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**IMAGINING AN IDEAL FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES: AN  
ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF ONE COMMUNITY-BASED  
RECREATION ORGANIZATION**

Angela M. Conti-Becker

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**IMAGINING AN IDEAL FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES:  
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF ONE COMMUNITY-BASED RECREATION  
ORGANIZATION**

**(Spine title: Imagining an Ideal for Children with Disabilities)**

**(Thesis format: Monograph)**

**by**

**Angela M. Conti-Becker**

**Graduate Program  
in  
Rehabilitation Sciences**

**2**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
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School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada**

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### **Abstract and Keywords**

Although the right to participation is enshrined in official policy, children with disabilities frequently face barriers to participation that are not encountered by their peers who are developing typically. This is important because participation in recreational plays a critical role in children's social and physical development. Other research has indicated that recreational environments influence participation experiences, and has suggested that environments can both facilitate and hinder children with disabilities. This thesis adds to what is known about the organizational culture of supportive recreational environments by reporting the findings of an ethnographic study of one such organization. Guided by a symbolic interactionist perspective, this research invokes the metaphor of a water-lily to study organizational culture on several levels. The analysis provides a detailed description of one supportive recreational organization and identifies thirteen themes that characterize a supportive recreational organizational culture. The discussion proposes a model of a supportive recreational organizational culture and includes a table of recommendations for programs that are interested in enhancing their organizations.

**Keywords:** Children with disabilities, participation, organizational culture, libraries, ethnography, social inclusion

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## **Contemplation**

Those trained in qualitative work know all too well how demanding it is---complex styles of interviewing, the conduct of participant observation, the nature of analysis, and the philosophical foundations of the research practices...yet newcomers often feel, after a brief exposure to qualitative methods, that they are perfectly capable of conducting an independent study.

Why is this? Perhaps because qualitative research resembles ordinary life more than traditional research does. Anyone can chat with people and write a diary, can't they? I must emphasize that no one should leave a limited encounter with qualitative work with such delusions in mind (Agar, 2004, p. 102).

Thinking qualitatively is about a way of looking at a problem, not just about academic theory and method and research design (Agar, 2004, p.104).

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

On December 13, 2006, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities* (2008). The Convention brought global attention to the issue of disability as a human rights issue with implications for all individuals and societies. It proposed a series of principles related to participation including the need to respect and include individuals of all abilities by ensuring opportunities and accessibility.

### **1.1: The Research Problem**

Although the right to full participation is enshrined in official policy, the literature suggests that differences continue to persist with respect to the recreational opportunities that are available to children with disabilities (Bedell and Dumas 2004; Law, Finkelman, Hurley, Rosenbaum, King, King & Hanna, 2004; Mihaylov, Jarvis, Colver & Beresford, 2004; Rimmer, Riley, Wang, Rauworth & Jurkowski, 2004). This is important because participation in recreational plays a critical role in the social and physical development of children and youth (Eccles & Barber 1999; Larson, 2000; Larson & Verma, 1999). This study adds to what is known about the culture of supportive community-based recreational organizations, by reporting the findings of an ethnographic study of one organization that was perceived as supporting the participation of children of all abilities. The study took place at a library in a community in Southwestern Ontario (approximate population 400,000) between October of 2007 and May of 2008. During this time, a series of field visits was completed and interviews were conducted with individuals who occupied a range of roles relative to the organization (i.e. staff members, administrators and partners, parents with children of all abilities, and youth participants). Studying the culture of one supportive community-based recreational organization has the potential to inform other, similar programs. The knowledge that is gained from this study may have relevance for community-based recreational organizations that are interested in fostering a supportive organizational culture.

## **1.2: Background**

Children with disabilities participate in recreational and leisure activities differently than peers who are developing typically (Law et al., 2004). Children with disabilities frequently face barriers to participation in a range of environments (Mihaylov et al., 2004). These barriers may be experienced at home, in the community (Bedell & Dumas 2004; Lawlor, Mihaylov, Welsh, Jarvis & Colver, 2006), in play and leisure settings (Hackett, 2003), school settings (Baker & Donnelly, 2001; Simeonsson, Carlson, Huntington, McMillen & Brent, 2001), and in activities outside of school (Heah, Case, McGuire & Law, 2007; Law et al., 2004). Children with disabilities engage in a variety of activities, they may not participate in recreational activities with the same degree of intensity as their peers (Law et al., 2004). Although individual predispositions influence activity preferences, researchers have highlighted the role that environments play in shaping participation opportunities and experiences (Bedell & Dumas, 2004; King, Law, King, Hurley, Hanna Kertoy, Rosenbaum & Young, 2003; Law, Haight, Milroy, Willms, Stewart & Rosenbaum, 1999; Letts, Rigby & Stewart, 2003).

Other studies have explored the relationship between environmental factors and the participation of children with disabilities (Colver, 2006; Hammal, Jarvis & Colver, 2004; King et al., 2003; Law, King, King, Kertoy, Hurley, Rosenbaum, Young & Hanna, 2006; Mihaylov et al., 2004). These studies have highlighted areas that require further investigation including: the participation experiences of children with disabilities (King et al., 2003), the ways in which programs can enable and disable the participation of children and youth (Colver, 2006), the training requirements of staff, the community recreational interventions that support the participation of individuals with disabilities (Mahon, Mactavish & Bockstoel, 2000), and the ways in which program providers and social services can better serve children with disabilities and their families (Lawlor et al., 2006). The findings from this study address several of these areas.

In addition to addressing several areas that have been highlighted in the literature this study was proposed to address a need for information that was

expressed by members of the community (Research Alliance for Children with Special Needs [RACSN], 2002). In 2002, a group of organizations, parents, and researchers, came together in a Community Forum with the goal of enhancing local opportunities for recreational participation for children with disabilities and their families. Forum participants were asked to identify factors and strategies that could be implemented to facilitate the participation of all children in recreational and leisure programs. Community culture, attitudes and awareness were strategic areas identified to enhance participation for children with disabilities. This study focuses on providing a description and analysis of one supportive community-based recreational program in response to the articulated need for additional information about community culture, attitudes and awareness.

### **1.3: Definitions**

#### **1.3.1: The International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) (WHO, 2001), Participation and the Environment**

The ICF is a classification of functioning that was endorsed by WHO members states in 2001. By recognizing the full range of factors that contribute to disability and that influence participation, the ICF provides a comprehensive classification that can be used for a range of purposes (WHO, 2001). The ICF was selected for use in this study because it is premised on universal assumptions about disability and highlights the role played by the environment in shaping participation experiences.

According to the ICF, disability is universal and affects everyone at different times over the course of life (WHO, 2001). The ICF defines participation as “involvement in life situations” (WHO, 2001, p. 10). Participation in life activities and social environments is a dimension of health that distinguishes biopsychosocial models of disability like ICF from biomedical models of health and disability (Simeonsson et al., 2001; WHO, 2001). Environments are the contexts in which participation takes place (WHO, 2001). The environmental domain of the ICF includes all of the following: products and technology, the natural environment and

human-made changes to the environment, support and relationships, attitudes, and services, systems, and policies (WHO, 2001).

### **1:3:2: Community-Based Recreational Organizations**

Community-based recreational organizations provide a range of participation opportunities for children and youth. Community-based recreational programs include physical activity programs (t-ball, weightlifting, track and field, and gymnastics), summer camp programs, art and cooking classes, and other recreational programs (i.e. *The Boy's and Girl's Club, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides*) (Scholl et al., 2005).

### **1:3:3: Inclusion**

According to Booth and Ainscow (2002), inclusion is a process of ongoing change and learning. Inclusion represents an ideal (Booth and Ainscow, 2002). Booth and Ainscow (2002) suggest that the process of inclusion begins once the process of enhancing participation begins. Although their work was conducted in the contexts of schools, Booth and Ainscow's (2002) work has application to other settings.

The ideas that Booth and Ainscow (2002) associate with inclusion are as follows: valuing everyone equally, enhancing the participation of individuals in schools and reducing exclusion from school cultures and communities, restructuring the policies and practices of schools to reflect the diversity of students, reducing barriers to participation for students of all abilities, learning from attempts to overcome barriers and making changes to benefit students, viewing differences as opportunities rather than barriers, acknowledging education as a right, improving schools for staff and students, emphasizing the role of schools in building communities and increasing achievement, fostering relationships between schools and communities, recognizing that inclusion in education is a part of inclusion in society.

#### **1.4: Overview of the Dissertation**

In Chapter 1, I introduce the research problem, background, and definitions. In Chapter Two, I review the literature. In Chapter Three, I describe the three theoretical perspectives that guide this study. The third chapter concludes with a summary of the literature, theoretical perspectives, and a statement of the research questions.

In Chapter Four, I describe the methods that were used in this study, including site selection, entering the setting and key informants, the sample, coding and analysis, quality, and ethics

In Chapter Five, I describe the library based on observations that were completed between the end of October 2007 and the beginning of May 2008. The description in this chapter is intended to provide the reader with “the ability ... to use the ethnography’s statements as instructions for appropriately anticipating the scenes of the society” (Sanday, 1983, p. 22).

In Chapter Six, I present the analytic results based on interviews with participants who occupied a range of roles in the setting. The results are presented according to four different layers of culture. The chapter concludes with a summary of the results.

In Chapter Seven, I discuss the results in the context of the literature. The discussion includes a model of supportive recreational organizational culture and a series of recommendations for recreational organizations that are interested in enhancing the accessibility of their organizations. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study and identifies areas for future research.

In Chapter Eight, I reflect on the lessons that were learned through the research process.



## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

### **2.1: Overview**

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature on participation and to examine the influence of both personal and environmental factors on participation.

### **2.2: Participation**

Participation facilitates social development and provides a context for the development of friendships and for peer interactions (Law et al., 2006). Participation also provides children with opportunities to learn about societal expectations and to acquire the skills that they will need for optimal functioning in life (Law et al., 2006).

Participation in structured, voluntary recreational programs can provide a range of benefits for children of all abilities (Carruthers & Busser, 2000; Eccles & Barber, 1999; King et al., 2003; Larson & Verma, 1999; Law et al., 2007; Simeonsson, et al., 2001). Structured voluntary activities are activities that are undertaken voluntarily and that involve some degree of formality (i.e. rules, goals, etc.) (Larson & Verma, 1999). These activities can include camps, sports, music, drama, and other recreational programs (Larson & Verma, 1999). Organized recreational activities provide children with unique opportunities for social, psychological and skill development that differ from those available in academic settings (Larson & Verma, 1999, Eccles & Barber, 1999; Larson, 2000; Specht, King, Brown, & Foris, 2002). Recreational activities offer children and youth opportunities for social, psychological and cultural development that are different from those that are associated with time spent in less organized leisure pursuits (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Larson & Verma, 1999; Larson, 2000).

Participation in leisure and recreational activities offers protective benefits for children and youth and reduces negative life outcomes (Simeonsson et al, 2001). For children with disabilities, participation in recreational activities facilitates the development of social relationships and influences both mental and physical health (Law et al., 2004). Participation in inclusive environments can provide children of all abilities with the feeling that they belong in the community (Mahon et al., 2000).

### **2.3: Participation Differences**

Previous research has identified several differences in the participation patterns of children with disabilities when compared with typically developing peers (Law et al., 2006). According to Law and colleagues (2006), children with disabilities face restrictions that limit their ability to participate in recreational activities and may experience a sense of social isolation. As children with disabilities get older, participation may decrease, and as adults, they may be less active and choose to participate in passive activities.

Several researchers (Bedell & Dumas 2004; Law et al., 2004; Mihaylov et al., 2004; Rimmer et al., 2004) have indicated that individuals with disabilities are less likely to participate in a range of organized activities and environments. Researchers have identified differences in the participation of individuals with disabilities and their typically developing peers in a range of environments such as school (Simeonsson et al., 2001), community environments (Ehrmann, Aeschleman & Svanum, 1995), and other physical activity programs (Rimmer et al., 2004). In school settings, children with disabilities may require support (assistive devices, classroom assistants, physical supports) to participate in classroom activities. Children with disabilities also tend to participate less often in school-based leisure and recreational programs (i.e. sports teams, clubs) (Simeonsson et al., 2001).

### **2.4: Participation Factors**

#### **2.4:1: Body Functions and Structures and Personal Factors**

Kerr and colleagues (2006) explored the relationship between gross motor function and participation in children with cerebral palsy (CP). The study findings suggested that functional ability was associated with participation and improvements in physical functioning enhanced participation (Kerr et al., 2006). The findings also indicated that a complex relationship exists between participation, functional ability, and other personal and environment factors (Kerr, McDowell & McDonough, 2006).

According to Law and colleagues (2007), personal factors including socioeconomic status, age, and behavioural characteristics are all factors that hindered participation. Almqvist and Granlund (2005), Bedell and Dumas, 2004, and Law and

colleagues (2004) have suggested that both personal and environmental factors interact to influence participation experiences. Environmental factors play a significant role in shaping opportunities for participation and participation experiences (Law et al., 2004).

