other	17	11	6
Total response	36	21	15

Other games listed by parents from School A were: games in native language, Ravensburger, Fisher Price , Lotto, Maths Bingo, Trouble, a Mickey Mouse game, Dominoes, own adaptations of Snap, Memory, Monopoly and Fish, card games, board games, Lotto Letters, and games from a toy library. Other games listed by parents

from School B were: <u>Monopoly</u>, <u>Snakes and Ladders</u>, board games, a game that helps

to count, <u>Bananas in Pyjamas Memory Game</u>, <u>Opposites</u>, <u>Disney Letter Game</u>,

<u>Trouble</u> and a memory game.

4.1.5   Computer

<u>Question 23.</u> *Does your child use a computer at home? If yes, how often?*

How many hours per day on average?

Twenty parents replied that their child used a computer at home: 14 from School A

and six from School B. Twenty-four parents replied that their child did not use a

computer at home: nine from School A and 15 from School B (see Table 4.30).

Table 4.30
<u>Children Who Used a Computer at Home</u>

Use computer at home	Total	School A	School B
Yes	20	14	6
No	24	9	15
Total response	44	23	21

Eighteen parents said that their child used the computer on a regular basis. Twelve of

the parents who said that their child used a computer at home replied that their child

used the compu... 5-6 days per week. Three parents said their child used the

computer every day and three said their child used it 3-4 days per week. One

parent said their child used the computer 1-2 days per week and one parent replied

"other" and did not elaborate (see Table 4.31).

Table 4.31
Frequency of computer use.

Days per week	Total	School A	School B
Every day	3	2	1
5-6 days	12	9	3
3-4 days	3	2	1
1-2 days	1	1	0
Other	1	0	1
Total response	20	14	6

All parents who reported that their child used a computer at home said that the child

used the computer two hours or less each day. Five parents said that their child used

the computer one to two hours per day and 15 parents said that their child used the

computer for less than one hour per day (see Table 4.32). Thirteen parents from

School A and five parents from School B said that their children used the computer at

home on a regular basis.

Table 4.32
Hours Per Day (on average) Use of Computer

Hours per day	Total	School A	School B
More than 4	0	0	0
3-4 hours	0	0	0
2-3 hours	0	0	0
1-2 hours	5	3	2
Less than 1 hour	15	11	4
Total response	20	14	6

Question 24. *How does your child use the computer?*

Three parents from School A and one from School B reported that their child used the

computer to write letters. Four parents from School A and two from School B

reported that their child played number games on the computer. Two parents from

each school reported that their child used the computer to play word games. Three

parents from School A and two parents from School B reported that their child used

the computer to play educational games. Eight parents from School A and one from

School B reported that their child used a drawing program on their computer at home

(see Table 4.33). One parent reported that their child used the computer with games

and CD ROMS from the library.

Table 4.33
Type of Computer Use

Type of use	Total	School A	School B
Write letters	4	3	1
Number games	6	4	2
Word games	4	2	2
Educational games	5	3	2
Drawing programs	9	8	1
Other	1	1	0
Total response	20	14	6

Question 25. *Does your child use the computer alone?*

Of the 20 parents who responded that their child used a computer at home, eight

parents from School A and two parents from School B replied that their child used the

computer alone. Six parents from School A and four parents from School B replied

that their child did not use the computer alone (see Table 4.34).

Table 4.34
Children Who Used the Computer Alone

Child uses computer alone	Total	School A	School B
Yes	10	8	2
No	10	6	4
Total response	20	14	6

If not, who sits with your child whilst using the computer?

Six parents replied that the mother sat with the child; two from School A and four

from School B. Three fathers, all from School A, and one sibling (also from School

A), were reported to accompany the child at the computer (see Table 4.35).

Table: 4.35
Who sat with child at computer

Accompanist	Total	School A	School B
Mother	6	2	4
Father	3	3	0
Sibling	1	1	0
Other	0	0	0
Total response	10	6	4

How often is the child accompanied at the computer?

Five parents, three from School A and two from School B replied that their child was

always accompanied at the computer. Six parents, three from each school, said that

their child was nearly always accompanied at the computer. Six parents from School

A said that their child was accompanied about half the time at the computer. Three

parents, two from School A and one from School B, said that their child was not often

accompanied at the computer. None of the parents replied that their child was never

accompanied at the computer (see Table 4.36).

Table 4.36
How often child was accompanied at computer

Frequency	Total	School A	School B
Always	5	3	2
Nearly always	6	3	3
Half the time	6	6	0
Not often	3	2	1
Never	0	0	0
Total response	20	14	6

4.1.6 Role Play Reading and Writing

<u>Question 26.</u> *Does your child attempt to, or pretend to write at home? If so, please*
elaborate.

Forty parents replied that their child did attempt some form of writing at home and

four parents replied that their child did not attempt to write. Twenty-two parents from

School A and 18 parents from School B replied that their child did attempt or

pretended to write at home. Two parents from each school replied that their child did

not attempt or pretend to write at home.

Some of the writing that children were reported to be doing was: writing his/her

name, pretending to do "running writing like sister", writing names spelt out by

adults, copying letters, "writing" shopping lists, letters to family and friends, labelling

things, scribbling on paper and calling it writing, "writing" signed messages to family

members, making cards, writing name on the blackboard, using a book to help trace

letters, attempting to write letters and numbers, scribbling on paper and telling parents

what the story is. Some examples of responses were:

> *"Has just recently begun to show an interest in writing- will scribble*
>
> *on paper and say that's a letter."*
>
> *"Yes. Writes "letters" makes cards. Asks us to read them back to her!"*
>
> *"Yes. Everyday she sits with her textas and prin: letters and spells*
>
> *words that she wants to. Adults around her at the time will often be*
>
> *asked how to spell them orally & then she prints the letters herself to*
>
> *form words."*
>
> *"Yes she scribbles her name but she can copy if I write down*
>
> *something."*
>
> *"He scribbles on paper and then tells us what the story is ie. Shopping*

lists or bills or a story."

Question 27. *Does your child attempt to, or pretend to read at home? If so, please*

elaborate.

Thirty-four parents replied that their child attempted or pretended to read at home.

Nineteen parents from School A and 15 parents from School B said 'yes' and five

parents from School A and four parents from School B said 'no'. Some of the reading

related activities that children were reported to be engaged in were: roleplay reading,

making up stories, word for word memorising, sounding out words and letters,

anticipating words and using picture or meaning clues. Typical responses were:

"She sometime (sic) pretends to read to her baby brother & her dolls."

"Yes makes up stories to go with pictures."

"knows her storybooks off by heart and sits and "reads " them by

following the pictures."

"Yes. Watches Grade 2 brother's reading and tries to anticipate."

Question 28. *Does someone draw your child's attention to the print in storybooks?*

If so, who does?

Thirty-three parents, 18 from School A and 15 from School B, replied that someone

drew their child's attention to the print in storybooks. Eleven parents, six from School

A and five from School B, replied that no-one drew their child's attention to the print

in storybooks (see Table 4.37)

Child's attention drawn to print
Table 4.37

Answer	Total	School A	School B
Yes	33	18	15
No	11	6	5
Total response	44	24	20

Question 29.*What sort of literacy related activities does your child see you engaged in? Please describe.*

Thirty-six parents, 21 from School A and 15 from School B, gave examples of what they considered to be literacy related activities in which they were engaged in the presence of their child. These activities could be classified under the following headings: *recreational* (reading novels, newspapers or magazines, doing crosswords and word puzzles), *functional* (writing letters and shopping lists, reading the television guide, reading instructions, reading recipes), *study* (reading and writing related to study), and *work* (using computer at home).

4.1.7   Music and Singing

Question 30. *Does someone (outside preprimary) teach your child songs or rhymes?*

If so, who?

Thirty-six parents replied that someone (other than preprimary staff) taught their child songs. Nineteen parents from School A and 17 parents from School B, replied that someone taught their child songs outside preprimary. Nine parents, five from School A and four from School B, replied that no-one else taught their child songs (see Table 4.38).

Table 4.38
Songs taught outside school

Answer	Total	School A	School B
Yes	36	19	17
No	9	5	4
Total response	45	24	21

Eight parents answered that the whole family was involved in teaching songs to the preprimary child; six from School A and two from School B. Eight parents, three

from School A and five from School B, answered that both parents taught songs to their child. Fifteen parents said that the mother taught the child songs; six from School A and seven from School B. Five siblings, three from School A and two from School B, were said to teach songs. Grandparents were named as teaching songs once by a parent from School A and three times by parents from School B. Siblings were mentioned as teaching songs to the preprimary child by three parents from School A and two parents from School B. Under the category of "other people who taught their child songs out of preprimary", parents from School A listed the following: Sunday School teachers (x 2), Daycare (x 3), tapes (x 2), CD's (x 2), videos, television (x 2), "Playschool" and piano teacher. Parents from School B listed the following as people who taught their child songs: Daycare, Karaoke, television ("Playschool" and "Sesame Street"), radio (x 2), "The Wiggles" and "The Wiggles" video (see Table 4.39).

Table 4.39
Who Taught Songs to Child

Teacher	Total	School A	School B
Whole family	8	6	2
Both parents	8	3	5
Mother	13	6	7
Father	0	0	0
Siblings	5	3	2
Grandparents	4	1	3
Other	18	11	7
Total response	36	19	17

What sort of songs or rhymes are taught?

Parents were asked if their child was taught songs in the following categories: Nursery Rhymes, Children's Songs, Television Jingles, Popular Songs, Folk Songs and other. Of the 36 parents who replied that their child was taught songs by someone other than preprimary personnel, all except two replied that their child was taught

more than one type of song. One child was said to have been taught songs from all six

categories (see Table 4.40).

Table 4.40
Type of Songs or Rhymes Taught

Type	Total	School A	School B
Nursery Rhymes	34	19	15
Children's songs	38	22	16
Television jingles	15	5	10
Popular songs	24	12	12
Folk songs	6	4	2
Other	5	2	3
Total response	41	22	19

4.1.8 Parental Expectations

Question 31. *Do you think that reading stories to your child helps him/her to*

become a better reader? Please suggest reasons for your answer.