#### **2:4:2: Environments with a focus on Recreational Programs**

Baker and Donnelly (2001) highlighted the need for additional information regarding the relationship between the environment and participation. According to Baker and Donnelly (2001), the way in which families, schools and communities perceived disability contributed to both positive and negative social experiences. Baker and Donnelly (2001) suggested that instead of focusing on the characteristics of children that contributed to unsuccessful participation, researchers should examine the full range of factors that create positive and negative experiences in the environment. An understanding of these environmental factors is critical to facilitating successful participation.

King and colleagues (2003) developed a conceptual model of the factors that influenced recreation and leisure participation of children with disabilities that identified several environmental factors. According to King and colleagues (2003), policy and institutional environments that were affordable, free of policy and physical barriers, conveniently located, accessible, and characterized by positive attitudes towards inclusion all facilitated participation. Positive environments provided supportive relationships for both children with disabilities and their parents (King et al., 2003).

Heah and colleagues (2007) explored the meaning of participation for a group of eight children with disabilities and their parents in a series of in-depth interviews. Heah and colleagues (2007) suggested that the factors that supported participation for children with disabilities were similar to the factors that supported children developing typically. These included: having fun, experiencing success, participating independently, and being with other people (Heah et al., 2007). Parental support and the preferences of the children themselves were also factors that influenced

participation for children with disabilities. Parents expressed a desire to participate in program planning (Heah et al., 2007).

A series of focus groups conducted with parents of 28 children with CP from five different European countries examined the impact of the physical, social, and attitudinal environment on children's participation in different community settings (McManus, Michelsen, Parkinson, Colver, Beckung, Pez & Caravale, 2006). The research indicated little variation in the factors that were identified by groups of parents from different countries. Excessive bureaucracy, a lack of information about programs, and a sense of isolation were identified as barriers to children's participation. The authors emphasized the importance of identifying primary factors that facilitated or hindered participation of children (McManus et al., 2006).

Rimmer and colleagues (2004) employed a series of focus groups with individuals with disabilities, architects, fitness and recreation professionals, city planners, and park district managers to better understand the factors that hinder and support the participation of individuals with disabilities in the United States in a range of community settings. The barriers and facilitators that were identified were organized into ten themes which included: the built environment, economic issues, emotional and psychological barriers, equipment barriers, barriers related to appropriate use of guidelines and regulations, information, professional knowledge and training issues, perceptions and attitudes of non-disabled individuals towards individuals with disabilities, community/facility-based policies and procedures and availability of resources. The authors identified a need for additional research about the perceptions of staff and program leaders that facilitated and hindered individuals with disabilities. Rimmer and colleagues' (2004) research engaged multiple perspectives and identified a broad range of barriers and facilitators to participation but it did not address the unique experiences of children with disabilities and their families (Rimmer et al, 2004).

Lawlor and colleagues (2006) interviewed thirteen families with children with CP to better understand the physical, social, and attitudinal factors that influenced participation in a range of community settings in northeast England. Mobility, transport, family support, and the attitudes of individuals and institutions were the

main themes reported by the researchers. The authors argued that new environments should be as accessible to children with disabilities as they are to peers who are developing typically (Lawlor et al., 2006). In such environment, services should be integrated so that children with disabilities experienced the same seamlessness in transitioning from one environment to the next as their typically developing peers. New environments should also be designed based on universal design to enhance physical accessibility (Lawlor et al., 2006). The authors indicated a need for an assessment tool that could be used to evaluate physical, social and attitudinal dimensions of the environment (Lawlor et al., 2006).

Mactavish and Schleien (2004) explored the recreation experiences of 65 parents with children of varying abilities. Their research highlighted differences in the way that families and children of varying abilities participated in recreation programs. Children with disabilities tended to participate more frequently with their family members and less frequently independently than their siblings and peers developing typically (Mactavish & Schleien, 2004). The authors indicated a need for additional research that focused on recreation programs and the opportunities that these programs provide for children with disabilities and their families (Mactavish & Schleien, 2004).

Law and colleagues (2007) explored environmental barriers to recreational, community, and school participation in a quantitative study of parent-child pairs. Parents indicated that their children experienced participation restrictions in a range of environments. The supportiveness of social and attitudinal environments had the greatest impact on participation (Law et al., 2007). Physical and structural barriers associated with the design and layout of the natural environment and policy barriers associated with the availability of programs also influenced participation. General attitudes held by others had the least impact on the participation experiences of children with disabilities (Law et al., 2007). Law and colleagues (2007) emphasized the importance of gathering local knowledge and developing policy based on the needs that are articulated by the community. They advocated a two-fold approach to enhancing participation which included reducing environmental barriers and building more supportive environments (Law et al. 2007).

Finally, in 2002, a Community Forum was held to develop local knowledge about the key factors and strategies that could be implemented to facilitate the participation of all children in the community. Among the most important strategic areas identified were the following: Community Culture, Attitudes, and Awareness (Strategy 1); Flexible, Adaptable, Creative, and Individualized Programs (Strategy 3); Child's and Families' Interests and Motivations (Strategy 4); and Support, Access and Training (Strategy 6). The authors of the report issued a challenge to community members to work towards implementing the strategies outlined in the report.

To summarize: several studies have examined the influence of environmental factors on the participation experiences of children in a range of environments (Baker & Donnelly, 2001; Heah et al., 2007; Lawlor et al., 2006; McManus et al., 2008; Messent, Carlton, Cooke & Long, 1999; Simeonsson et al., 2001). Baker and Donnelly (2001), Law and colleagues (2007), and Rimmer and colleagues (2004) highlighted the importance of supportive professionals, staff members and, policies in enhancing and facilitating the participation of children with disabilities in school settings. Other factors that have been identified as influencing participation for children with disabilities included the availability of information (McManus et al., 2006; Rimmer et al.), the attitudes of others (Lawlor et al., 2007; Rimmer et al., 2004), excessive bureaucracy (McManus, 2006), cost, (King et al., 2003; Rimmer et al., 2004), proximity (King et al., 2003; Lawlor et al., 2006), the availability of supportive programs (Heah et al., 2007; King et al., 2003), and the availability of a supportive physical environment (King et al., 2003; Law et al., 2007; Rimmer et al., 2004).

Both personal and environmental factors shape the participation experiences of children with disabilities (Almqvist & Granlund, 2005; Bedell & Dumas, 2004; Law et al., 2004; Simeonsson et al., 2001). There are a number of areas where additional research is required to enhance our understanding of the relationship between environments and participation. Specifically, information about: 1. the primary factors that facilitate and hinder participation (McManus et al., 2006); 2. the perceptions that community members hold relative to individuals with disabilities and the role that these perceptions play in creating or hindering successful participation

experiences (Baker and Donnelly, 2001); 3. the perceptions of staff members and community recreational program leaders about the factors that support and hinder individuals with disabilities (Rimmer et al., 2004); 4. the training needs of staff (Scholl et al., 2005); 5. the assessment tools that can be used to evaluate the physical, social and attitudinal characteristics of the environment (Lawlor et al., 2006); 6. the opportunities that are provided to children by recreation programs (Mactavish & Schleien); 7. the culture of the community, and the attitudes and awareness of community members relative to individuals with disabilities is needed (RACSN, 2002).

## **Chapter 3: Methodology and Theoretical Perspectives**

### **3.1: Overview**

The purpose of this chapter is to review the methodology and theoretical perspectives that were used in this study. Ethnography and thick description are the methodologies that were used to study culture in this research. Symbolic interactionism and a symbolic approach to the study of organizational culture are the theoretical frameworks used in this study. A water-lily is used as a metaphor for organizational culture (Hawkins, 1997).

### **3.2: Ethnographic Methodology**

According to Crotty (2003:3), methodology is “the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes”. Ethnography and thick description are methodologies that are used by cultural anthropologists and sociologists to describe, classify, and interpret culture (Geertz, 1973; Denzin, 1989).

According to Geertz (1973:20), ethnographic description is interpretive, studies social discourse, attempts to articulate culture in readable terms and has a micro-focus. Culture is articulated through social action and ethnographers “see” culture by observing behaviour (Geertz, 1973). The quality of ethnographic research depends on the extent to which it thickly describes culture, and the extent to which it takes others into the core of culture that it is describing (Geertz, 1973).

Ethnographers go beyond an appreciation of culture to provide an interpretation of it and in the process of doing this ethnographers record social discourse (Geertz, 1973).

Ethnographic work extends description and cultural appreciation and although its focus is on the particular, it is not limited by this focus (Geertz, 1973). Credible ethnographic work contributes theoretical ideas about the social world that can be adopted by others, refined, and applied to different problems (Geertz, 1973:27). In interpretive work, hypotheses are not identified a priori (Denzin, 1989); rather, theoretical interpretations and hypotheses continually emerge and are tested as the research is done.



Ethnographers employ fieldwork (including observation, interviews, and the collection of artifacts and documents) to produce accounts of human lives that are historically, personally, culturally and/or socially situated (Tedlock, 2003). The ethnographic research setting is the natural context and the focus of research is on the interrelationship of factors in that social setting (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). The ethnographer participates in the daily life of a group or culture over a significant period of time during which she observes, listens and asks questions collecting a range of data with the goal of illuminating and better understanding the issues that are the focus of the research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Ethnographers are interested in the everyday interactions of people; their work is some of the most “basic” social research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Relationships are central in ethnography and they are the heart of ethnographic fieldwork (Agar, 1980). Ethnography is an “experientially rich” way of doing research that values the “humanity” of both the ethnographer and the participant, while remaining credible to skeptics (Agar, 1980:15).

Ethnographic research is an ongoing attempt to place encounters and events into a more meaningful context (Tedlock, 2003). It is both a product and a process; in producing their accounts, ethnographers attend to the process through which such information is transferred into form (Tedlock, 2003). Ethnographers produce a story about social positions, locations, and relationships and the way in which these are understood by participants (Halloway and Todres, 2003).

Ethnographic approaches invite the subjective perspectives of participants and researchers and in so doing, make space for a deep understanding of social processes and interactions that is not found in positivistic approaches (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982).

### **3.3: Theoretical Perspectives**

Theoretical perspectives are the philosophies that inform methodology (Crotty, 2003:3). Two theoretical frameworks were used in this research: symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) and organizational culture theory (Alvesson, 1993; Alvesson & Berg, 1992; Hawkins, 1997).

### **3:3:1: Symbolic Interactionism**

#### **Overview**

Blumer (1969) identifies three ideas that underlie symbolic interactionism. They are: 1. Individuals act based on meanings; 2. meanings come out of the interactions that people have with others; and 3. these meanings are negotiated and change through an interpretive process that includes the individual and the social world. According to Blumer (1969), we can only understand actions by understanding the meanings that are attached to those actions. Meanings are “social products” that are developed through the interactions that people have with one another (Blumer, 1969:5). Interaction is an interpretive process which involves internalization and interpretation of the situation (Blumer, 1969). Interpretation is an active process that is negotiated by individuals.

#### **Root Images in Symbolic Interactionism**

##### **Human Group Life is Active**

Blumer (1969) describes a number of root images that form the foundations of symbolic interactionism. The first root image is that the nature of human group life is active. Groups are constantly engaged in some kind of action; in contemporary societies, both culture and social structure share this active quality. Blumer (1969:7) argues that it is “this complex of ongoing activity that establishes and portrays structure or organization”. The core of human society is action; people interacting with and engaging with one another.

##### **The Nature of Social Interaction**

Blumer (1969:8) states “social interaction is a process that *forms* human conduct. Blumer (1969) credits Mead for describing the process of social interaction and suggests that humans interact with one another in both non-symbolic and symbolic ways. Non-symbolic interaction is a direct response to the behaviours of other without interpretation. Symbolic interaction is a process of responding to others based on the interpretation of action.

##### **The Nature of Objects**

Three categories of objects form the worlds of individuals (Blumer, 1969). Objects are things that can be “referred to” (Blumer, 1969:10); they can be physical

(building, washroom, ball), social (volunteer, program planner, parent, administrator), or abstract (inclusion, friendship, participation, disability). To understand an individual's actions, we must identify and understand an individual's world of objects" (Blumer, 1969:11). Objects are "social creations" whose meanings are derived through the process of interacting. Common meanings emerged from a process of mutual indications (Blumer, 1969). Peoples' lives and actions are continually being redefined and changing as their world of objects changes (Blumer, 1969).

### **The Human Being as an Acting Organism**

In addition to interacting with objects outside of themselves, humans also interpret themselves (Blumer, 1969). The "self" emerges from interactions that individuals have with others (Blumer, 1969:12). Humans can only become objects to themselves by viewing themselves from the perspectives of others (Blumer, 1969). Through the socialization process, individuals progress from trying on roles and perspectives of others (in the play and game stages) to understanding and conforming to the expectations of the community (Blumer, 1969). People continuously engage in a process of interacting with themselves and these self-indications guide our everyday actions (Blumer, 1969).

### **The Nature of Human Action**

Joint action is comprised of individual actions but is unique and distinct from any one of the actions that comprise it (Blumer, 1969). Examples of joint action would include groups like: a soccer team, a support group, a brownies troupe, a drama club. Joint action is constantly being formed by individuals. Most social action is based on common and established meanings and happens in patterned, familiar way. These ways of acting are frequently described as examples of "natural" human behaviour because they are so patterned and routine (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic interactionists assume that even where group action (i.e. culture) appears to be unthought, patterned, and natural, it is constructed.

### **Methodological Implications**

Blumer (1969) described an empirical approach to the study of human interaction. The "empirical social world...is the world of everyday experience" and

the problems that confront social scientists are problems that “go back to” group life (Blumer, 1969:35). Blumer (1969) argues that while a researcher may not have any first-hand experience of the thing she is interested in studying, she likely has some preexisting ideas about what that thing is like. These assumptions cannot substitute for the insight that is gained through first-hand experience (participant observation and fieldwork).

### **Exploration and Inspection**

According to Blumer (1969) exploration allows researchers to become familiar with social problems and settings with which they are unfamiliar. In exploring a social setting, the researchers’ perspective becomes more focused as the research progresses. The researcher stays “grounded” in the setting that is being studied (Blumer, 1969:40). The goal of exploration is a thorough descriptive account of what is going on in a given social setting.

According to Blumer (1969:43), inspection is “an intensive focused examination of the empirical content of whatever analytical elements are used for purposes of analysis, and the same kind of examination of the empirical nature of the relations between such elements”. Analytical elements can be any item that is included in the research (e.g. organizational culture) (Blumer, 1969). Inspection is a thorough examination of the given analytical element from multiple perspectives, a “close, shifting scrutiny” that is “flexible, imaginative, creative, and free to take new directions” (Blumer, 1969:44). To summarize, Blumer (1969) argued that the social world must be studied empirically, that a naturalistic approach is the most appropriate approach to studying the social world, and that naturalistic inquiry embodied both exploration and inspection.

### **3:3:2: Organizational Culture**

Mats Alvesson (1993) has written extensively about organizational culture and cultural approaches to the study of organizations. In describing his approach to studying the culture of organizations Alvesson (1993) takes an approach that is similar to that of cultural anthropologists (including Geertz, 1973). He includes the following elements in his definition of organizational culture: shared experiences,

values, understandings, and the expression of these things in a symbolic way. He states that his definition is influenced by the definition of organizational culture provided by Frost and colleagues (as cited in Alvesson, 1993). This definition includes rituals, myths and legends that are held by individuals, and how these are interpreted, influenced and shaped by the groups with which individuals identify.

Alvesson (1993) describes two broad approaches to the study of organizational culture. The first approach is a functionalist approach and is used to improve organizational management and efficiency. The second is a cultural approach and conceptualizes culture as an entry point for understanding and deep reflection (Alvesson, 1993). The second perspective illuminates taken-for-granted assumptions and reveals social understandings (including ideas and values) as social constructions, rather than natural occurrences (Alvesson, 1993). By encouraging reflection and a deep study of culture, traditional thought patterns may be questioned, and human potential may be increased.

In a systematic review of the organizational culture literature in nursing, Scott-Findlay and Estabrooks (2006) describe three conceptual approaches to the study of organizational culture. According to Scott-Findlay and Estabrooks (2006:505) a symbolic-interpretive approach to the study of organizational culture defines organizational culture as “a context for meaning making and interpretation”. Researchers who study organizational culture from this perspective attempt to understand culture from the perspective of group members (Scott-Findlay & Estabrooks, 2006). Ethnography is the data collection strategy that is associated with this particular way of studying culture.

### **3.4: Metaphors for Organizational Culture**

Metaphors provide a way of thinking and talking about complex things. Scott-Findlay and Estabrooks (2006) note that studies of organizational culture that are grounded in a symbolic-interpretive paradigm frequently use metaphors to study organizational culture.

**The Water-Lily**

One metaphor for organizational culture is the “water-lily” (Hawkins, 1997). The metaphor of the water-lily represents multiple levels and layers within organizations. Beginning with the most obvious elements above the surface of the water (the physical environment, artifacts, documents and behaviours) through to the deepest roots (the emotional ground and motivational roots), the metaphor of the water-lily encourages researchers to examine the complexity of organizations; the hidden meanings and understandings that interact with the official policies and rules to create what really exists. The water-lily allows researchers to study the gap between the reality and the ideal; what organizations aspire to do and what they actually do.

According to Hawkins, the culture of an organization can be studied at three levels:

**Table 3.1 Layers of Organizational Culture**

| <b>Level</b>         | <b>What it is</b>                     | <b>Label attached by Hawkins</b> |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Espoused             | What an organization does             | “Espoused culture”               |
| Enacted              | How culture is lived and              | “Enacted culture”                |
| Unconscious culture” | Culture that is not consciously known | “Unconscious                     |

In studying organizational culture, Hawkins suggests that researchers employ multiple methods and take an approach that is reflexive, experiential, and collaborative.

### **3.5: Summary of Chapters 2 and 3**

Although participation in organized recreational programs plays a critical role in development and socialization, the literature suggests that children with disabilities have different participation opportunities and experiences than their peers who are developing typically (Law et al., 2004; Law et al., 2006). Physical, social, and attitudinal aspects of recreational environments play a critical role in shaping participation experiences and opportunities (Hammal et al., 2004; Kerr et al., 2006; King et al. 2006) and research has suggested that environmental factors are as important as individual factors in shaping the participation experiences of children with disabilities. The purpose of this study is to add to what is known about the culture of supportive recreational organizations by studying one program that is perceived as offering supportive environment to children of all abilities.

Although previous research has explored the relationship between environmental factors and the participation of children with disabilities (Colver, 2006; Hammal et al., 2004; King et al., 2006; Law et al., 2006; Mihaylov et al., 2004), it has also highlighted areas that require further investigation. These include information about: 1. the primary factors that facilitate and hinder participation (McManus et al., 2006); 2. the perceptions that community members hold relative to individuals with disabilities and the role that these perceptions play in creating or hindering successful participation experiences (Baker and Donnelly, 2001); 3. the perceptions of staff members and community recreational program leaders about the factors that support and hinder individuals with disabilities (Rimmer et al., 2004); 4. the training needs of staff (Scholl et al., 2005); 5. assessment tools that can be used to evaluate the physical, social and attitudinal characteristics of the environment (Lawlor et al., 2006); 6. the opportunities that are provided to children by recreation programs (Mactavish & Schleien); 7. the culture of the community, and the attitudes and awareness of community members relative to individuals with disabilities is needed (RACSN, 2002).

This study addresses several of the areas mentioned above by exploring the culture of an organization that provides a recreational setting that is inviting to

children of all abilities. It explores how supportive environments are created and enacted and identifies some of the supportive elements within these settings.

Ethnography is a methodology that is used by cultural anthropologists and sociologists to describe, classify, and interpret culture (Agar, 1980; Denzin, 1989; Geertz, 1973; Wolcott, 1987; Wolcott, 1994). Ethnographic studies contribute theoretical ideas about the social world that can be adopted by others, refined, and applied to understand different problems (Geertz, 1973). The metaphor of a water-lily was used to represent organizational culture in this study (Hawkins, 1997) with the belief that this metaphor would facilitate a study of organizational culture at a range of levels.

### **3.6: Research Questions**

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the cultural characteristics of a supportive recreational organization?
  - a. What specific cultural elements support the participation of children with disabilities and their families?
  - b. What specific cultural elements hinder the participation of children with disabilities and their families?
2. How well does the water-lily metaphor fit the culture that is observed and described by the researcher and participants?
  - a. How do the official, enacted, and invisible layers of culture at a supportive recreational organization fit together?
  - b. What are the gaps between the layers of culture?
3. What are the implications of this study for the library and for other recreational settings?
  - a. How can recreational organizations apply the findings from this study to enhance the inclusiveness of their recreational programs?



## **Chapter 4: Methods and Data Collection**

### **4.1: Overview**

This chapter describes the methods that were used in this study. This includes a discussion of the process that was employed to select the study site, entry, the sample, analysis and coding strategy, quality, and ethics.

### **4.2: Site Selection**

Three sources were used to identify and provide information about potential settings for this study. In May of 2007, the researcher facilitated a discussion group with fourteen parents who attended a support group that had been meeting regularly for several years at a local parent resource centre (Appendix 1 and 2). Participants were asked to identify some of the characteristics that they associated with an “ideal” organization, and suggest potential recreational organizations that might be approached by the researcher to participate in the study. The discussion group provided an opportunity to learn more about the participation experiences of local children and families. This information was useful in identifying recreational needs and expectations and in suggesting some of the organizational characteristics that support the participation of children with disabilities in community-based recreational programs.

The organizations that were suggested by the participants varied with respect to size, the kinds of recreational opportunities that were offered, how well established they were in the community, whether or not they operated from a fixed location, and the age of children to whom they offered recreational programs. Included on the list of programs were: girl guides, swimming programs, music programs, the library, camping programs, art programs, and a multi-program recreational centre.

Of the ten organizations suggested, two met the following inclusion criteria: they were substantive enough to provide a data rich field site for observation; they were large enough to have some degree of variation in staff members, volunteers, and participants; they were established enough to have some history in the community (preferably a minimum of five years); they operated from a permanent physical

location in the community; and they offered programs to children between the ages of six and eleven (the age group of interest).

Two separate, additional sources of information were consulted before selecting an organization. The first source of information was anecdotal information from several service providers who work with children with disabilities. Several of these individuals independently suggested one of the two organizations that had been recommended by the parents and that fit the inclusion criteria. The findings from a survey of 28 local leisure and recreational programs provided the second source of information (Kertoy, Bartlett, Specht & Miller, 2006). The survey posed a series of questions about types of recreational services provided, the number of children who participated in their organizations (including those with and without disabilities), and asked participants to evaluate their organizations on three dimensions of the environment (physical, social, and attitudinal). Two of the organizations that were suggested by the parents in the discussion group had high self-evaluations. The decision was made to contact the library and ask if the organization would consider participating in the study.

In September of 2007, following ethics approval by the University of Western Ontario (Appendix 3), contact was established with Administrator (Admin 2), a member of the administration at the library. A contact letter and an information package (Appendices 4, 5, 6, 7) were sent by electronic mail, along with a letter that summarized the research and asked if the library would consider participating in the study. Admin 2 was receptive to the inquiry and a meeting was arranged with Admin 2, Admin 3, and Admin 5. At the meeting the research goals were discussed, questions were answered and additional study information was provided. Admin 2 and 3 agreed to consult with several local libraries and to recommend sites that might be suitable given the goals of the research.

In October of 2007, Admin 2 provided the names of two libraries that were interested in participating in the study. According to Admin 2, both of the libraries were located in the east end of the city, and both had “a large child/youth population and lots of programming” (email correspondence, sent October 17, 2007). One of the libraries was a stand-alone location and the other was part of a Neighbourhood

Resource Centre. In her message, Admin 2 stated that the supervisor at the stand-alone library was “very interested” in the project (email correspondence, sent October 17, 2007).

During the last week of October, 2007, a meeting was arranged with two librarians at the stand-alone library. Information about the study was shared, and questions were answered. Both librarians were receptive to the idea of having their branch serve as the setting for the study. Consent forms were completed by one of the librarians and two of the administrators and field work began shortly thereafter.

### **4.3: Entering the Library and Key Informants**

During the first observation session, three signs announcing the research were placed in the library (Appendix 8). One sign was placed next to the circulation computer, a second was placed next to the self-scan checkout computer, and a third was placed at the opposite end of the circulation desk next to a pile of daily newspapers. These signs remained in place for the duration of the field work. The researcher was given a tour of the branch and introduced to staff members. A librarian introduced the researcher to most of the staff members and provided information about library programs and services, the community, and the other organizations that operated programs at the library.