Forty-four parents, 23 from School A and 21 from School B, replied that they thought

reading stories to their child would help them to become a better reader. One parent

from School B answered "*no*" to this question with the reason that "*because some*

time he dosnt (sic) *take it in*"(see Table 4.41). The question was intended to refer to

the child's long term success as a reader and the parent who answered "no" may have

been referring to the child's current progress as a reader.

Table 4.41
Does Reading to Your Child Make him/her a Better Reader

Reading makes better readers	Total	School A	School B
Yes	44	23	21
No	1	0	1
Total response	45	23	22

Parents who answered "yes" to this question gave a variety of reasons for their

answer. Ten parents, nine from School A and one from School B, said that they

believed that by reading to their child they were helping the child to develop an interest in words and print. Some examples of these answers follow:

> "Develops an interest in words, how they are put together, double-meanings humour."

> "He can associate what the word looks like to how it sounds and learn the words."

> "Helps them become familiar with print, shows them that they can predict what is happening in the story by looking at the pictures etc. - basic familiarisation."

Ten parents, five from each school, said that they believed that by reading to their child they would instil a desire in the child to read for him/her self. For example:

> "The child can see that you have an interest by reading to them and then they attempt to do the same."

> "Reading stories encourages the child to enter into a world of magic & imagination and if done repeatedly encourages the child to want to do it for themselves."

Six parents, four from School A and two from School B, said that they believed that reading to their child helped the child to develop a love of reading, that is, reading for pleasure. For example:

> "Role model. Pleasure in hearing stories, indicating pleasure to be had at reading."

> "Gets them familiar with books & to enjoy it."

Four parents, three from School B and one from School A, said that reading to their child helped the child to understand the world:

"Broadens their knowledge."

"Reveals to the child the wide & wonderful world of entertainment,

knowledge & imagination that is always on tap."

One parent from School B said that reading to her child helped him to be able to

understand and repeat the story; *"because he's able to think and tell the story."*

One parent from School A said that reading helped to develop the child's imagination,

"Children develop their imaginations where they can relate to the

content of the book, becoming more involved."

Thirteen parents did not answer this question (see Table 4.42).

Table 4.42
Why parents believed that reading to child helped the child learn to read

Reason	Total	School A	School B
Interest in print	10	9	1
Desire to read	10	5	5
Pleasure	6	4	2
General knowledge	4	1	3
Comprehension	1	0	1
Imagination	1	1	0
No answer	13	3	10
Respondents	45	23	22

Question 32. *What do you hope that your child will get out of his or her preprimary*

education?

Sixteen parents replied that they hoped their child would get a broad education.

They replied that they hoped their child would develop a variety of skills in the social,

cognitive and physical areas as well as having fun and developing a positive attitude

towards school and learning. Thirteen parents from School A and three parents from

School B gave answers that could be classified as holistic such as:

"An enjoyable experience of learning. A holistic approach to

EDUCATION.

Developing my child socially emotionally academically individually

(being realistic for the teacher though)."

Seven parents, four from School A and three from School B, replied that they wanted their child to have a year of what I have categorised as "education with enjoyment". These parents said that they wanted their child to develop a love of learning and for school. Some examples of answers I placed in this category are:

"At least I hope he is given a broad understanding of different things.

Especially reading and writing in a fun way but still be educational."

"A love & enjoyment of learning. Preprimary is a very important year as it

forms the basis for the rest of their schooling life."

Four parents, all from School B, said they hoped that their child would gain knowledge from preprimary. Some examples of these answers follow:

" We hope that he will lean (sic) so he can be something when he

grows up."

"Learning ability."

Four parents, two from each school, said they hoped their child would gain literacy skills from preprimary. For example:

"To be able to be close to reading and writing and be disciplined

enough to sit in a classroom without too many distractions."

Five parents, three from School A and two from School B, said they hoped their child would gain socialisation or social skills from preprimary. For example:

"A lovely social time."

"A year of fun with friends."

Three parents. One from School A and two from School B said they hoped that

preprimary would prepare their child for school. For example:

"To help her cope when she starts primary school."

One parent from School B hoped that his child would *"do his best"* and one parent

from School A hoped that his child would develop *"Sensibility & responsibility."*

Six parents did not answer this question. (See Table 4.43 for a summary.)

Table 4.43
Outcomes Parents Expect of Preprimary Education

Desired outcomes of Preprimary	Total	School A	School B
Holistic	16	13	3
Education with enjoyment	7		3
Knowledge	4	0	4
Reading & writing	4	2	2
Socialisation	5	3	2
Preparation for school	3	1	2
To do his/her best	1	0	1
Sensibility and responsibility	1	1	0
No answer	6	0	6
Respondents	47	24	23

Question 33. *What level of education do you hope your child will eventually*

achieve?

One parent from School A said she would like her child to achieve a postgraduate

degree. Twenty-one parents, 17 from School A and four from School B, said that they

hoped that their child would obtain a university degree. Nine parents, two from

School A and seven from School B, said they hoped that their child would achieve an

education level of Year 12. One parent from School B hoped that his/her child would

reach Year 11 and one parent from School B hoped that his/her child would reach

Year 10. Seven parents, one from School A and six from School B, said that they

hoped that their child would achieve his/her best. Two parents, one from each school

hoped that their child would achieve his/her ambition. One parent from School A said

that she hoped that her child would achieve whatever level of education would enable

him to get a job (see Table 4.44).

Table 4.44
Parents' Expectations of Child's Eventual Level of Education

Expectations	Total	School A	School B
Postgraduate	1	1	0
University	21	17	4
Year 12	9	2	7
Year 11	1	0	1
Year 10	1	0	1
His/her best	7	1	6
His/her ambition	2	1	1
Enough to get job	1	1	0
Respondents	43	23	20

4.2 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

4.2.1 Demographic information

The questionnaires were mainly completed by mothers. There was a wide range of

education levels amongst parents; from below Year 10 to postgraduate university

degrees. As Heath (1983) has shown, the education level of parents may influence the

type of literacy activities in the home, thus advantaging some children and

disadvantaging others once they enter school. Reid (1998) claimed that a child's

school achievement level is predetermined by economic and cultural advantage.

4.2.2 Joint Book Reading

Parents reported that nearly all of the children (77.5%) in the study were read to at least three times a week. The frequency of parent-preschooler reading has been shown to be related to later literacy development by Bus, Ijzendoorn and Pellegrini (1995), Spreadbury (1994) and Wells (1986).

In the present study, the most likely person to be reading to the child was their mother. The books which were read were mostly storybooks and were either chosen by the child or the mother. Many parents reported that they frequently discussed the book with their child before, during and/or after reading. This practice provides opportunity for verbal interaction between the parent and the child which Hess and Holloway (1984) cite as a factor which may influence reading development.

Approximately half of the children in the study were reported to borrow books from a library on a fortnightly or monthly basis. There was a range of sources for books read to the children; supermarkets, libraries, gifts and their own collections. The availability of reading materials in the home was another factor identified by Hess and Holloway (1984) as being involved in children's reading development.

Parents reported that the children in the study often asked for a book to be re-read and that they complied with this request about half the time. Reading to the child every day and the repeated reading of the same book may help children to develop grammatical awareness which has been shown to be important in the development of early literacy (Adams, 1990; Tunmer, Herriman and Nesdale, 1988).

Many (35 of 44) children were reported to memorise the books read to them about half the time. By memorising text, a child may be able to make a connection between

the spoken word and the printed word (Holdaway, 1979), in other words, that print has meaning. This is one of the concepts of print which Weinberger (1997) claims children need to understand in order to learn to read.

The children's favourite books were said to be mainly classics (such as *Peter Pan*) and storybooks. By repeatedly reading a favourite book, children become familiar with the language of books and the concepts of print. Familiarity with print and the language of books has been shown by Donaldson (1986) and Weinberger (1996) to be important in learning to read.

4.2.3 Participation in Daily Routines

Garton and Pratt (1990) have suggested that children may acquire language through continuous interaction with parents or significant others in everyday situations. Parents in the current study identified 16 different literacy-related activities that their children were engaged in on a regular basis in their homes. The parents reported that there was a wide range of literacy-related routines occurring in their homes which supports the results of the study by Breen et al (1994) which found that a large variety of literacy-related practices were being carried out in a range of homes. As will be discussed later, the results of this study, similarly to those of Breen et al (1994), found that parents did not define the literacy environment of their homes solely in terms of books, but included activities such as shopping, household chores, banking, religious practices, computer and television. So it seems that the children in these homes were exposed to a variety of activities which may have contributed to the development of their literacy knowledge (Weinberger, 1996).

4.2.4 Classes

The children in the study attended a range of classes other than preprimary. The

children most likely to attend classes were those attending school in the middle class area. They attended sport, music, dance and church classes out of school hours. Such classes may well help to develop listening skills and familiarise children with "school behaviour", for example, following routines and instructions as a group. By sending their child to classes other than preprimary parents would appear to be displaying an interest in developing the child's skills in a variety of areas. Some of these, such as the 5-year-old extension class, were related to school literacy, activities and behaviours.

Attendance at classes and activities other than preprimary could possibly be related to finance and access. Those parents who were able to afford to pay for classes, or who had private transport would perhaps be more likely to send their child. There were possibly more classes and activities available to the children attending the school in the middle class area.

Other activities which over half of the parents said their child participated in were religion and social activities, sport and board or card games. The study by Breen et al (1994) found that literacy-related practices such as religious practices may contribute to literacy learning. Playing board or card games provides opportunities for verbal interaction which Hess and Holloway (1984) identified as a possible influence on reading development.

4.2.5 Environmental Print

Recognition of print in the environment was identified by Frith (1985) as an important stage in the development of word reading. Thirteen parents reported that they drew their child's attention to print in the environment and five others reported that siblings drew their child's attention to print. By pointing out print in the environment, parents and siblings were reinforcing the child's developing

understanding of print. The print given as examples by the parents in the study was often related to take away food and drinks, street signs and print that the child might see whilst travelling in the car.

4.2.6 Writing Resources

Parents reported that there was a wide range of writing and drawing materials available to children in their homes. All of the children in the study were said to have at least three types of drawing or writing resources in their home. As previously mentioned, Hess and Holloway (1984) included availability of reading and writing resources in the home as one of the areas of family functioning which may influence reading development. They found that availability of reading and writing material in the home was likely to encourage literacy-related experiences. Parents who read and write as part of their daily routine in the home are modelling literacy practices. Such literacy practices would appear to be more likely to be imitated in role play by children who had reading and writing materials available to them. Baker, Serpell and Sonnenschein (1995) identified role play reading and writing as possibly being related to early literacy development.

4.2.7 Explicit Instruction

One quarter of the parents in the study said that they were using pre-reading packages with their children. One third of the parents said that they were teaching their child to read and two thirds said that they (mainly the mother) were teaching the child the letters of the alphabet. Adams (1990) reported letter knowledge to be one of the best predictors of reading achievement, especially if combined with phonological awareness. Two thirds of the parents said that they sounded out words and played number, word and letter games with their child. Sounding out words may help to

develop phonological awareness which has been shown by Adams (1990) to be very important in learning to read and write. Rohl and Milton (1993) suggested that playing games which require whole sentence responses may help children to develop grammatical awareness and playing I Spy may help children to develop phonological awareness.

4.2.8 Computer

Nearly half (20 of 44) of the children were reported to use a computer at home at least three to four days per week for two hours or less per day. The children were said to use the computer for a range of activities: to write letters, play number games, word games, educational games and interact with drawing programs, all of which could be said to be assisting in the development of literacy-related knowledge and skills. The study by Breen et al (1994) found that literacy practices in homes are not restricted to books; there are other practices such as computer use which may also contribute to literacy learning. The children who were using a computer may have been developing their literacy knowledge by doing so. Of the children who used the computer, half were reported to be using it alone. Those parents who were accompanying their child at the computer may have been teaching them literacy-related skills such as letter recognition and the direction of print. The availability of a computer in the home could possibly be related to financial status as there were 14 children from School A who were said to be using a computer compared with six from School B.

4.2.9 Role Play Reading and Writing

Nearly all the parents (40 of 46) said that their child attempted or pretended to write. Many (34 of 46) parents said that their child attempted or pretended to read. Parents gave examples of how children role played reading and writing at home (see section

4.1.6). More than half of the parents said that they drew their child's attention to print, thus helping to familiarise them with concepts of print. The parents who took part in the survey identified a range of literacy-related activities that they said were taking place in their homes. Approximately three quarters of the parents surveyed gave examples of literacy activities in which their child saw them engaged. The model that a parent gives a child by engaging in literacy-related practices either for work, household routines or for recreation, was identified by Hess and Holloway (1984) as "value placed on literacy" which they believed may influence reading development. According to Hess and Holloway, parents demonstrate to their child that they value reading by reading themselves, either for work, as part of their daily household routine, or for pleasure.

Many of the answers given by parents indicated that their homes provided the three facets of home literacy practice which Leseman and de Jong (1998) identified as responsible for literacy development: opportunity (exposure and modelling), instruction (transmission of knowledge and skills) and cooperation between parent and child.

4.2.10 Literacy Related Activities

Approximately three quarters of the parents surveyed said that they (mainly mothers) taught their child songs, either Nursery Rhymes, children's songs or popular songs. Research by Maclean, Bradley and Bryant (1987) has demonstrated the importance of songs in terms of alliteration and rhyme in the development of phonological awareness.

4.2.11 Parental Expectations

All but one parent replied that they believed that reading to their child would help to

make her a better reader. Many parents were able to give reasons that were related to familiarisation with print, motivation to read and pleasure in reading, all of which indicated that they placed value on reading and were creating Hess and Holloway's "press for achievement".

Nearly all of the parents said that they wanted the preprimary year to cater holistically to their child's needs and development. Some parents said that they wanted their child to have fun, some wanted their child to learn (for example the alphabet) and some saw the preprimary year as important in preparing the child for school. Approximately 90% of the parents who responded to the questionnaire said that they wanted their child to achieve Year 12 or above. All parents said that they wanted their child to achieve the parent's level of education or higher. Parental expectations, or "press for achievement" was another area identified by Hess and Holloway (1984) as one which may influence reading development.

4.3 ASSESSMENT TASKS

A total of 46 children participated in the assessment tasks. The numbers of children assessed by individual tests vary because some children were absent on test days. See Table 4.45 for the overall results (minimum score, maximum score, mean and standard deviation) of the assessment tasks used to measure early literacy-related knowledge.

Table 4.45
Early Literacy Related Assessment Tasks (N = number of children tested)

Task	N	Range	Mean	S.D.
Letter Recognition	46	0 - 52	17.39	16.65
Environmental Print	46	0 - 10	6.41	2.16
Phonological Awareness	44	0 - 19	8.30	4.03
Vocabulary	46	14 - 38	28.52	4.87
Concepts of Print	45	0 - 11	5.8	3.62
Grammatical Awareness	44	0 - 9	5.86	3.25

Table 4.46
Pearson Correlation Coefficient for Assessment Tasks

	Letter Identification	Environment Print	Phonological Awareness	Vocabulary	Concepts of Print
Environmental Print	0.58**				
Phonological Awareness	0.477**	0.331*			
Vocabulary	0.479**	0.527**	0.469**		
Concepts of Print	0.713**	0.576**	0.560**	0.671**	
Grammatical Awareness	0.269	0.374*	0.294	0.582**	0.529**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)
Number of children tested = 44

Table 4.46 shows a correlation matrix for the assessment tasks. Most variables were found to be related at the 0.01 level; only two variables had no significant correlation. A significant correlation was not found between letter identification and grammatical awareness or between grammatical awareness and phonological awareness. This is different to some findings of Tunmer, Herriman and Nesdale (1988) who found significant correlations between grammatical awareness and phonological awareness. However, the present sample was smaller and the children were younger. There have not been many studies of these variables in children of this age and experience.

4.3.1 Letter Identification

The mean score for the letter recognition task was 17.4 with a maximum score of 52. Of the 46 children who attempted this task, 33 recognised more upper than lower case letters. Two children recognised more lower case letters than upper case letters, and seven children did not recognise any letters at all. Thirty-eight of the 46 children were able to identify the initial letter of their first name. For five children this was the only letter they could recognise. All but two children answered by giving the alphabet response rather than the letter sound response or a word beginning with the letter sound. One child consistently gave the letter and a word beginning with that letter, for

example, *"'v' for victory"*. There were many incorrect guesses and a few children,

when asked *"Do you know what these are?"*, referred to the letters in general as

numbers.

4.3.2 Ready to Read Word Test

Very few children were able to recognise any of the 15 words on the list. Of

the 46 children who attempted this task, only six were able to recognise any

words. The highest score was four; one child scored two and the other four

recognised one word. The words recognised were: I, not, too, car.

Because of the floor effect this test could not be included in later analyses.

4.3.3 Environmental Print

The mean score for the environmental print task was 6.41 with a possible score of 11.

One child who scored close to the mean with a score of 6 was able to name Hungry

Jack's, McDonald's, Target, Bananas in Pyjamas, and ABC. Other frequently

recognised symbols were Coca Cola and STOP (see Table 4.47).

Table 4.47
Frequency of words recognised

Word recognised	School A	School B	Total Sample
Milk	19	10	29
ABC	15	1	16
Stop	23	10	33
Exit	8	3	11
Bananas in Pyjamas	22	14	36
Coca Cola	22	21	43
Hungry Jacks	24	19	43
MacDonalds	23	20	43
Police	8	6	14
Target	9	13	22
Myer	2	1	3

Total number of children assessed = 46 (24 from School A, 23 from School B).

4.3.4 Phonological Awareness (TOPA)

Twenty-six of the 45 children tested could identify the <u>same</u> sound at the beginning of a word in at least 50% of the tasks presented to them. Ten of the 45 children tested could identify the word that started with a <u>different</u> sound in at least 50% of the tasks presented to them, suggesting that they had some phonological awareness in that they were able to identify more than half the onsets. The mean score for identifying the <u>different</u> sound was 3, which meant that most children could only identify the correct word in three out of ten tasks, all of which contained multiple choice items. This score could have been gained by chance as there was a choice of three items. The total mean score for the phonological tasks was 8.3.

4.3.5 Vocabulary (K-SEALS)

This task was scored out of 40 with a possible sub-total score of 20 for expressive skills and 20 for receptive skills. All but two of the children assessed achieved a higher score for receptive skills than for expressive skills. The mean score for this task was 28.52

4.3.6 Concepts of print

This task was scored out of 13 and the mean score was 5.8 which indicated that most of the children were familiar with some items of print in their environment. There were two children who were unable to recognise any of the symbols.

4.3.7 Grammatical Awareness

The mean score for this task was 5.8 with a possible score of ten which indicated that most children were developing an awareness of grammar. Generally, the children scored higher for the morpheme deletion task than for the word order changes task.

4.3 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF ASSESSMENT TASK RESULTS

The mean scores for the tasks listed above indicate that, as a group, the children in the study were developing literacy skills in the following areas: letter recognition, which Adams (1990) identified as one of the best predictors of reading achievement; environmental print, which is an early stage in learning to identify words (Goswami (1994); phonological awareness, which Rohl and Pratt (1996) have shown to be one of the pre-requisites in learning to read and write; vocabulary, which Snow (1998) reported to be a reliable predictor of later reading ability; concepts of print, which according to Weinberger (1997), children need in order to learn to read; and grammatical awareness, which has been shown by research studies to be important in the development of early literacy (Adams, 1990; Tunmer, Herriman and Nesdale, 1988). They were not, however, at the stage of being able to recognise words as unique visual patterns which Frith (1991) says comes with an increased familiarity with print.

The range of scores (see Table 4.45) indicates that for each task there were some children who had little or no knowledge (except in the case of vocabulary where all children knew some words). There were also some children who achieved high scores in the tasks.