### **4.4: Sample**

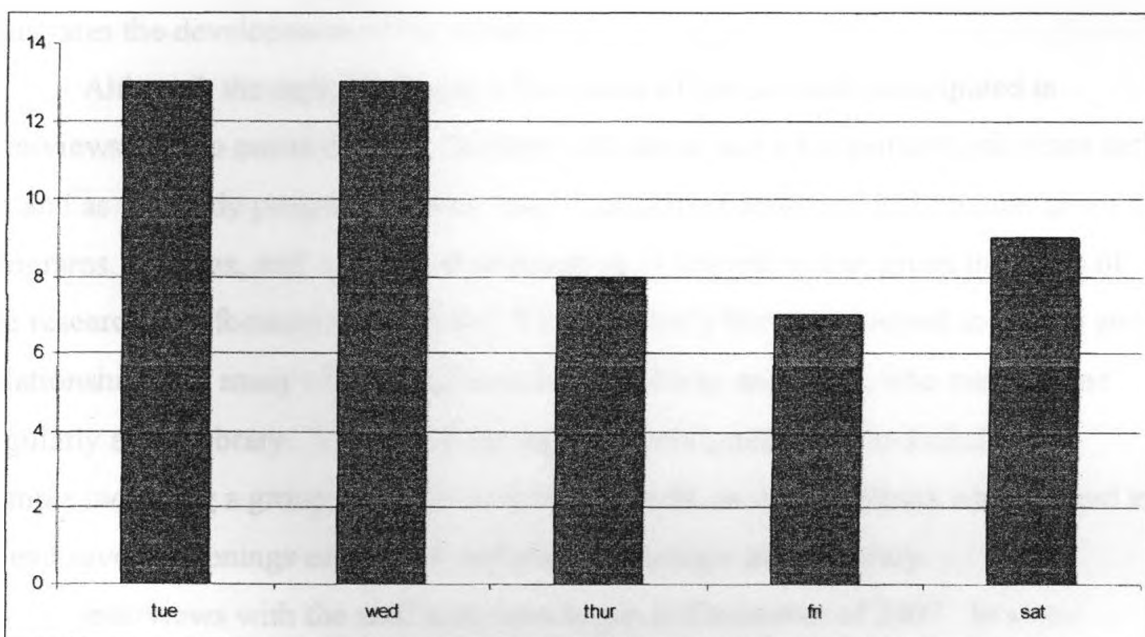
Qualitative researchers sample purposively to capture specific people and perspectives (Ritchie et al., 2003). Purposive samples are used in qualitative research because the definition of the research universe is limited and because the social processes that tend to form the basis of qualitative research projects do not fit the assumptions and logic inherent in the random sampling strategies that are used in quantitative research projects (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

#### **Sample for Observations**

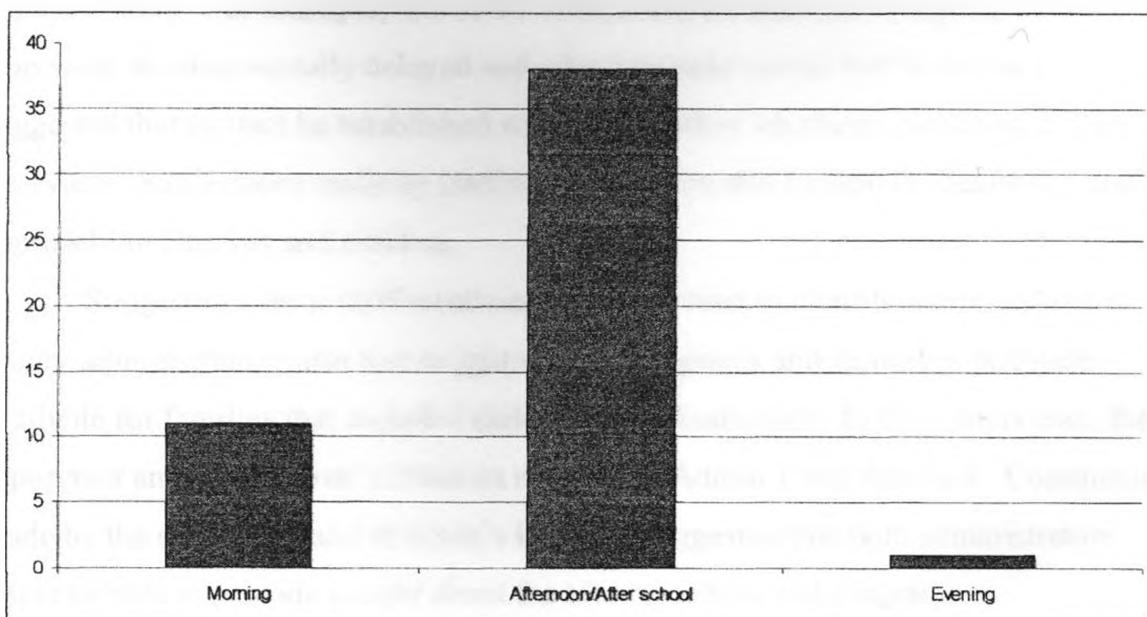
The library served as the sample for observations in this study. To maximize diversity, the researcher visited the library on approximately 50 occasions between the end of October of 2007 and the beginning of May of 2008. These visits occurred at different times of the day and on different days of the week. Figures 4.1 and 4.2

illustrate how the observation sessions were distributed over days of the week (4.1) and times of the day (4.2) during the field work. Note that the library was closed on Sundays and Mondays. Although sessions were evenly distributed according to days of the week, most of the sessions occurred during the afternoon and early evening. These were the times during which the library was most used by younger patrons. Field notes and reflections were transcribed following each visit using a field note template (Mulhall, 2003) (Appendix 9).

**Figure 4.1: Distribution of Observation Sessions (Days of the Week)**



**Figure 4.2: Distribution of Observation Sessions (Time of Day)**



### **Sample for Interviews**

In addition to the observation sessions, the researcher completed 46 interviews with a range of participants. Of the 46, 12 were staff, four were administrators, three were community partners, 12 were parents (nine of whom had children or youth with disabilities), and 15 were child and youth participants. Most of the participants who were interviewed were recruited directly from the site. Interview participants were selected based on their membership in five sub-groups: staff members, administrators/managers, partners, and parents and participants. Appendix 10 illustrates the development of the sample.

Although the supervisor was a first point of contact and participated in interviews on two occasions, the children's librarian was an important informant early on and as the study progressed. She was an important source of information about the programs, families, and children that might be of interest to me, given the goals of the research that focused on children. The children's librarian seemed to have a good relationship with many of the neighbourhood children and youth who participated regularly at the library. Twelve of the regular participants were included in the sample including a group of sisters and their friends, as well as others who seemed to spend several evenings each week and many Saturdays at the library.

Interviews with the staff members began in December of 2007. In some cases, these interviews led to interviews with other partners, parents, and administrators. For example, one of the staff members referred to a group of students who were developmentally delayed and who regularly visited the library and suggested that contact be established with their teacher who later participated in an interview. Suggestions made by staff members were also helpful in identifying and approaching families and children.

Suggestions from staff members were also used to identify members of the library administration who had insight into the programs and resources that were available for families that included children with disabilities. In their interviews, the supervisor and the children's librarian referred to Admin 1 and Admin 4. Comments made by the supervisor and children's librarian suggested that both administrators might be able to provide insight about the library culture and programs.

The remaining interviewees were recruited for a variety of reasons as my understanding of the culture of the library improved and as additional questions emerged from this understanding. For example, the two other community partners were selected because they worked closely with the library. Both of the partners offered supports and programs from the library to members of the community. These partners were selected to speak about their perceptions of the culture of the library and to help me better understand the surrounding community and the families in the community. Two other parents who had children with disabilities were recruited directly from the library. Both had noticed the signs posted in the library, indicated that they had a child with a disability, and expressed their interest in participating in the study. Parents who had children developing typically and their children were all recruited from the site.

The remaining administrators, Admin 2 and Admin 3, participated in the initial meeting that was held at the library in October of 2007 and were selected based on their familiarity with the library's organizational structure and children's services. When I met with Admin 3 in January of 2008, I indicated that I had observed relatively few families who had children with disabilities at the site. Admin 3 suggested that I contact Parent 2, whose son had Asperger's syndrome. This contact led me to three other families that included children with disabilities. The families included children with autism, and a non-specified developmental disorder. Although these families used several of the library branches, the interviews were useful in providing information about the experiences of children at different branches, attitudes towards children with disabilities, some of the challenges that families face in attempting to access programs, and concrete program suggestions and ideas for the library.

In summary, the researcher arranged interviews with 12 of the 14 staff members. The two staff members who were not included were both part-time students who were at the branch less frequently than the other staff members. The sample of administrators was developed based on initial contact with the library and by the information that was gathered in the interviews with staff members. Community partners were identified through the interviews with staff members. Two

of the community partners who were included in the sample operated programs at the library and the other community partner was a teacher whose students participated regularly at the library.

### **Interview format**

Interviews with participants were informal conversations that were guided by a list of topics (Appendix 11). The interviews covered the following areas: relationship to and history with the library; a description of culture; a discussion about factors at the library that might support children with disabilities; a discussion about factors at the library that might hinder children with disabilities. Interviews with staff, partners, and administrators were done one-on-one. Interviews with participants and families were done in groups. A second topic guide (Appendix 12) was developed for the children and youth following the first month of field work.

### **4.5: Coding and Analysis**

Taylor and Bogdan (1998) identify three phases in qualitative analysis: discovery, coding, and discounting. In the discovery phase, researchers read and reread transcripts, track their ideas and interpretations, look for themes, and begin to develop their ideas (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). In coding, researchers develop a story line, list major themes and concepts, code the data, sort the data, and refine the analysis (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). In the discounting phase, the researcher revisits the analysis and considers the roles played by various participants, the context in which statements were made, the role of the researcher and other participants, and reconsiders her own interpretive process. In the last phase, the researcher may also go back to the participants with the developing interpretation (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998).

In this study, audio-taped interviews were transcribed verbatim following the interview session and reviewed several times by the researcher to discover initial ideas and impressions. The transcribed interviews were saved in *NVivo*, a software package for qualitative analysis. *NVivo* was used to organize the field notes and interviews and was used in the beginning stages of the analysis to code the transcripts and field notes and to organize the codes. The coding process began following the

first interviews in November of 2007. The first several transcripts were used to generate a list of codes and these codes were used to code subsequent interviews and field notes. Once data collection was finished, codes were organized and reduced. Coded passages were printed and explored. The researcher reflected on each code and attempted to identify how it differed from other codes (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998).

The analysis developed over several months and a number of strategies were helpful in moving forward with the analysis. The analysis was discussed with supervisory committee members at meetings on January 23, 2008, May 14, 2008, June 23, 2008, and August 6, 2008 and completed over the course of several months. A poster was presented at two conferences in 2008. These presentations provided opportunities to discuss and reflect on the emerging analysis. The researcher wrote several reflective notes while completing the analysis and interpretation. The water-lily metaphor and the following research questions were ultimately used to select the themes that would be highlighted in the analysis: What is the perceived culture of the library? What aspects of the culture are perceived as supporting children with disabilities? What aspects of culture are perceived as hindering children with disabilities? As a final step, the results chapters were presented to the librarians for their comments. These comments are summarized in Section 6.8.



**Table 4.1: Layers of Culture and Representation in the Setting**

| <b>Layer of culture</b> | <b>How this was represented in the setting</b> |
|-------------------------|--|
| Official and espoused   | Vision, mission, accessibility policy          |
| Enacted                 | Physical and structural characteristics        |
| Enacted                 | Social characteristics                         |
| Invisible               | Values and beliefs                             |

**4.6: Quality**

Although it is difficult to separate issues of validity, reliability, and generalizability in qualitative studies, there is a need for rigour in all research studies (Hammell, 2002; Long and Johnson, 2000). In this study, several strategies were employed to enhance the quality of the research.

**Reflection**

In qualitative studies, researcher subjectivity is acknowledged. By reflecting on the research and the research process, researchers become aware of their values and beliefs and the way in which these values and beliefs have influenced the research process and findings. During field work, the researcher wrote a series of reflective notes. In the final chapter of this thesis, I share several of these reflections.

**Prolonged Involvement and Persistent Observation**

Prolonged involvement and persistent observation enhances qualitative research (Long & Johnson, 2000). Persistent observation enables researchers to identify important characteristics and issues in the setting and to focus on them. In this study, observations were conducted at different times of the day, on different days of the week, over the course of six months.

### **Peer Debriefing**

Peer debriefing can include discussing emerging findings with supervisors and colleagues, presenting and defending findings at conferences and in other venues, and presenting the findings and implications to interested groups (Long & Johnson, 2000). During data collection and analysis, the researcher consulted with supervisory committee members on several occasions to discuss the coding strategy, analytic framework, and to present and discuss emerging findings. Early findings were presented to colleagues at five conferences in 2008, and the dissertation was publicly defended in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Western Ontario.

### **Triangulation**

Triangulation minimizes potential bias that can result from over-reliance on one data source. Triangulation is achieved by employing multiple data sources and methods (Hammell, 2002; Long & Johnson, 2000). In this study, several methods were used including observation, interviews, and a review of the organization's vision and mission statements.

### **Audit of the Decision Trail**

Documentation of all sources of data, data collection strategies, and the decisions that were made provides evidence that can be used to evaluate the rigour of a qualitative study (Long & Johnson, 2000). Field notes, interview transcripts, and materials collected were available to members of the supervisory committee for review along with analysis notes, coding summaries and the final dissertation.