As referred to in the literature review, the literacy-related knowledge which was assessed by the above tasks, has been shown by research to predict later success in learning to read. It seems, from the results of this study, that some of the children had developed a range of literacy-related skills before they entered preprimary. Some children's literacy-related skills were already well developed, whereas other children's skills were not. Those children who scored well in the assessment tasks would appear

to have already begun to develop the emergent literacy skills which will enable them to learn to read conventionally. If previous research concerning the predictors of reading success are correct, it appears that the children who scored well in the assessment tasks may be more successful in learning to read than the children who did not score well.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HOME LITERACY PRACTICES AND THE CHILDREN'S LITERACY-RELATED KNOWLEDGE

Parents' answers to the questionnaire and the results of the literacy-related assessment tasks given to the children were examined for possible relationships between home literacy practices as reported by the parents and the literacy-related skills of the children involved in the study as tested by the researcher. It should be noted that only significant relationships are reported (.05). Further, there is always the possibility of Type 1 errors when many comparisons are made, in which particular findings may be due to chance.

5.1.1 Relationships

Significant relationships were found between mother's education level and letter identification, concepts of print and vocabulary; father's education level and letter identification and concepts of print.

5.1.1.1 Mother's Education Level

A one-way ANOVA (see Table 5.1) showed a significant relationship between mother's education level and the child's letter identification score ($F(6,36) = 4.3$, $P = 0.002$), vocabulary (expressive and receptive language) score ($F(6,36) = 6.0$, $P = <0.001$) and concepts of print score ($F(6,35) = 5.3$, $P = 0.001$).

Table 5.1
Relationship between mother's education level and child's score
Values are means. Number of children in parentheses.

Mother's Ed. Level	Letter Identification	Vocabulary	Concepts of Print
Below Year 10	0.00 (1)	14.00 (1)	2.00 (1)
Year 10	13.10 (10)	28.60 (10)	3.50 (10)
Year 11	1.67 (3)	22.00 (3)	2.67 (3)
Year 12	6.38 (8)	25.87 (8)	4.63 (8)
TAFE	22.14 (7)	30.57 (7)	8.17 (6)
University Degree	27.80 (10)	31.40 (10)	8.40 (10)
Postgraduate Degree	36.75 (4)	29.75 (4)	9.00 (4)
Significance (P value of ANOVA)	0.002	<0.001	0.001

5.1.1.2 Father's Education Level

A one-way ANOVA (see Table 5.2) showed a significant relationship between father's education level and letter identification $(F(6,30) = 5.2, P = 0.001)$ and concepts of print $(F(6,29) = 13.3, P <0.001)$.

Table 5.2
Relationship between father's education level and child's score
Values are means. Number of children in parentheses.

Father's Ed. Level	Letter Identification	Concepts of Print
Below Year 10	4.20 (5)	2.6 (5)
Year 10	7.17 (6)	2.17 (6)
Year 11	17.00 (1)	8.00 (1)
Year 12	12.40 (5)	7.40 (5)
TAFE	8.00 (1)	5.00 (1)
University Degree	0.50 (2)	6.00 (2)
Postgraduate Degree	30.35 (17)	8.94 (16)
Significance (P value of ANOVA)	0.001	<0.001

5.1.1.3 Joint book reading

Questions in this category related to factors involved in reading to the young child. These included the number of people who read to the child; how often the child was read to (referred to as reading frequency); whether the topic of the book was discussed before, during or after reading; whether the child borrowed books from the library and how often; whether the child requested a favourite or particular book to be read; whether the child requested that a book be read more than once at a sitting; how often the book was read again if requested by the child and how often the child memorised the text of books. A one-way ANOVA (see Table 5.3) showed a significant relationship between reading frequency and the child's vocabulary score ($F(6,30) = 3.17$, $P = 0.013$). Reading frequency did not have a significant relationship with any other assessment tasks.

Table 5.3
Relationship between reading frequency and the child's vocabulary
Values are means. Number of children in parentheses.

	Never	1-2 days per week	3-4 days per week	5-6 days per week	Every day	P value of ANOVA
Vocabulary	23.00 (2)	27.50 (4)	26.75 (12)	27.40 (5)	30.50 (20)	0.013

5.1.1.4 Explicit instruction

Included in this section were questions related to explicit instruction in literacy in the child's home: the use of pre-reading or literacy packages; if the child was being taught to read at home; if the child was being taught the letters of the alphabet; if someone sounded out words to the child; if the child played number or letter games; if the child's attention was drawn to print in storybooks; if someone taught the child songs or rhymes and if the parent thought that reading stories to the child helped him or her to become a better reader.

T-tests performed on these results showed that teaching the child the letters of the alphabet had a significant relationship with the child's vocabulary. Vocabulary scores were significantly higher for the children who had been taught the letters of the alphabet (M= 29.6) than in the group who had not been taught them (M = 24.6), t(38) = 2.91, P = 0.006.

The task which one might expect to be affected by this home activity, identification by the child of the letters of the alphabet, was not significant. The group who had been taught the letters of the alphabet (M = 21.6) had higher scores than the group who had not been taught (M = 9.7), t(38) = 1.95, P = 0.059; see Table 5.4). Being taught the letters of the alphabet would seem to be more closely related to letter identification than to vocabulary, however a larger sample size may be necessary to show this. There was also a large range of scores for letter identification within the group of children whose parents said that they taught their child the alphabet.

Table 5.4
Relationship between teaching the child the alphabet and literacy-related assessment tasks
Values are means. Number of children in parentheses.

	Alphabet taught	Alphabet not taught	P-value of t-test
Letter Identification	21.6 (30)	9.7 (10)	0.059
Vocabulary	29.6 (30)	24.6 (10)	0.006

Scores were separated into two groups on the basis of the answer to the question "Does someone play letter or word games with your child?" (see Table 4.28). T-tests showed that playing number or letter games had a significant relationship to the child's environmental print, vocabulary and grammatical awareness (see Table 5.5). However, these results should be viewed with caution as the group which did play letter games was much larger than the group which did not.

Environmental print scores were significantly greater at the .05 level in the group who did play games (M = 6.2) than in the group who did not play games (M = 4.6), t(42) = 2.04, P = 0.048. Vocabulary scores were significantly greater in the group who did play games (M = 29.4) than in the group who did not play games (M = 24.9), t(42) = 2.61, P = 0.012. Grammatical awareness scores were significantly greater in the group who did play games (M = 6.5) than in the group who did not play games (M = 3.6), t(39) = 2.31, P = 0.027.

Table 5.5
Relationship between playing number or letter games and literacy-related assessment tasks
Values are means. Number of children in parentheses.

	Played games	Did not play games	P-value of t-test
Environmental Print	6.2 (35)	4.6 (9)	0.048
Vocabulary	29.4 (35)	24.9 (9)	0.012
Grammatical Awareness	6.5 (34)	3.6 (7)	0.027

5.1.1.5 Computer use

Scores were separated into two groups on the basis of the answer to the question "Does your child use the computer?" (see Table 4.30). T-tests showed that computer use had a significant relationship to the child's score for environmental print, concepts of print, vocabulary and letter identification (see table 5.6). Letter identification scores were significantly greater in the group who used computer (M = 23.4) than in the group who did not (M = 12.8), t(41) = 2.22, P = 0.032. Environmental print scores were significantly greater in the group who used the computer (M = 6.9) than in the group who did not (M = 5.0), t(41) = 3.07, P = 0.004. Vocabulary scores were significantly greater in the group who used the computer (M = 30.3) than in the group who did not (M = 26.8), t(41) = 0.55, P = 0.017. Concepts of

print scores were significantly greater in the group who did use the computer (M = 7.4) than in the group who did not use the computer (M = 4.7), t(40) = 2.74, P = 0.009. There were too few children who used a computer at home to test for the significance of other computer-related variables, for example, how many hours the child used the computer.

Table 5.6
Relationship between computer use and literacy-related skills
Values are means (Number of students).

	Used computer	Did not use computer	P-value of t-test
Letter identification	23.4 (19)	12.8 (24)	0.032
Environmental print	6.9 (19)	5.0 (24)	0.009
Vocabulary	30.3 (19)	26.8 (24)	0.017
Concepts of print	7.4 (18)	4.7 (24)	0.009

5.2 DISCUSSION OF RELATIONSHIPS FOUND BETWEEN HOME PRACTICES AND CHILDREN'S LITERACY-RELATED KNOWLEDGE

It is important to bear in mind that the results referred to above are correlational and cannot be used to ascribe cause. In the discussion that follows, these results will be discussed in terms of findings from the literature and some possible relationships will be tentatively explored.

The results of this study seem to support some previous research which has looked at the relationship between parental input and children's language acquisition and literacy development. As the results of Well's (1986) research showed, children who were read to at home demonstrated a better reading comprehension than those children who were not read to at home. The children in the current study who were read to frequently scored higher on the vocabulary task than the children who were read to less frequently. Bus, Ijzendoorn and Pellegrini (1995) also found that book

reading assisted language development.

Teaching children the letters of the alphabet was also found in the current study to have a significant relationship to the children's vocabulary. Leseman and de Jong (1998) found that instruction was one of the facets of home literacy which was related to the language development and achievement levels of the 7-year-old children in their study.

Results from the current study also indicated that playing number or letter games may be significantly related to children's literacy development, specifically environmental print, vocabulary and grammatical awareness. It is suggested that a child whose attention is drawn to print by playing such games may have an increased awareness and understanding of print. Rohl and Milton (1993) have suggested that the development of grammatical awareness may be assisted by games which include I Spy for phonological awareness and sentence transformations and extensions which encourage children to focus on the structure of language.

It is possible that children may be learning about print and vocabulary by using a computer as the results of this study showed a significant relationship between computer use and environmental print, concepts of print, vocabulary and letter identification. Nevertheless, it is possible that other variables in the homes of computer owning families, such as parent education level may be responsible for the relationship with early literacy-related knowledge.

5.3 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO SCHOOLS

In the literature review it was suggested that children from different socio-economic contexts may perform differently in school literacy-related tasks according to their

"cultural capital" (Heath, 1983). As the two schools in the study were in two different socio-economic areas and, as some differences between the parent's questionnaire responses and the children's test scores across the two schools were noted, it was decided to examine the results for each school separately.

5.3.1 Questionnaire results

Answers to the questionnaire indicated that there were many differences between the two schools. The differences were particularly noticeable for the education levels of fathers (see Table 4.2); the education levels of mothers (see Table 4.1); the frequency of joint book reading (see Table 4.5); the number of classes attended outside preprimary (see Table 4.18); computer use (see Table 4.30); frequency of library borrowing (see Table 4.11); and the parents' expectations of their child's eventual level of education (see Table 4.44).

5.3.1.1 Fathers' education level

Answers to the questionnaire showed that 68% of the fathers of children at School A had postgraduate university degrees. A total of 88% of the fathers at School A had an education level of Year 12 or above. Answers to the questionnaire showed that none of the fathers from School B had a university degree, 4.2% had attended TAFE, 8.3% had completed Year 12, 25% had completed Year 10 and 25% had left school before Year 10.

5.3.1.2 Mother's education level

Answers to the questionnaire showed that 40% of the mothers of children attending School A had university degrees and 72% had completed Year 12 or above. Mothers from School B answered that 50% had left school at the end of Year 10 or before, 8.3% had completed Year 11 and 20% had completed Year 12. Two mothers (8.3%)

from School B had a TAFE qualification and none had a university degree.

5.3.1.3 Frequency of joint book reading

All of the parents of children at School A reported that their child was read to at least three to four days per week; 64% said their child was read to every day. Sixteen percent of the parents of children at School B answered that their child was read to every day; two parents (8.3%) said their child was never read to and four parents (16.7%) said their child was read to one or two days per week.

5.3.1.4 Classes attended outside preprimary

Answers to the questionnaire indicated that a total of 19 children, 16 (67.7%) from School A and three (14.3%) from School B, attended classes outside preprimary.

5.3.1.5 Computer use

Fifty-six percent of parents of children at School A said that their child used a computer at home. Twenty-five percent of parents of children at School B said that their child used a computer at home.

5.3.1.6 Library borrowing

Parents of children at School A said that 79.2% of them borrowed books from a library and 25% of parents of children from School B said that they borrowed books from a library.

5.3.1.7 Child's eventual level of education

Of the 23 parents of children from School A who answered the question regarding their expectations for their child's eventual level of education, 82.6% replied that they hoped their child would obtain a university degree. Of the 20 parents of children from School B who answered this question, 55% said that they hoped their child would

obtain a university degree.

5.3.2 Assessment tasks results

As differences between the two schools were noted in the children's scores on the assessment tasks, these differences were investigated by means of t-tests. The children from School A scored significantly higher as a group than the children from School B in every assessment task. Table 5.7 shows the mean scores, standard deviations and significance for both schools for the assessment tasks.

Table 5.7
Mean scores, standard deviations and significance (2-tailed t-test) for both schools

	School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T-test P-value
Letter	A	24	26.67	16.14	
recognition	B	22	7.27	10.15	<0.001
Environmental	A	24	7.29	1.68	
print	B	22	5.45	2.24	0.003
Phonological	A	23	10.17	3.37	
awareness	B	21	6.24	3.73	0.001
Vocabulary	A	24	30.71	3.05	
K-SEALS	B	22	26.14	5.42	0.001
Concepts	A	23	8.52	1.93	
About Print	B	22	2.95	2.63	<0.001
Grammatical	A	23	7.09	3.41	
Awareness	B	21	4.45	2.44	<0.001

T-tests performed on the results of the assessment tasks for both schools showed that there was a significant difference between the mean scores for the two schools for all the assessment tasks when the level of significance was set at 99%, that is, a P value of less than 0.01. As was discussed on page 98, there is always a possibility of chance results when many statistical comparisons are made. However, in all but one comparison the P value was 0.001 or less (in the other case it was 0.003) showing a high level of significance. This, along with the fact that all scores for School A were larger than those for School B suggest that these were not chance results.

5.3.2.1 Letter Identification

The range of scores for School A in the letter identification task was 0 – 52

(maximum possible score 52) with a mean of 26.67.The range for School B

was 0 – 38 with a mean of 7.27. Results of a t-test showed the differences between

the mean scores to be significant (t(44) = -4.83, P < 0.01).

Ann, from School A, scored 25 on this task. She was able to correctly name with an

alphabet response A, F, K, W, B, H, J, Y, L, M, D, N, S, X, G, R, V, T, a, w, b, s, x, r,

and v. Joe, from school B, scored 8 and was able to name A, J, K, M, O, S, X and j

with an alphabet response.

5.3.2.2 Environmental Print

The mean score for School A for environmental print was 7.29 (possible score of 11)

with a range of scores from 3 – 9. The mean score for School B was 5.45 with a range

of scores from 0 – 8. A t-test showed the differences between the mean scores to be

significant (t(44) = -2.78, P < 0.01).

Neil, from School A, had a score of 6. He correctly identified STOP, Bananas in

Pyjamas, MacDonalds, Police, "Coke" for Coca Cola and Hungry Jack's. Cam, from

School B, with a score of 5, correctly identified Bananas in Pyjamas, MacDonalds,

Hungry Jack's, "Coke" for Coca Cola, and STOP.

5.3.2.3 Phonological Awareness

The mean score for the total phonological awareness task (possible score of 20) for

School A was 10.17 with a range of scores from 4 –17. For School B the mean was

6.24, with a range of 1 – 19. A t-test showed the difference between the scores for the

two schools to be significant (t(42) = -3.68, P< 0.01) for the total scores for

phonological awareness and for identification of the same sound (t(43) = -4.17) and significant at the P < 0.05 level of significance for identification of the different sound (t(42) = 0.7, P = 0.027).

Emory, from School A, scored 10 out of 20. He correctly identified eight of the 10 items with the same sound and two of the 10 items with a different sound. Jake, from School B, scored 6 out of 20. He correctly identified three of the 10 items with the same initial sound and two out of ten of the words beginning with a different sound.

5.3.2.4 Vocabulary (K-SEALS)

The mean score for the K-SEALS receptive and expressive vocabulary (possible score of 40) for School A was 30.71 with a range of 25 – 38. The mean score for School B was 26.14 with a range of 14 – 32. A t-test showed the difference between the mean scores for the two schools to be significant (t(44) = 0.03, P < 0 .01) for the total vocabulary task.

Alison, from School A, scored a total of 30. She correctly responded to 14 of the 20 expressive language skills items. She was able to name pictures of the following: spoon, cat, watching TV, eating, book, running, umbrella, lamp, painting, milk, door, bench, washing machine. Instead of baby she said "crawling, a person crawling". When given a description without a picture she was unable to give an answer for: star, moon, escalator, globe, compass and hinge. Of the 20 receptive skills items, Alison was able to point correctly to 16. She could show bird, elephant, pencil, toys, flying, washing, crayons, cart, floating, tissues, bandage, sharing, helping, glasses, arguing, and directing. She said "I don't know" in response to discussing, pointed to First Aid for experimenting, spatula for tap and floating for exercising.

Kaye, from School B, scored 26. She was correctly able to name spoon, cat, TV, eating, book, umbrella, milk, door, washer and star. She answered "crawling boy" for baby, "cleaning" for painting, "chair" then "bed" for bench, "car" for moon, "steps" then "skier" for escalator, "wheel" for globe, "clock" for compass and "square" for hinge. For the receptive tasks she was able to show bird, elephant, pencil, toys, flying, washing, cart, floating, tissues, bandage, sharing, helping, glasses, arguing, and tap. She pointed to soap for crayons, floating for exercising, carpenter for directing, cashier for discussing and doctor for experimenting.

5.3.2.5 Concepts of print

The mean score for School A in the concepts of print task was 8.52 (possible score of 13) with a range of 5 – 12. The mean score for School B was 2.95 with a range of scores from 0 – 10. A t-test showed that the difference between the means for the two schools was significant (t(43) = 0.31, P < 0.01).

Andrew, from School A, scored eight for this task. He was able to identify the front of the book, indicated that print contains a message, knew where to start, which way to go, was able to match word by word, understood first and last concepts, inversion of the picture and responded to inverted print. He did not know the meaning of a question mark or a full stop, nor could he find capital M, H or T. Amy, from School B, scored 3 and was able to point to the front of the book, knew that print contains a message and was able to indicate which way to go (ie the directionality of print).

5.3.2.6 Grammatical Awareness

The mean score for School A for grammatical awareness was 7.09 (possible score of 10) with a range of 0 – 10. The mean score for School B was 4.45 with a range of 0 –

8. A t-test showed the difference between the mean scores for the two schools to be significant for word order changes (t(42) = -4.75, P < 0.01) and for morpheme deletions (t(42) = -759, P < 0.01).

Jim, from School A, scored 5 out of 5 for morpheme deletions and 2 out of 5 for word order changes. For the morpheme deletion tasks he was able to correctly repeat the whole sentence for each of the five items. For the word order changes tasks he answered *"Looking after the horse"* instead of <u>Mary patted the horse</u>, *"Mary has a blonde hair"* instead of <u>Mary has blonde hair</u>, and *"John has a horse"* instead of <u>John is watching the horses</u>. Sophie, from School B, scored a total of 4 out of 10 for the grammatical awareness tasks. She corrected three of the five morpheme deletion tasks. She did not correct <u>John eat his apple</u> and said *"I don't know"*. For <u>It is John horse</u> she answered *"John's horse"*, for <u>The horse has tail</u> she answered *"got a tail"*, which were both accepted as correct. For <u>The cow has two horn</u> she answered *" Cow's got two horns"* which was also accepted. Sophie found the morpheme deletions more difficult and only answered one question correctly. She said *"Mary patting the horse"* for <u>Patted Mary the horse</u>, *"has coloured hair"* for <u>Mary blonde hair has</u> and *"Pig's lying down"* for <u>Pig the went to sleep</u>. She did not give an answer for <u>John watching is the horses</u> but was able to correct <u>John has a shirt red</u> with *"got a red shirt"*. As mentioned in the Method, 3.2.2.7, a point was scored for either correctly repeating the whole sentence or for correcting the appropriate words. Verbal working memory was involved in this task but the purpose of the task was only to identify the grammatical error.