### **Respondent Validation**

Respondent validation is useful in assessing the plausibility of the study findings (Hammell, 2002). Hammell (2002) suggests that respondents should be consulted and their viewpoints documented to provide readers with an indication of the degree to which the interpretation is consistent with the perspectives of participants. Prior to submitting the final dissertation for examination, two of the librarians were provided with copies of the results chapters and *Table 7.1* (p. 113) and asked to evaluate the final product. A summary of the comments from the librarians is included in Section 6.8.

#### **4.7: Ethics**

Prior to beginning this study, ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Western Ontario. This study was conducted in a community setting and several strategies were employed to inform library patrons about the research. Signs were placed in high traffic areas of the library and comments from some of the parents suggested that these signs were noticed by patrons. Prior to engaging in conversations with participants, the researcher introduced herself and provided a brief description of the research.

Vulnerable populations are individuals who may be harmed by researchers as a result of their competence, powerlessness, or disadvantaged status (Sutton, Erlen, Glad & Simioff, 2003). This study included members of three vulnerable populations: children, racial and ethnic minorities, and individuals with disabilities (Sutton et al., 2003). In this study, all of the individuals who participated in interviews were informed of the study purpose and their rights as participants. Children under the age of 18 were asked to provide parental assent prior to participating in interviews. Individuals with disabilities were interviewed with their parent or caregiver in attendance. Although the researcher attempted to recruit members from a range of cultural backgrounds, it was difficult to recruit participants who spoke a language other than English at home.

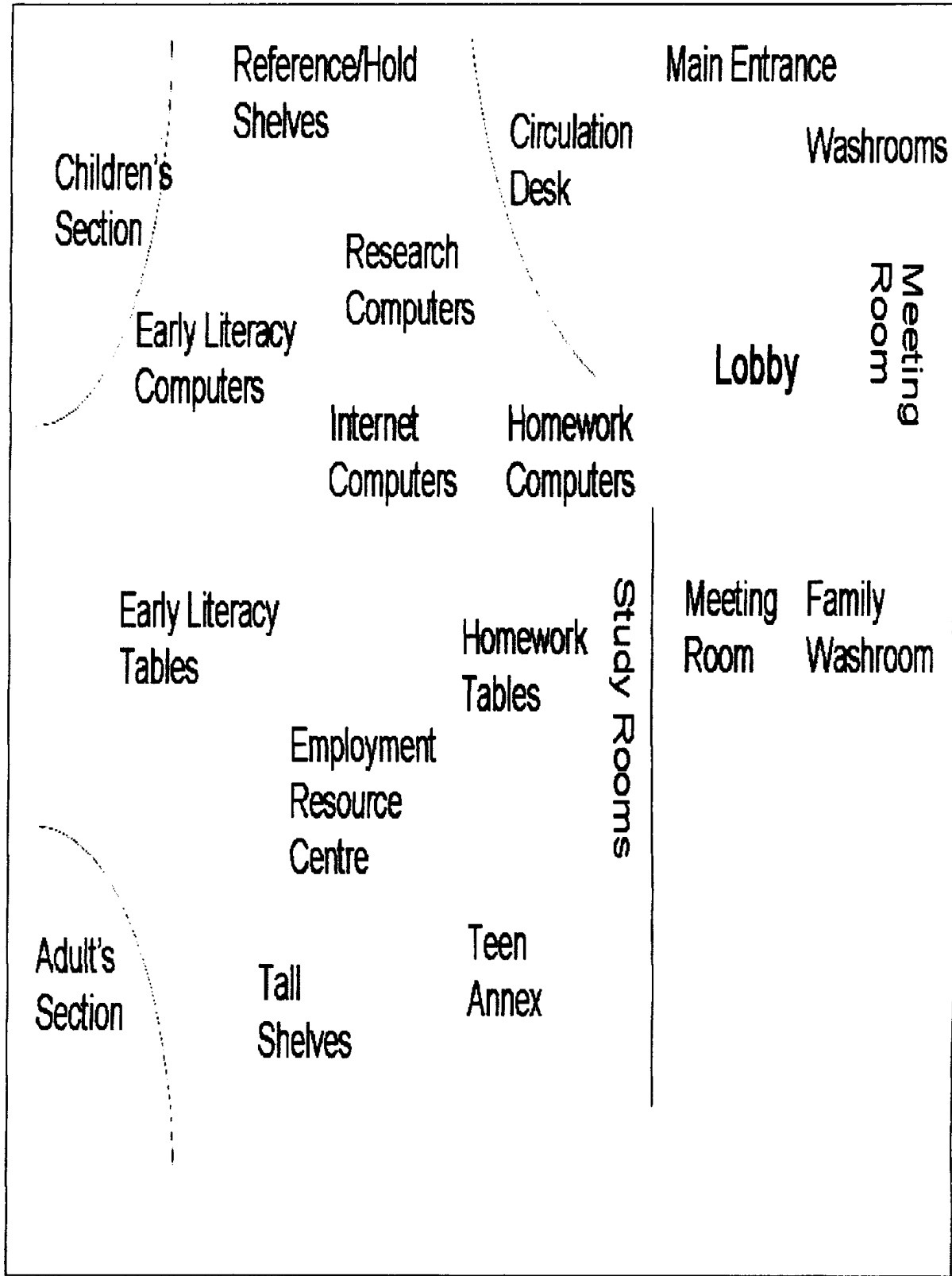
## **Chapter 5: Descriptive Results**

### **5.1: Overview**

According to Geertz (1973) culture is articulated through social action and ethnographers “see” culture by observing behaviour (Geertz, 1973). The quality of ethnographic research depends on the extent to which it thickly describes culture, and the extent to which it takes others into the culture that it is describing (Geertz, 1973). This chapter provides a thick description of the culture of the library in the first-person based on field notes that were recorded between the end of October 2007 and the beginning of May 2008. The thick description of the library’s culture is intended to give the reader a chance to see some of the cultural characteristics of a supportive recreational organization, as they were observed by the researcher during field work.

Figure 5.1 is an illustration of the physical layout of the library, and Table 5.1 presents an adapted version of the Physical Accessibility Measure for Schools (RACSN, 2003), a measure of the environment that was developed for use in schools. The figure and table are followed by a detailed description of the library that was recorded one morning in December of 2007 and is reported here in the present tense. The chapter continues with a description of the library on each day of the week based on field visits that occurred between October and December of 2007. This description illustrates how the library changes from day-to-day during the course of a week and describes the programs and events that take place at the library on a regular basis. The chapter concludes with a description of four special events that occurred at the library between October of 2007 and May of 2008. These events are included to enhance the description of the library and to illustrate how the library was used as a hub by members of the community and other organization.

**Figure 5.1: The Physical Layout of the Library, 2007**



## **5.2: Assessing the Physical Space**

Table 5.1 includes several items taken from the Physical Accessibility Measure for Schools measure (PAMS) (RACSN, 2003). The PAMS provides a quantitative measure of the physical accessibility of the library. As the table indicates, the library was accessible on all but four of the indicators of accessibility.

**Table 5.1: Adapted Physical Accessibility Measure for Schools**

| <b>Item</b>  | <b>Assessment</b> |
|--|-------------------|
| <b>Main Entrance</b>   |                   |
| Is there a threshold in the door?                                    | Yes               |
| Is the threshold less than 1.5 cm high?                              | Yes               |
| Is the centre of the door opener between .76 – 1.1 m off the ground? | Yes               |
| Is there 1.5 m of clear space on the pull side of the door?          | Yes               |
| Is there at least 1.2 m of open space on the push side of the door?  | Yes               |
| Is there 1.2 m between the doors?                                    | Yes               |
| Do the doors swing in the same direction?                            | Yes               |
| <b>Parking Lot</b>   |                   |
| Is there a sign on the handicapped parking spot?                     | Yes               |
| If it is on the pavement is it at least 1.8 m by 1.8 m wide?         | Yes               |
| Is the walkway 1.2 m wide?   | Yes               |
| Is there a drop off zone?  | Yes               |
| Is the space at least 1.5 m wide?                                    | Yes               |
| <b>Behind the Counter</b>  |                   |
| Is the area 1.2 m wide?  | Yes               |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Is the counter less than .82 m feet above the floor?                  | Yes |
| Is there 1.5 m of space at the beginning of the aisle?                | Yes |
| Is the space behind the counter:<br>.82 m high?                       | Yes |
| .49 m deep?   | Yes |
| .76 m wide?   | Yes |
| <b>Homework Area</b>  |     |
| Is there 1.5 m between tables?  | No  |
| Is there .49 m of depth under the table?                              | Yes |
| Is the space between the front legs of the table at least .76 m wide? | Yes |
| Is there .76 m of space from the floor to the table?                  | Yes |
| Are the chairs adjustable?  | Yes |
| <b>Shelves</b>  |     |
| Is there a 1.2 m opening in front of the shelves?                     | No  |
| Are the shelves holding material .31 m off the floor?                 | No  |
| <b>Lobby</b>  |     |
| Is the phone cord more than 1 m long?                                 | No  |
| Is the phone between .76 – 1.2 m off the ground?                      | Yes |
| <b>Washrooms</b>  |     |
| Is the entry 1.2 m wide?  | Yes |
| Is there a threshold?   | No  |
| Is there a kick-plate on the push side of the door?                   | No  |

|   |                      |
|---|----------------------|
| Is the midpoint of the handle between .9 – 1 m off the floor?             | No handle, push open |
| Is there 1.5 m of space on the pull side of the door?                     | Yes                  |
| Is there .91 – 1.5 m of space beside the latch side of the door?          | Yes                  |
| Is there 1.2 m of space on the push side of the door?                     | Yes                  |
| Is there a clear space between .16 – 1.2 m on the latch side of the door? | Yes                  |

### **5.3: A Visit to the Library**

The library is located on the northwest corner of a busy intersection in the northeast quadrant of London, Ontario. It is a “big” library, relative to other library locations in the city. There is a parking lot adjacent to the building that accommodates approximately 25 vehicles. The parking lot is very busy in the mornings and after school. One of the parking spaces is reserved for individuals with disabilities. This spot is closest to the entrance.

As I approach the doors at the main entrance, I notice the hours posted on the outside of one of the doors. I pull the door open and walk into the hallway. In the hallway between the doors on my left is a bulletin board that displays the *Hours of Operation*, the *Rules of Conduct* for the Library, and two other posters. One of the posters tells patrons that members of the staff are not responsible for unattended children. The second poster advertises some of the resources that are available at the library for individuals who are looking for work. On the second set of doors, I notice the universal access sign, and a *Libraries for All* sticker (Appendix 13) which I also observe at the circulation desk. *Libraries for All* is a program that enhances the accessibility of the library for patrons with communication impairments by equipping each library with communication boards and stickers that are posted on the doors and at the circulation desk. The stickers announce the program and indicate that the



program is a partnership between the library and a local children's rehabilitation centre.

The second door opens into a spacious lobby area. A display stands in the middle of the lobby announcing the programs that are happening at the library. Today, the library is offering two children's programs, *Books for Babies* and *Tales for Tots*. I pick up a brochure entitled *Libraries by the Numbers* that provides statistical facts about the library. I collect four different brochures, two of which outline the library policies, one that advertises the hours of operation, and one that provides information about library resources.

In the lobby, several bulletin boards display advertisements and community announcements on the walls around me. To my right I notice a collection of *English as a Second Language* (ESL) resources and advertisements for classes and conversation circles. The washrooms, a payphone, and a multi-coloured, handwritten sign advertising a program called the *Games Hour* are posted on the walls. The meeting rooms are located just off the lobby near the main entrance. These large rooms are used for programs and other community events. A family washroom sits between the meeting rooms. More posters and announcements line the wall next to the glass display. There is information about music, volunteer tutors, research studies, and upcoming programs and events at the library.

I walk into the main library area. The main area is all on one level and the windows at the south end make the area seem bright and open. The shelves appear to be well spaced and the floor appears to be free of barriers. I notice a shelving unit that houses digital video and compact disks and wonder about the accessibility of the unit to individuals in wheelchairs. I notice that there are tall shelves in the teen and adult section of the library and shorter shelves in the children's section. Both areas would be difficult for patrons in wheelchairs to access without assistance.

To my right is the circulation desk labeled with another *Libraries for All* sticker. In the windows that separate the front desk from the staff workroom I see an advertisement for library merchandise, a Certificate of Appreciation from a local organization that supports individuals with disabilities, and a poster advertising a

program called *A Book for Every Child*. A couple of Christmas cards are displayed at the very end of the windows.

As I move towards the hold shelves, I spot the “Check Out” and “Help Desk” signs. I walk past the circulation desk towards the hold shelves and read about loan periods, fines, and fees. At the end of the counter there is a jar collecting change for the library. There are four sets of hold shelves, two general reference shelves, and two family resource shelves. The research and catalogue computer bank is on my left past the internet computers. There are six internet computers and an additional computer for printing. Most of the computer chairs are adjustable and pull out from the desks. On each internet computer, there is a copy of the computer policy and information on a project that is currently being undertaken by the library to filter sexually explicit material on the public-use internet computers.

There is a table that has been set up for writing letters to Santa at the west end of the shelves that house the digital video and compact disks. The materials that are displayed on this table change regularly to reflect holidays and monthly events. There are four homework computers and three homework tables in front of three meeting rooms. The homework computers and homework tables appear to be wheelchair accessible. There are three study rooms that patrons can book in two hour blocks. One of the three study rooms is occupied but rooms A and B are available to patrons and frequently occupied. After school on Tuesdays and Thursdays these rooms are used for the homework club, a program that is offered in partnership with another community organization. The homework club matches volunteers with elementary school-aged children who require academic assistance.

There are copies of the newspaper on a table in the Employment Resource Centre (ERC), an area where individuals who are looking for work can create resumes, look for employment, and receive assistance from a library staff member. There are six computers that can be used to prepare resumes and to search the employment listings. One of the computers has an enhanced screen for individuals with visual impairments. A staff member’s desk sits close to the table, next to a short stack of shelves that house information about writing resumes and cover letters. The teen annex shelves are filled with books for teens. The annex is furnished with a

paisley rug, a round table, a couple of chairs, and two bean bag chairs. Although these items are popular with many of the regular participants, they are not wheelchair accessible.

Week day mornings are quiet relative to afternoons, evenings, and Saturdays. This morning I notice one woman using the catalogue computer and one man in the adult section. Two of the staff members are chatting in the background. I notice an assortment of holiday books displayed on the shelves around me. The titles that are displayed would appeal to individuals representing a range of cultural and religious backgrounds. Some of the titles that catch my eye are: *Hannaukuh*, *Passover*, *Angelina's Christmas*, *A Jewish Holiday*, *Woodland Christmas*, and *Kwanza*.

I wander into the *Early Literacy* area. There are two early literacy computers, and two additional catalogue computers located on tables in the area. I notice that headphones for the early literacy computers are available at the circulation desk. The early literacy computers are equipped with reading exercises and games that can be used by children who are learning to read. Just past the computers are the short tables. These tables are popular with the regular participants.

In the children's section, I see a wooden coat rack, a colourful plastic fish, and a couple of kites. A sign displayed on the short table in the play area reminds patrons to "*Have fun playing but please clean up afterwards*". There are several puzzles and toys scattered on the floor in the play area and a round table that is covered in blank pages waiting to be coloured. I notice a booklet that provides information for families, and a couple of children's books that have been left behind. Two of the staff members are discussing a book in the background. I wander into the adult's section. It is one of the first sunny winter days we've had in a while and I can't help but notice how the sun streams in through the windows. This is a nice, warm spot to sit, play, read, or think. I settle into one of the chairs and rest against the window.

**Figure 5.2: Southeast Windows, Adult Reading Section**



#### **5.4: A Week at the Library**

##### **Monday**

I ask a staff member about what goes on at the library when it is closed on Mondays. She tells me that this is a day for sorting books, returning items to the shelves, organizing, transfers, and so on. Although Mondays are busy days with transfers, holds, and other jobs, Mondays are less structured than other days.

##### **Tuesday**

I arrive around one o'clock and notice that the shifts are changing. There is a lot of activity and chatting behind the desk. One of the staff members is leaving and another has just arrived. One of the staff members is sitting at her desk in the main area and another staff member is returning books from the workroom to the shelves. The library is quiet and most of the patrons who are here are adults. I notice that all of the internet computers and many of the ERC computers are occupied. There are a few young people here, but not many. I notice an older teen working at a table in the

homework area near the teen annex. There is no one in the children's section, and only one parent comes in during the time that I am here.

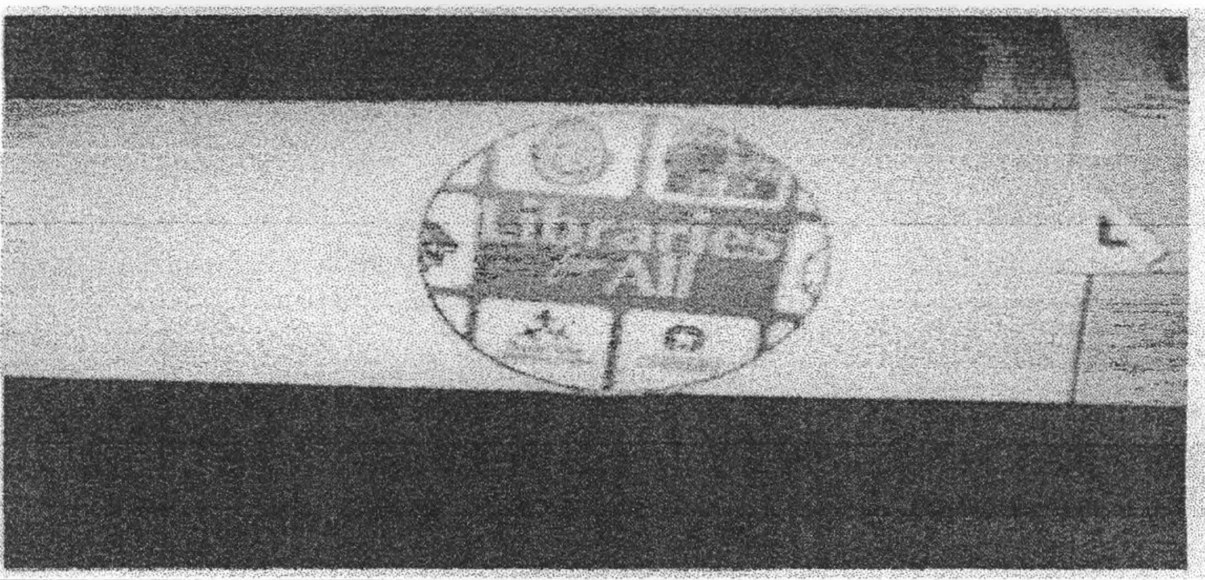
I decide to spend time exploring the library. What kind of place is the library? What kinds of things seem to be important to the library? What kinds of things do I see when I look around the library?

**Openness/accessibility:** How is this made visible? How is it enacted?

**Figure 5.3: Accessibility Symbols, Main Entrance**

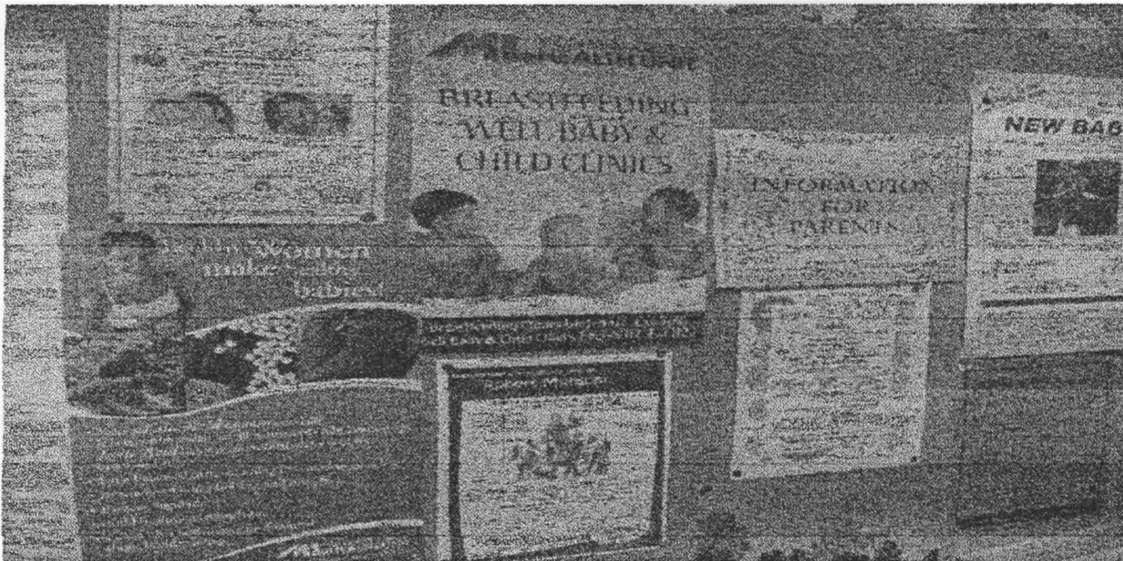


**Figure 5.4: Accessibility Symbol, Circulation Desk**

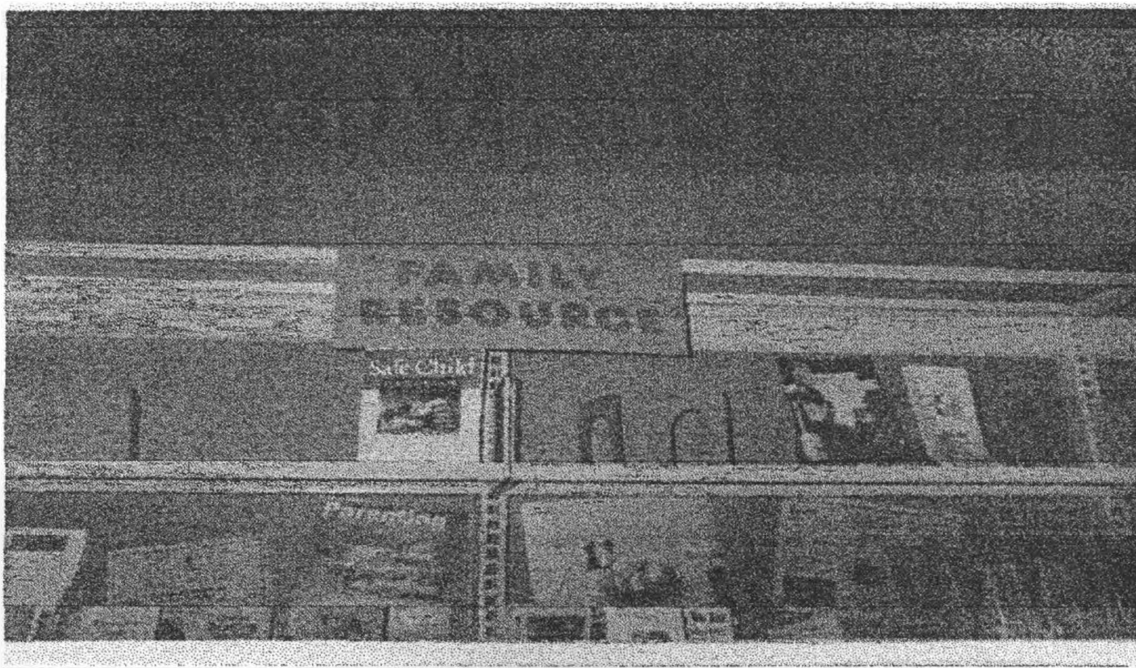


**Family:** How does the library support families?

**Figure 5.5: Announcement Board, Off the Main Lobby**



**Figure 5.6: Family Resource Shelf**



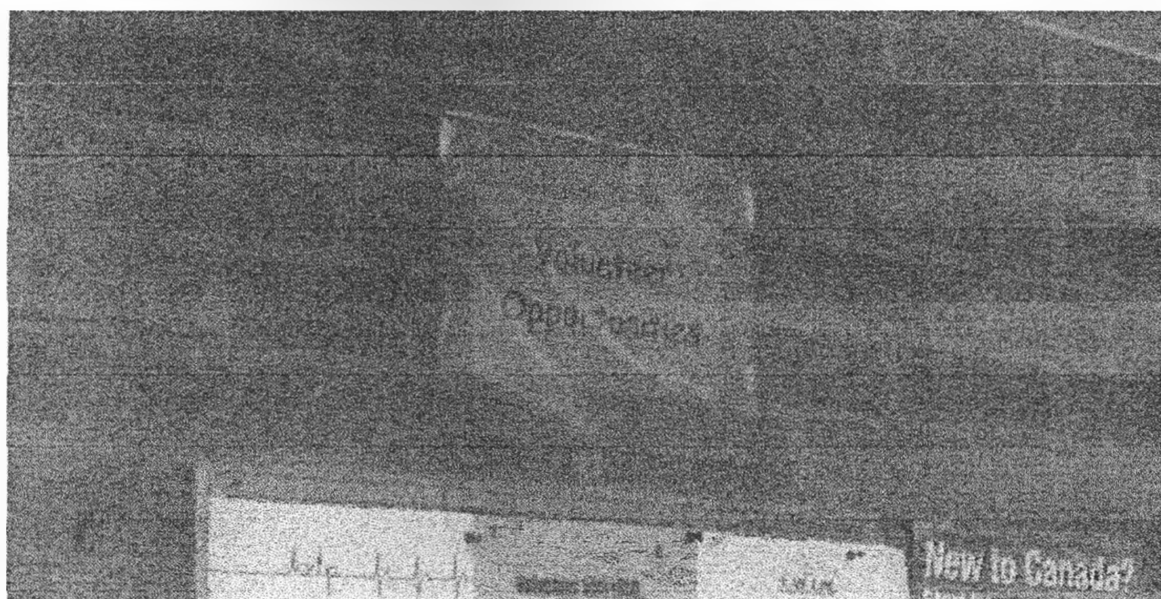
**Human potential:** When I look at the flyers advertising events and some of the books that are featured, I notice that the library is a place that tells us that we all have potential. Human potential transcends ability, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. There seems to be an emphasis on achieving and overcoming barriers.