5.4 DISCUSSION OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO SCHOOLS

Parent responses to the questionnaire

From the results of this study, it is apparent that the parents of the children entering the two preprimary centres were able to identify a wide variety of literacy-related activities occurring in their homes. The education levels of both mothers and fathers were far higher in School A than in School B. Whilst this is most likely a reflection of the difference in socio-economic status between the two groups of parents, it is also probable that the remaining five differences were also related to this same socio-economic difference. Hence, frequency of joint book reading, classes outside preprimary, computer use, library borrowing and the parents' expectations for their children's eventual level of education may all be seen to be related to the parent's education level, which in turn is most likely to be socio-economically determined. It is of interest to note that these same seven differences were those which were identified in section 5.1 of this chapter as being related to children's early literacy knowledge (see below). It may also be that children at School A had higher levels of intelligence which was not controlled for in this study. It will be noted that as a group, the children from School A scored higher than the children from School B in the K-SEALS test for vocabulary which has been used by researchers to measure one facet of verbal intelligence.

Assessment tasks

As shown in table 5.7, significant differences (P values of less than 0.01 in t-tests) were found between the schools for the mean scores for each of the assessment tasks. The largest differences were for letter recognition, concepts of print and grammatical awareness. If, as discussed in the literature review (section 2.4), each of these factors is an important predictor of early reading success, the children in School A may

therefore be seen as having an advantage. It should be noted that the six assessment tasks were chosen to assess an individual child's level of literacy knowledge in areas which have been shown to predict success in reading. As the children from School A performed significantly better in each assessment task, we can infer that there was most likely a relationship between the home variables of this group and the literacy assessments used. In section 5.1 (discussed in section 5.2) a relationship between specific home variables and children's literacy-related knowledge was noted. These same specific home variables identified in section 5.1 (mother's education level, father's education level, frequency of joint book reading, explicit instruction and computer use) were variables which were observed to be different between the two schools in the parents' responses to the questionnaire. Hence there appears to be a relationship between these specific home variables and the child's literacy-related knowledge. These variables include parents' levels of education and specific home literacy practices.

In summary, the parents from School A, who had higher educational levels, said that they were providing more of those activities which have been shown in this study to have a relationship to the children's literacy knowledge. In section 2.2.3 of the literature review the concept of "linguistic and social capital" (Cairney, 1994) was noted. Research by Breen et al (1994) has found a wealth of literacy practices within homes across a range of communities. The same research also found that within socio-economic groups there were families who engaged in few school-like behaviours and others whose home culture was similar to that of the school. Parents with higher educational levels are more likely to use in their homes the social, cultural and linguistic practices of schools and thus give their children the linguistic and social capital described by Cairney (1994). Therefore, parents with higher educational levels

are likely to be providing their children with some school-like practices at home. As previously pointed out in this discussion, higher education levels are generally linked to socio-economic status. This supports the findings of a recent survey conducted in Australia, the National School English Literacy Survey (1997), which found that differences in literacy achievement were related to socio-economic status.

CHAPTER SIX

GENERAL DISCUSSION

6.1 AIMS OF THE STUDY

This study was designed to answer the following research questions:

(a) **What do the parents of children attending two WA preprimary centres identify as the literacy-related practices in which their children are engaged at home?**

(b) **What is the literacy-related knowledge of children attending two WA preprimary centres?**

(c) **Is there a significant relationship between these literacy practices in the home and the children's early literacy-related knowledge?**

A fourth question was added later, as during data analysis, it was observed that there were noticeable differences between the literacy related knowledge of the two groups of children. This fourth question was:

(d) **Are there differences in the home literacy practices and the literacy-related knowledge of the children at the two centres?**

One of the aims of this research was to obtain data from the parents of children entering two WA preprimary centres about their child's literacy knowledge and the literacy-related practices in which the child and family were regularly engaged at home. The questionnaire was personally handed to a parent of each child and parents were asked to respond to the questions as honestly as possible. There was a very good response rate of 94% to the questionnaire, with most respondents attempting to

answer most questions.

The second aim of this research was to assess the literacy related knowledge of the children beginning their education in two WA preprimary centres. The tasks used to assess the children's knowledge were chosen with reference to previous research in order to collect relevant information at a level appropriate for the age of the children. Much previous research had involved children who had already completed at least one year of school. This study aimed to assess the knowledge the children had when they entered pre-primary, so it was important to carry out the assessments as soon in the year as possible and as consistently as possible for both groups. Great care was taken to test the two groups of children under the same conditions and with the same procedures.

The third aim was to identify any significant relationships between home literacy-related practices and the assessment of the children's early literacy knowledge. T-tests were used to test for significant differences between two related samples, such as the letter identification scores of the children who were taught the letters of the alphabet and the letter identification scores of the children who were not taught the letters of the alphabet. Analysis of variance was used to test for relationships between the parents' answers to the questionnaire and the children's literacy-related skills as assessed by the researcher.

The fourth aim, which was added as data were analysed, was to look at the differences between the results for the two schools. Two-tailed t-tests were used to compare the mean scores for the assessment tasks for the two schools. Parents' responses to the questionnaire were divided into school groups and compared (see Tables 4.1 to 4.44).

No statistical analyses were carried out on these data as such complex analysis would have extended the scope of the project well beyond that which was initially planned.

6.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are some limitations to this study. One of the major limitations is the way in which the information was gathered. A questionnaire is limited in that it relies upon the accuracy of the answers as given by the respondents. There was no observation of actual home literacy practices, for example, counting of books or attempts to estimate the amount of time spent on shared book reading, which are other ways that home literacy practices have been measured (see Leseman and de Jong, 1998). It is possible that in some cases parents may have given the answer that they thought they should have given, that is, socially desirable answers, rather than the answer which best described what really happened in their home. It may also have been that where examples were given in order to clarify a question, parents used only the given examples to respond to the question. This may have resulted in a decrease in the variety of possible responses. However, there was a wide range of responses from both schools.

Another limitation is that the assessment tasks performed on the children may not have been developmentally appropriate for all of the children in the survey. Very few of the children were able to recognise any of the words in Clay's Ready to Read word recognition task so the results from this observation were not used in analyses. Further, as the children had only just begun their preprimary education, they may not have been familiar with the question-response format of the assessments, nor with some of the language forms used. Nevertheless, they appeared to enjoy the one to one attention from the teacher and were keen to participate in the assessment sessions.

It was difficult to assess the phonological awareness skills of the children, especially the child's ability to identify the 'different' sound at the beginning of the word. In some cases the task may have been too difficult for the child as it was carried out before phonological awareness and reading instruction which usually begins a year later. Leseman and de Jong (1998) did not include phonological awareness in their assessments for this reason. However, Maclean, Bradley and Bryant (1987) in their study showed that phonological awareness can begin to develop at 3 years of age and the children's ability to identify onsets was, as a group, above chance level.. There was also some concern about the children's ability to do the word order changes.

In this study, it was not possible to measure reading achievement, or success in learning to read and write; it was only possible to measure those skills considered to be predictors of later reading success. Further studies would need to be carried out to discover whether those children who scored well on the assessment tasks became successful readers.

Results of this study need to be interpreted with care as the size of the sample was relatively small. Also I.Q. was not included as a control variable.

Finally, the study used a large number of t-tests which may lead to Type 1 errors. As explained by Minium (1978), if one t-test is done and significance is set at the 95% level (p<.05) then there is a 1 in 20 chance of a significant finding being due to chance. He states: "for each taken individually, the probability of a type 1 error is .05 but taken as a group, the probability that at least one from among the several will prove to be a false positive is greater than .05 and continues rising as more tests are made" (p 277). Further research will need to be done to confirm the results of this study.

6.3 GENERAL DISCUSSION

6.3.1 Home literacy practices

The questionnaire was designed to answer the research question:

What do the parents of children attending two WA preprimary

centres identify as the literacy-related practices in which their

children are engaged at home?

Responses to the questionnaire provided much information about a variety of

literacy-related practices as identified by the parents of the children attending the two

preprimary classes. A summary follows.

Answers to the questionnaire showed that parents believed that children entering

preprimary had a broad base of literacy-related experiences. Most of the literacy-

related experiences described by parents who completed the questionnaire were

related to joint book reading. However, the parents involved did not define literacy

exclusively in terms of paper-based texts, as home computers were reported to be

used for literacy related activities by approximately half of the preprimary children in

the study. Many parents reported that they were involved in teaching their child the

letters of the alphabet and how to read and write.

This would seem to indicate that these parents saw themselves as having an important

role to play in their child's education, even before the child began formal schooling.

Mothers were the people most likely to be involved in the child's early literacy

experiences, but the results of the questionnaire also showed that other family

members were often involved, for example, by reading to the child and exposing the

child to environmental print.

The results of the questionnaire would seem to support the results of research by

Breen et al (1994) which found a wide range of literacy practices within the homes of

families from both high and low socio-economic groups as the parents in the current

study reported a variety of literacy-related practices occurring within their homes.

6.3.2 Literacy-related knowledge of the children

The assessment tasks were used to answer the question:

What is the literacy-related knowledge of children attending two

WA preprimary centres?

From the results of the assessment tasks, it would appear that an "average" child

entering one of these two preprimary centres would be able to recognise and name

some upper case letters of the alphabet and possibly a few lower case letters, would

not be able to recognise printed words on a page, but would give meaning to some

signs and symbols in the environment. She might be able to identify some similarities

and differences in initial sounds of words, but not very reliably. She would have some

knowledge of some concepts of print, such as being able to distinguish words from

pictures and that print contains a message. She would have some grammatical

awareness but would still find it difficult to hear and correct mistakes in word order

and grammar. The "average " child would be able to name pictures of some common

items such as 'spoon' and 'cat' and activities such as 'running' and 'crawling' but would

find it more difficult to give a name to items which were verbally described. Her

receptive language would enable her to show 'exercising' and 'floating' but not

more complex and less familiar tasks such as 'experimenting' and 'discussing'.