**Figure 5.7: Communicating Human Potential**



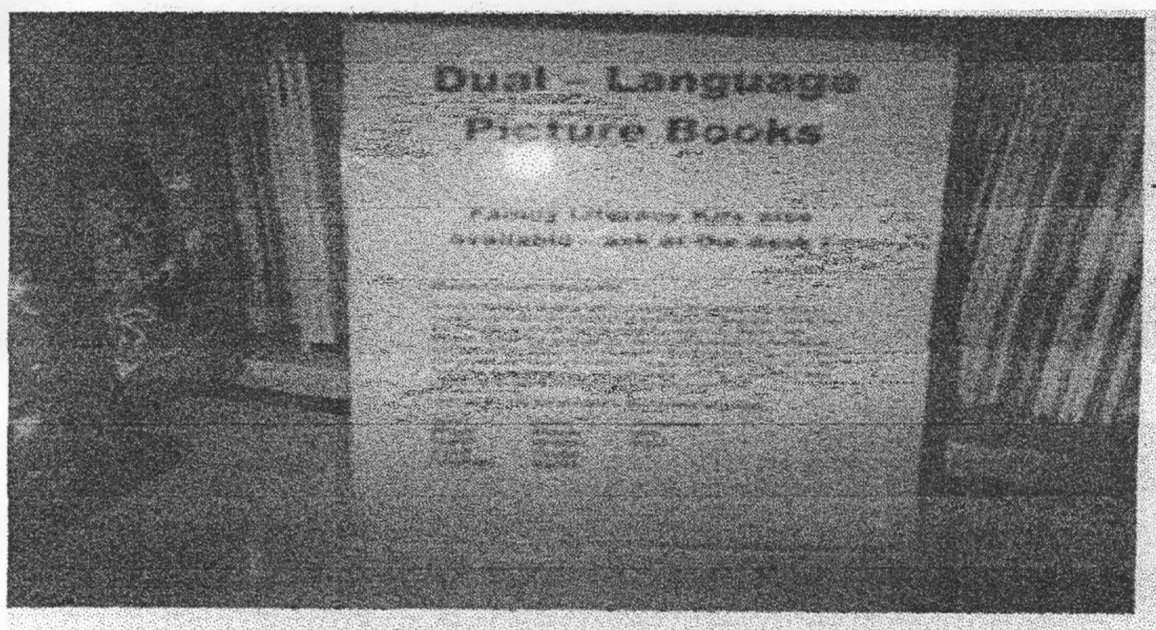
**Volunteerism/Community involvement:** In several places throughout the library there is information about volunteering. Some of the youth who participate regularly at the library are volunteers. They are able to use their volunteer hours to fulfill the provincial requirement for 40 volunteer hours prior to graduation from Grade 12. There is also a partnership between the library and a local organization that supports individuals with disabilities and these individuals volunteer at the library through this partnership.

**Figure 5.8: Volunteer Opportunities, Main Lobby**



**Diversity:** Diversity is enacted in many ways throughout the library. As I look around I see a range of items that might appeal to individuals from a number of different cultural backgrounds. For example, there are books that feature characters that are culturally diverse and newspapers in several languages. I hear individuals speaking in languages other than English while I am observing participants in the setting.

**Figure 5.9: Dual-Language Picture Books**

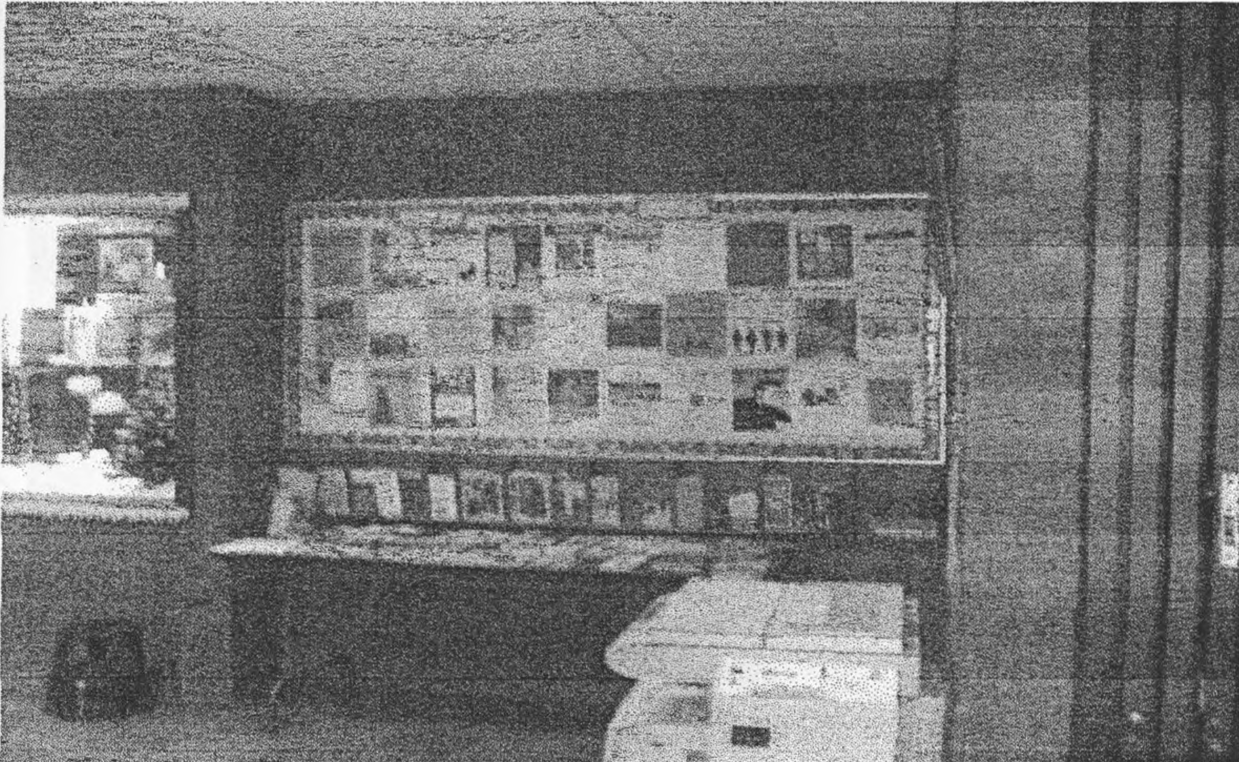


**Resources for individuals with disabilities:** There are several books about different disabilities in the collections and information about disability on the resource shelf. A directory that lists recreational opportunities for individuals with disabilities is also on file.

**Community hub:** The library seems to be a centre for information about the city and the community. For example, there are several boards that display upcoming activities and events. There are tables that display brochures and pamphlets for individuals who are new to the community and for individuals who are interested in learning to speak English. There are also several brochures that invite individuals to be involved in the community and that promote issues related to equality and social justice.

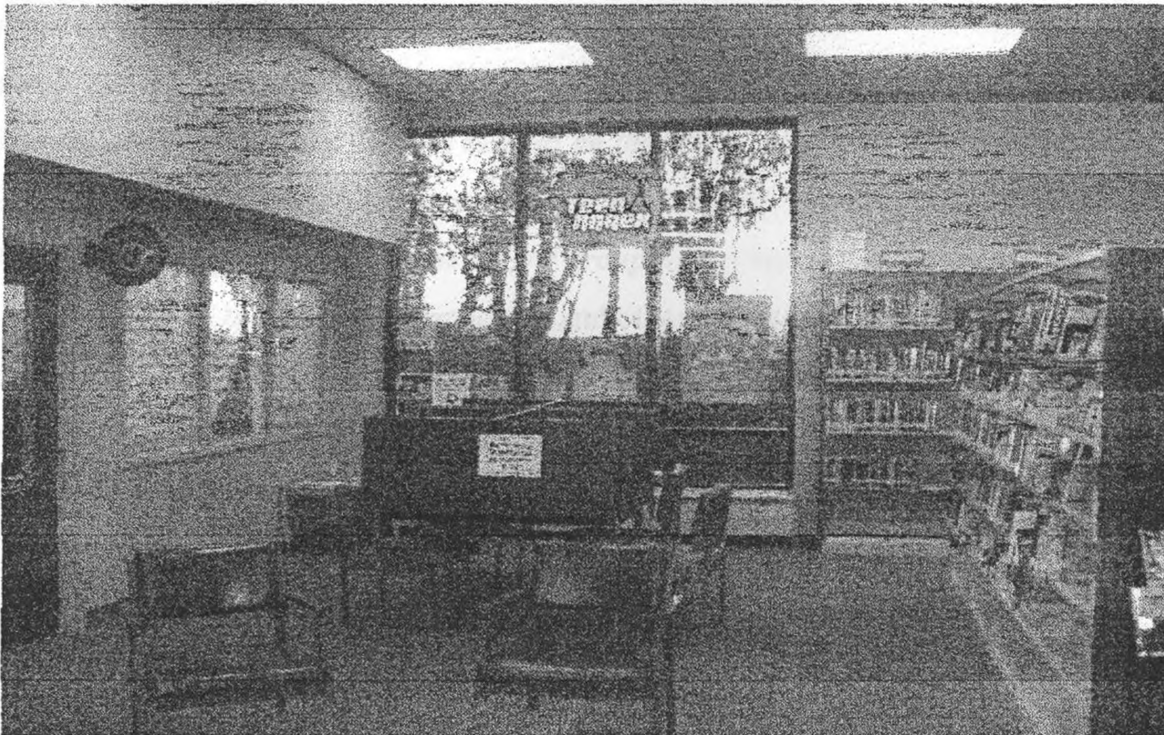


**Figure 5.10: Community Announcements: Main Lobby**



I continue to look around and enter the teen annex where I pick up an assortment of information about sexual health and mental health.

**Figure 5.11: The Teen Annex**



I look around for information that might tell me about the rules for patron use at the library. Although the code of conduct is visible in the corridor between the two entrance doors, it is detailed and I wonder if the language used in the document would be accessible to all patrons. I also notice signs in different places throughout the library. For example, there is a sign on the table in the ERC that encourages patrons to enjoy beverages and food but asks that they clean up after themselves. There are also two signs in the children's area that remind patrons to have fun and to clean up when they are finished.

I head back to the children's section and chat with a woman who is at the library with her baby. She tells me about her child and we talk about the weather.

### **Wednesday**

The library is having a live musical event tonight. I arrive at 7:45 p.m. and notice a number of younger patrons. I am not surprised by the number of youth at the branch because a member of the staff has indicated that nights are extremely busy at the library.

*Wednesday nights are your best bet to come in for this kind of stuff... that's the night that I see most of the kids coming in... Wednesday nights are the nights that I really see the kids interacting... they're either working on projects or they're doing homework or they're just goofing around on the computers... they start to get rowdy around 6:30 or so...that's when you have to start talking to them and stuff like that but that's usually when we get the larger groupings of kids is on Wednesday (Staff 6).*

Some of the children I recognize and others faces are new. I wander around and chat with a few of the girls. They have been here since school ended. One of the girls participates at the library every night. The other girl participates once each week. Staff 4 is buzzing back and forth across the library chatting with everyone. She seems pleased with the concert and she is very busy because of the number of young people who are there.

#### **Thursday**

I visit the library this afternoon to observe the Homework Club, a program that is offered on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. I leave my bag and clipboard in one of the study rooms and notice three volunteers (two women and one man) working at the homework tables sorting cards and stacking digital video disks. All of the volunteers have disabilities; the man and one of the women are in wheelchairs. I introduce myself and the study. We chat for a while and I ask one of the volunteers about the accessibility of the physical space. She tells me that although she is able to navigate through the aisles, she has trouble getting her chair under some of the tables.

The *Homework Club* starts between 3:30 and 4:00 on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The program is offered by another neighbourhood organization at the library and matches elementary students with volunteers who provide assistance with homework and one-on-one assistance with school work. The volunteers and students meet twice each week to do homework and practice other academic skills. The program is very busy and occupies the entire North end of the library including all of the homework tables and both of the study rooms.

**Figure 5.12: The Homework Tables**



Some of the children who participate in the program work on an individual basis with volunteers. Others work in groups with one volunteer. The program is structured in the sense that it runs for a set period of time, but the groups themselves seem to be fairly unstructured. Some of the children read to the volunteers, some of them eat snacks while they are working and I notice a lot of laughing and joking. Some of the groups are louder than others, and participants travel in and out of the rooms during the program. I wonder if this flexibility is part of what makes the program appealing to children from a range of cultural backgrounds, abilities, and learning styles. The program leader supervises the program and works with some of the children.