The results of the assessment tasks showed that there was a wide range of literacy-

related knowledge in the group of children in the study. Some children displayed very

little knowledge about concepts of print, phonological awareness and grammatical awareness, whereas some children were able to name nearly all the letters of the alphabet and had well developed grammatical and phonological awareness. There was also a wide range of literacy-related knowledge within each school group.

This supports the findings of the 100 Children project (Hill et al, 1998) which found that in terms of literacy-related knowledge learnt from literacy practices within the home there is no "stereotypical" child, but rather a wide range of practices and abilities even within social and economic groups (see also previous reference to Breen et al (1994) in section 6.3.1).

6.3.3 Literacy relationships

Data from the questionnaire and the assessment tasks was examined to answer the question:

Is there a significant relationship between the literacy practices in the home and the children's early literacy-related knowledge?

In this study only some literacy-related practices were found to have a significant relationship with the children's literacy-related knowledge. The practices which were found to have significant relationships with the children's literacy-related knowledge were:

frequency of joint book reading;

teaching the child the letters of the alphabet;

playing word and letter games;

computer use.

These four home literacy practices were found to have a significant relationship to six

of the seven tasks which were used in this study to assess the children's literacy-related knowledge.

Significant correlations were found between one of these home literacy practices, that is frequency of joint book reading, and three aspects of early literacy-related knowledge: recognition of the letters of the alphabet, phonological awareness which involved being able to identify words beginning with the same sound and grammatical awareness which involved being able to correct word order changes in grammatically incorrect sentences. All of these factors have been shown by previous research to be related to success in learning to read (Adams, 1990). These results also support research by Bus, Ijzendoorn and Pellegrini (1995), which found that parents reading to preschoolers assists the child's language and literacy development.

Another home literacy factor which was found to have a significant relationship to the children's literacy-related knowledge was explicit instruction in teaching children the letters of the alphabet which has been shown by Adams (1990) to be a predictor of reading achievement. This was found to be significantly related to the child's vocabulary score as it seems likely that the child would need to have an adequately developed vocabulary before being taught the alphabet. Teaching the child the letters of the alphabet approached significance in relation to the child's letter identification skills.

The results of this study indicate that playing games involving letters or words, such as I Spy, may be significantly related to the child's knowledge of environmental print, vocabulary and grammatical awareness. This supports the work of Rohl and Milton (1993) which suggested that playing games that require whole sentence responses may help children to develop grammatical awareness. Using a computer was also

found to be significantly related to knowledge of environmental print and vocabulary, as well as concepts of print and letter identification.

It is possible that some of the home literacy practices which parents reported that they were participating in may have influenced their children's literacy-related knowledge. However, it seems that parents would need to be doing a variety of things in order to assist the development of the range of skills which previous research has shown to be related to success in learning to read.

Leseman and de Jong (1998) found that home literacy is multifaceted, involving opportunity, instruction and cooperation. These three facets may be relevant to the results of the current study. Parents who were reading to their children, playing games, teaching the letters of the alphabet and who owned a computer, were providing opportunity and instruction. It would seem that there is an element of cooperation in shared book reading, playing games, and teaching the letters of the alphabet.

Leseman and de Jong (1998) found that home literacy could not be separated from the context of the home, that is, the social and cultural context constituted by the parent's education, work, social networks and wider cultural and ethnic communities. The current study also found that there was a significant relationship between parents' education levels and some aspects of the children's literacy development. Mother's education level was found to have a significant effect on the child's letter identification, vocabulary and concepts of print scores. Father's education level was found to have a significant effect on the child's letter identification and concepts of print scores. It may be that parents with high levels of education place greater value on literacy. Hess and Holloway (1984) suggested that the value placed by parents on

literacy influenced the child's reading development. It may also be a reflection of the "cultural capital" identified by Cairney (1994).

6.3.4 School differences

The data were examined for any differences in results between the centres which were located at different schools in order to answer the question:

Are there any differences in the literacy-related practices and knowledge of the children at the two centres?

Observation of the results of the questionnaire indicated that there appeared to be differences between the responses that the parents from the two schools gave to several questions. These questions were related to the level of parents' education, the frequency of joint book reading, the number of classes (other than preprimary) attended by the children, computer use and expectations of the child's eventual level of education.

The level of parent education was strikingly different in the two schools. There were 19 fathers with university degrees (17 postgraduate) at School A and none at School B. Mothers at School A were also much more highly educated than the mothers at School B.

Sixteen parents from School A said that they read to their child every day compared with six parents from School B. Nineteen parents from School A said that they borrowed library books for their preschooler, whereas only five parents from School B said that they borrowed library books. Parents from School A said that they were more likely to access books from bookshops and libraries whilst parents from School B said that their main source of books was supermarkets and department stores. Both

the frequency with which parents borrowed library books and their ability to purchase books could possibly have been related to finance and accessibility of libraries and book stores.

Classes attended outside preprimary and computer use varied considerably between the two schools and could possibly also be linked to finance and access. It is possible that they could also be linked to parents' education levels and expectations of the child's eventual level of education.

Other responses generally appeared to have been answered similarly by parents from both schools apart from expectations of the child's eventual level of education. These expectations were apparently higher for the parents from School A, although parents from both schools hoped for their child to achieve approximately their own level of education or slightly higher.

Results of the literacy-related assessment tasks for the children from the two Schools, which were subjected to statistical analysis, differed greatly in terms of letter identification, phonological awareness, concepts of print and grammatical awareness. In all assessment tasks, the children from School A scored significantly higher, as a group, than the children from School B. The standard deviation was also lower for all assessment tasks for the group of children from School A than for the group from School B. In other words, the children from School A scored at a consistently higher level and there was a smaller range of abilities in that class. Conversely, for School B, whilst the average scores were lower, there was a very wide range of achievement, which included some children with high scores. This latter point suggests that within the School B parent population there could have been some parents who were providing more school-like practices (see discussion of "social and linguistic capital"

in section 5.4) than others who were providing significantly fewer school-like practices. The greater variance in the School B group may possibly be a reflection of the diversity of literacy-related practices occurring in these homes (Breen, et al, 1994), which is not necessarily related to the parents' educational background. The possible socio-economic basis of these observations was discussed in section 5.4.

6.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS

The two groups of children were very different from each other in terms of the average level of skill as well as the range of skills within the class. These results have implications for teachers who might believe that all preprimary children should be doing the same things in terms of curriculum, for example that they should learn the letters of the alphabet in Term 3, or that teachers should teach at a whole class level.

Some children entering Year 1 have a good knowledge of letter names and sounds and are well on the way to becoming competent readers and writers. However, some children may not be ready for the same type of work.

Teachers need to look in detail at the emergent literacy skills (such as recognition of the letters of the alphabet, phonemic and grammatical awareness) of each child in the class in order to program effectively. This is not new in theory, but the skills that preprimary and Year 1 teachers now need to look at are different. Whereas, in the past, teachers assessed whether the child knew her colours, could cut and paste, write her name and follow instructions, this may not be enough if teachers are going to meet the needs and address the developmental levels of the children in their classes in the 21st century. In order to accurately identify students at educational risk, teachers

may need to use diagnostic tests to analyse a particular child's need for intervention.

As a result of the Making the Difference Policy (EDWA, 1998), government schools in Western Australia are forming SAER (Students At Educational Risk) committees to identify those children in need of early intervention at both ends of the spectrum, that is, those children who may need more time and help to develop, as well as those children who are advanced in one or more areas of development and therefore need extra input and extension to meet their needs.

Those preprimary children in full-time programs who are already writing and reading need to be extended rather than told to wait until Year 1. Early childhood teachers have always espoused the philosophy of working with the individual child at her own level and looking at individual levels of developmental progress which means recognising that children of the same age may not all be ready to tackle the same emotional, physical and cognitive challenges at the same time. The First Steps Program also embraces this ideal and the teachers who have responded appropriately to the developmental philosophy of First Steps plan to meet the needs of all the individuals in their class and look at each child's progress rather than attempt to reach benchmarks set for a particular year level or age group. The pressure is on teachers now, more than ever, to plan for individual progress and acknowledge it, instead of viewing the children in a class as a group to be kept busy and to be assessed as a whole. To be truly accountable, teachers need to assess the skills and knowledge of individual children who show signs of being 'at risk', and, by using diagnostic observation, plan to meet the needs of particular children in their class.

There are implications for those involved in curriculum planning for 4- and 5-year-olds. The syllabus cannot be "set" at a level which all children are expected to

achieve. It cannot be assumed that all children in preprimary classes will be ready to learn about <u>Letterland</u> (for example) in Term 2. Teachers need to be aware of the developing needs of the children in their class and to plan and program appropriately. This will mean working with individuals and small groups rather than the whole class, and having different expectations and individual education plans for each child.

6.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research on this topic would need to involve a much larger sample size, measured over a period of time in order to obtain results which could be used reliably to predict the literacy related knowledge of children entering preprimary. Instead of relying on a questionnaire as a means of data collection, it would be preferable to use more accurate measures of family literacy practices, for example, a diary, tape or video recording and observation. Literacy practices would also need to be measured in such a way that relationships could be made with the children's scores in the assessment tasks administered over time.

The literacy-related knowledge which was assessed would need to be relevant to the future school performance of the children involved.

Reid (1998) concluded that the issue of a home literacy curriculum is a complex one and central to the issue of school literacy learning. She argued that rather than attempting to compensate for lack of "cultural capital" and moulding home literacy experiences into a "homogenous, single set of classroom literacy practices" (p.246), teachers should be acknowledging that they can't make the children in their classrooms all the same and, rather, should be "acknowledging the potential benefits of social diversity in language and literacy rather than simply focussing on

'overcoming' diversity and difference". This is a very different view from that of the researchers who aim to develop the "transmission" style of family literacy programs which attempt to transmit the constrained literacy practices of the school to the rich and diverse literacy context of the home.

Reid does not elaborate on how the social diversity in language and literacy could be incorporated into a classroom curriculum which aims, perhaps unrealistically, to give all children equal opportunity in education and is expected, in the current political climate, to ensure that all children meet national literacy standards and benchmarks by Year 3.

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As part of my studies for my Master of Education Degree, I am looking at patterns of development in the area of children's literacy. I am particularly interested in the literacy development that takes place at home with parents, siblings and extended family (include babysitter if applicable).

I am interested in what sort of literacy activities occur in the homes of children attending preprimary and would appreciate any information you can give me about the level of interest that your child displays in language, words, books and print. I would like you to answer the questions on the basis of the last week.

Please answer the following questions honestly; I want to know what you really do, not what you would like to have time to do. Your responses will remain strictly confidential. It is not necessary to sign your name.

Please tick:

DEMOGRAPHICS

Filled out by

☐ Mother

☐ Father

☐ Other (please specify)_____

Mother's level of education

☐ below Year 10

☐ Year 10

☐ Year 11

☐ Year 12

☐ TAFE

☐ University degree (Undergraduate)

☐ Postgraduate degree

Father's level of education

☐ below year 10

☐ Year 10

☐ Year 11

☐ Year 12

☐ TAFE

☐ University degree (Undergraduate)

☐ Postgraduate degree

Has either parent or partner had any teacher training in the following areas:

☐ Early Childhood

☐ Primary

☐ Secondary

☐ Other (please specify)

☐ No teacher training

Please specify (eg mother)_____

JOINT BOOK READING

1. Who reads to your child?

   - ☐ Mother
   - ☐ Father
   - ☐ Sibling
   - ☐ Grandparent
   - ☐ Babysitter
   - ☐ Other (please specify)_____

2. How often is your child read to on average?

   - ☐ Every day
   - ☐ 5-6 days a week
   - ☐ 3-4 days a week
   - ☐ 1-2 days a week
   - ☐ Never
   - ☐ Other (please specify)_____

3. Who reads most frequently to your child?

   - ☐ Mother
   - ☐ Father
   - ☐ Sibling
   - ☐ Grandparent
   - ☐ Babysitter
   - ☐ Other (please specify)_____

   What is this person's main reason for reading to the child?_____

   _____

   _____

4. What type of books or literature are read to your child?

   - ☐ Storybooks
   - ☐ Comics
   - ☐ Poetry
   - ☐ Nursery Rhymes
   - ☐ Encyclodedia
   - ☐ Other (please specify eg. toy catalogue, Bible)_____

5. Who is primarily responsible for choosing the books which are read (eg. the child, mother)?

   _____

6. Does the reader discuss what a book could be about before, during and/or after reading it with your child?

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Always	Nearly Always	About half the time	Hardly Ever	Never

7. Does your child borrow books from a library?

☐ YES   ☐ NO

If so, how often?

☐ Once a week
☐ Once a fortnight
☐ Once a month
☐ Less than once a month
☐ Other (please specify)_____

8. What is the main source of books that are read to your child?

☐ Bookshops
☐ Library
☐ Supermarket
☐ Department store (eg. Target)
☐ Gifts
☐ Other (please specify)_____

9. How often does your child ask for a favourite or particular book to be read?

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Always	Nearly Always	About Half the Time	Not Often	Never

10. Does your child ask for a book to be read more than once at a sitting?

☐ YES   ☐ NO

If so, how often is the book read again?

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Always	Nearly Always	About Half the Time	Not Often	Never

11. How often does your child memorise the text of books?

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Always	Nearly Always	About Half the Time	Not Often	Never

12. What is your child's favourite book?_____
_____

PARTICIPATION IN DAILY ROUTINES

13. What sort of family or household routines does your child participate in which involve some sort of literacy(eg. cooking, shopping)? Please specify_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

14. Does your child participate in any classes outside preprimary? If so, which ?

_____

_____

_____

15. What other activities does your child take part in (eg. Religion, sport)?

_____

_____

_____

_____

16. Does anyone draw your child's attention to signs (eg. BP, McDonalds) and print in the environment ? Please elaborate_____

_____

_____

_____

17. What drawing and writing resources are available to your child at home?

- ☐ Pencils
- ☐ Crayons
- ☐ Textas
- ☐ Paints
- ☐ Chalk & Blackboard
- ☐ Stencils
- ☐ Colouring Books
- ☐ Other (please specify)_____

EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION

18. Does your child use any pre-reading or literacy packages?

☐ YES   ☐ NO

If so, which ones?

☐ Ladybird Books
☐ Early Learning Centre
☐ Preschool Activity Books
☐ Letterland
☐ Questron
☐ Other (please specify)_____
_____

19. Is your child being taught or has been taught to read at home?

☐ YES   ☐ NO

If so, how?_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

20. Has someone taught your child the letters of the alphabet? If so, who?_____
_____

21. Does someone sound out words to your child?

☐ YES   ☐ NO

22. Does someone play number, letter or word games with your child?

☐ YES   ☐ NO

If so, which games?

☐ UNO
☐ I Spy
☐ Snap
☐ Scrabble
☐ Boggle
☐ Other (please specify)_____

23. Does your child use a computer at home?

☐ YES   ☐ NO

If yes, how often?

☐ Everyday
☐ 5-6 days a week
☐ 3-4 days a week
☐ 1-2 days a week
☐ Other

How many hours per day on average?

☐ More than 4 hours
☐ 3 - 4 hours
☐ 2 - 3 hours
☐ 1 - 2 hours
☐ Less than one hour

24. How does your child use the computer?

☐ Write letters
☐ Play number games
☐ Play word games
☐ Play other educational games
☐ Drawing programs
☐ Other, please specify

25. Does your child use the computer alone?

☐ YES   ☐ NO

If not, who sits with your child whilst using the computer?_____

_____

How often is the child accompanied at the computer?

☐ _____ ☐ _____ ☐ _____ ☐ _____ ☐
Always   Nearly Always   About Half the Time   Not Often   Never

ROLE PLAY READING & WRITING

26. Does your child attempt to, or pretend to write at home ? If so please elaborate._____

_____

_____

_____

_____

27. Does your child attempt to, or pretend to read at home? If so, please elaborate._____

_____

_____

_____

_____

28. Does someone draw your child's attention to the print in storybooks?

☐ YES   ☐ NO

If so, who does?_____

29. What sort of literacy related activities does your child see you engaged in? Please describe

_____

_____

_____

_____

MUSIC & SINGING

30. Does someone (outside prepimary) teach your child songs or rhymes?

☐ YES   ☐ NO

If so, who?_____

_____

What sort of songs or rhymes are taught?

☐ Nursery rhymes
☐ Children's songs
☐ TV jingles
☐ Popular songs
☐ Folk songs
☐ Other (please specify)_____

_____

AND FINALLY...

31. Do you think that reading stories to your child helps him/her to become a better reader?

☐ YES   ☐ NO

Please suggest reasons for your answer._____

_____

_____

_____

_____

32. What do you hope that your child will get out of his or her preprimary education?_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

33. What level of education do you hope your child will eventually achieve?_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

From <u>BLACKMORE'S SYNTACTIC AWARENESS TASK</u>

<u>All presented with props.</u>

Morpheme deletions

(B)

Practice items: 1. John saw pig. 2. John cow is big.

Test items: 1. John eat his apple.

2. The horse is eat.

3. It is John horse.

4. The horse has tail.

5. The cow has two horn.·

6. Peter stand up.

7. The zebra is walk

8. Peter chimpanzees are black.

9. The chimpanzee has banana.

10. The zebra has four leg

Word order changes

(A)

Practice items: 1. Eats grass the sheep. 2. Cow the gives milk.

Test items: 1. Patted Mary the horse.

2. Mary blonde hair has.

3. Pig the went to sleep.

4. John has a shirt red.

5. John watching is the horses.

6. Washes Peter the horse.

7. Peter black hair has.

8. Tiger the is sitting.

9. The boy has pants blue.

10. The tiger roaring is.

Dear Principal,

I am a Masters student in Language Education at Edith Cowan University and I am investigating the literacy development of preprimary children and the home literacy-related practices of their families.

Aims of the project

The aim of this project is to observe children's literacy development and examine some literacy practices in the families of children attending a preprimary.

Requirements of the project

1. Observation of children's literacy-related knowledge.

Each child will be observed for literacy related knowledge at a time convenient to you. The observation will take approximately 20-30 minutes for each child.

2. Questionnaire and diary about Family Literacy practices

Each family will be asked to complete a questionnaire and a diary over a period of 3 days about the frequency and variety of literacy practices they take part in with their children at home.

3. Case studies

Three families will be asked to take part in a case study to build up a more detailed picture of family literacy practices. The case studies will involve classroom observations of the participants, an interview with the child's parents lasting up to 1 hour and a taped reading of a story.

Benefits of the study

The observation of the children's literacy skills will provide me with valuable information which will help me to plan appropriate learning experiences for the children.

My obligations

- I will only collect data that is pertinent to the purposes of this project.
- The participants can withdraw at any time.
- Anything I write about the project for an audience will be written so that individuals and their school cannot be identified.

- Anything I write about the project for an audience will be written so that individuals and their school cannot be identified.

I will be delighted if you grant your permission for your school to be involved in this research project. Once you have made your decision to participate, could you please fill in the consent form below and return it to me. If you have any questions about the project or the consent form, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Susan Beilharz.

Your Consent

I understand that the children will be observed for literacy-related knowledge. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that the children can participate in this study, knowing that I may withdraw my permission at any time. I agree that information which may be gathered for this study can be published provided that the children are not identifiable.

_____(Principal/Teacher) _____Date.

_____(Research Officer) _____Date

Dear Parent,

I am a Masters student in Language Education at Edith Cowan University and I am investigating the literacy development of preprimary children and the home literacy-related practices of their families.

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_____(Parent)   _____Date

_____(Research Officer) _____Date