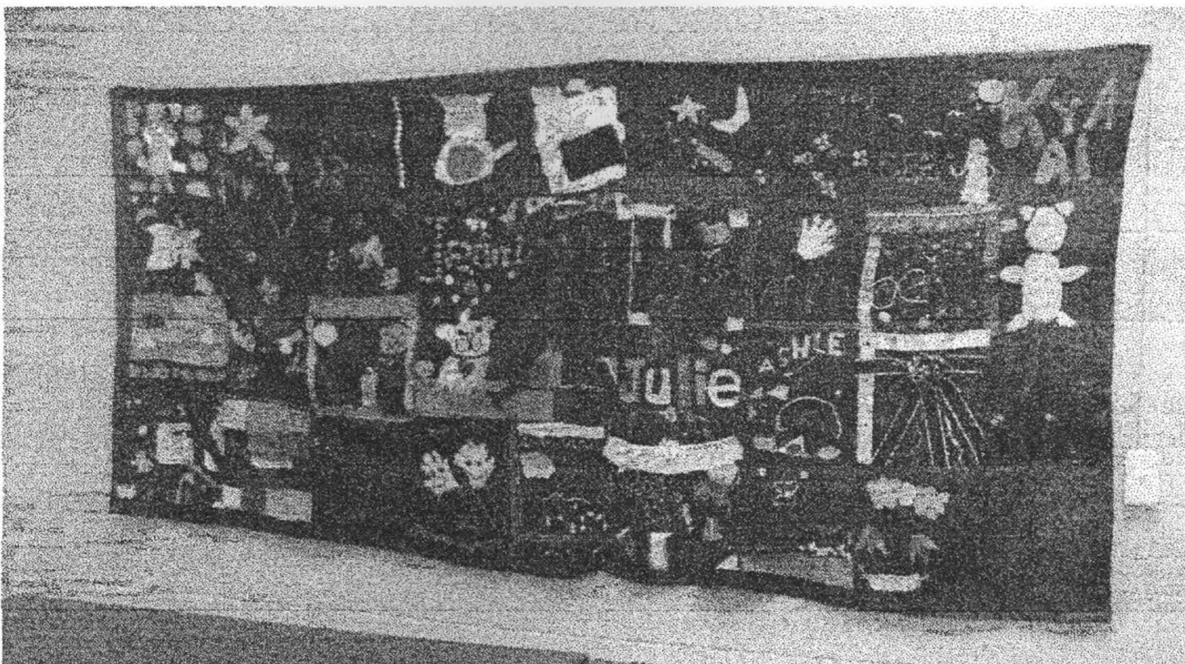
I decide to sit in the children's section for a few minutes. While I am there, a parent with a jogger stroller whizzes through the library and joins me. We comment on how nice the day is (it is sunny and warm and the sun is just starting to come down) and I introduce myself. She tells me that her daughter is fifteen months old. Her family lives in the neighbourhood and she walks to the library with her daughter. She tells me that she discovered the library after having her daughter and that they now participate in the weekly programs that are offered at the library. They also borrow books and digital video disks. She tells me that although they do not have

cable television at home her daughter enjoys watching the digital video disks. She thinks it's neat to see her daughter beginning to recognize some of the characters that are featured in the programs.

### **Friday**

When I arrive, one of the staff members is at the circulation desk checking materials out for patrons and two other staff members are working in the workroom. Another staff member comes in just after I arrive. I ask one of the staff members if I can look around in one of the meeting rooms and she gives me the keys. I go into the room and look around. I notice a big, bright, colourful quilt on one of the walls. The quilt is blue and covered with names, colours, and little designs. When I ask a staff member about the quilt she tells me it was made by some of the children at the library.

**Figure 5.13: Quilt, Meeting Room B**



While I am in the room, one of the younger, part-time staff members comes in. We chat briefly. I leave the room and talk with two of the staff members who are working behind the circulation desk. I feel awkward being behind the circulation desk and I don't really know what to say or do. Things are quiet.

## Saturday

It's Saturday and the library is bustling with activity. A group of younger participants is using the computers. There are some older adults at the site, but they seem to be peripheral to the children and youth. It seems that most of the children and youth are in the center of the library while many of the adult patrons sit in the chairs along the windows. There is a certain business to the branch on Saturdays. One of the librarians tells me:

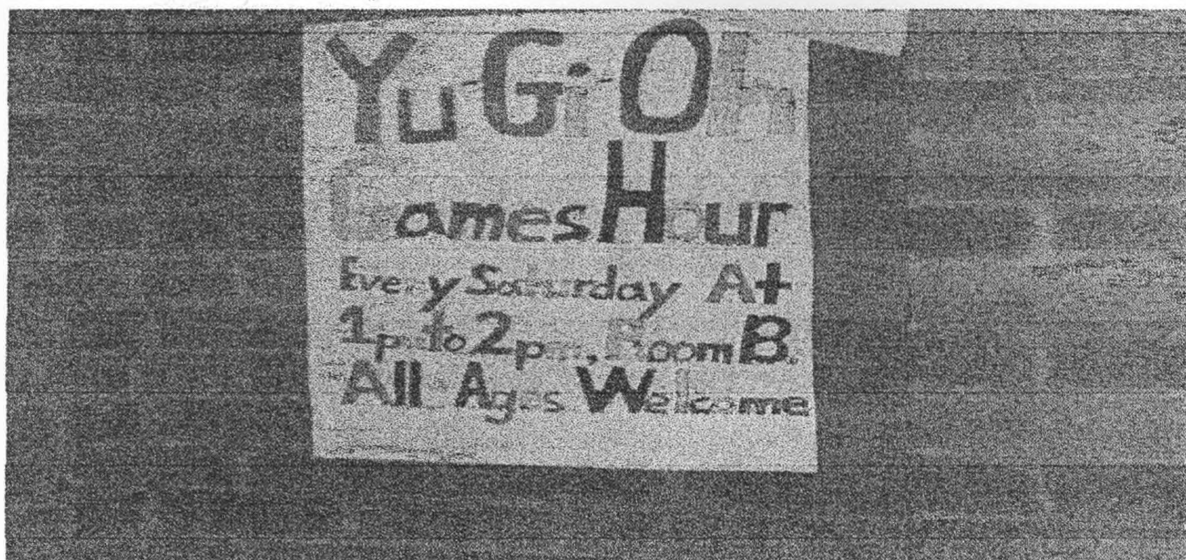
*It buzzes. Yeah, we talk about it all the time. You know, it's funny because you can come in and it can be really quiet, and... you know then you come in and... it's buzzing. But it could be buzzing in really different ways, we notice. It could be buzzing of people needing our assistance... it could be buzzing with people checking things out. Or, there's another type of buzz... when there's tons of people and they're just talking to each other, they're looking at the materials, you know, they're on the computers... It's really interesting. (Staff 3)*

I observe three boys and two girls on the computers. I am uncertain about the ages of the children, but I guess that they are older elementary students. I recognize several of the boys because I have observed them in other library programs. The children divide their time between interacting with each other and interacting with the computer. At times, the computer is secondary to the interaction between the children. At other times, they focus on the computer and do not interact with one another. They talk about the rules of the computer game, discuss strategy, encourage each other, and chastise each other. It seems to me that children come to the library to play and to be with their friends.

I observe a group of boys chatting and arguing back and forth. I wonder if they are waiting for a computer, or playing together, or just hanging out. They are excited and speak quickly, trying to prompt each other along. As one of the boys gets excited, his voice becomes louder. They talk back and forth and comment to one another about what they think is going to happen in the game.

I decide to observe the *Games Hour*, a program that is starting in one of the meeting rooms. During the *Games Hour*, the children play a popular game using cards.

**Figure 5.14: Games Hour Program Announcement**



On each card is a picture of a hero or villain and players earn points by sparring with each other using the cards. The game is played in pairs and each pair agrees on the total points needed to win at the beginning of each match. Each of the children brings a deck of cards, and they play at long tables in groups of different sizes. In addition to playing cards during the *Games Hour*, players look at other players' cards and trade cards with one another. Most of the players are boys. There is one girl in the room with another child who is too young to play. She shows me her necklace and explains what all of the things on it do. I observe for a while and then leave the room to look around the lobby.

I decide to go back into the room and notice a parent of one of the participants sitting at the table. He stays for a while, then goes, and then comes back. The program leader is older than most of the participants and seems to be friends with some of the participants.

### **5.5: Special Events**

#### **The Teen Advisory Committee**

I am observing the first meeting of the *Teen Advisory Committee* today at 4 o'clock. I arrive at the library just before 4 pm and greet one of the staff members.

The staff member is coordinating the committee and she tells that we will be meeting in one of the meeting rooms. The four female participants range in age from 12 to 18. The staff member tells the girls that the *Advisory Committee* is responsible for advising the library about programs and services that might interest teens, in planning displays and promotions for teens, and making suggestions about the library collection. The staff member says it is important that the committee plans and oversees one project (the creation of a mural for the library) from start to finish. There is some paperwork that the girls are required to complete. The staff member tells the girls that they will need to complete a *Volunteer Application Form* and that they will all be interviewed by the staff member who oversees the hiring of all library volunteers. Each high school student in Ontario is required to complete a set number of community volunteer hours before he or she is eligible to graduate and the staff member tells the girls that volunteering as a committee member qualifies towards the completion of these hours.

### **A Class Visit**

Today I am observing a group of kindergarten students, parents, and teachers who are visiting the library for a special storytime. For many of the children, this is a first visit to the library. As part of the visit, the children will receive their own library cards and have the opportunity to choose a book to take home. When I ask about the class visits, one of the staff members tells me:

*I think that, especially when they're children, you want them to get this sense that when they're in the library it's a happy place, it's a good place, it's a place where they can have fun... I don't know, like people have a very, I shouldn't say everyone, but a lot of people have a very uptight view of the library as like, fines, and you know you have to be quiet, and you know one book per person or whatever. But, you want to kind of instill in them when they're little that it's a happy place... that they should be happy to come to the library. They see McDonald's and they get all excited... they should see the library and get all excited. When I was little I was not a good reader and did not like to read, but I remember coming to the library and it didn't matter if I wasn't a good reader, because there were other things to do and it was a place for more than just books. (Staff 5)*



I am in the children's section and the children are sitting on the floor in front of me. The adults are either sitting or standing around the children and the program leader is sitting with her back to the window facing the children. There are 12 adults, 11 women and one man. I look at the adults. Some of them are smiling, others have their arms crossed, and some look bored.

The program leader greets the children and says that they are all friends at the library. She asks the children what grade they are in. She opens a library book and begins to read. She tells the children that they are listening very well. After the first story, the group sings a song and when the song ends, the program leader asks if the children want to do it again. The response is mixed. They sing another song called *Sticky Bubble Gum*, where the children take an imaginary piece of gum and stick the gum to different parts of their bodies. When the children stick the gum on their "bums", all of the adults laugh. The children seem to love this part of the song.

The program leader starts reading a pop-up book. Many of the children appear to be impressed with the selection. When the book is done, the program leader pulls out several finger puppets (a crocodile and some monkeys). The crocodile eats the monkeys one at a time, and spits each of the monkeys out. The children seem to love this and ask the program leader to play the game again and again so that they can try to catch a monkey. The children giggle as monkeys fly through the air. When the game ends, the program leader tells the children to stand up, and get their wiggles out so that she can read one last story. During the last story, I watch the children. Many of them rock back and forth to the rhythm of her voice as she reads. I notice three boys at the back of the group who are playing with one another.

When the story ends, everyone is given a picture of a monkey to colour. One of the children is reprimanded for doing something. The children are asked to pass pictures and supplies around. Adults help the program leader pass the papers around and most of the children are clumped at the table or on the floor. A small group of children occupies a table in the early literacy area. I am curious about this group and sit at the next table. There are four boys and one girl in the group. As the children colour at the table, a group of adults speak to one another.

After a few minutes, the program leader calls the children back. The program leader tells the children that will all receive library cards today and that they can choose one book to take home. She shows them some of the books that they might choose and the children are given their cards and begin to look for books. Some of the adults help the children while others sit and read with the children.

After a few minutes, the teacher comes along and tells the children that it is time to return to school. One of the children starts to cry. I think that someone might have tried to take his book. As the children start to leave, the program leader cleans up. I hear one of the other staff members ask how the visit went. The program leader seems relieved to be finished. Another staff member walks past and says “ah...peace”.

### **The Winter Community Open House**

Today the library is hosting a *Community Open House*. A local Middle Eastern group will be providing music, and there will be activities for the children, and food and refreshments for everyone. I arrive early and see that two of the regular participants are already there, following a staff member around. The staff member is going back and forth between the meeting room and the library. She helps the participants by providing them with colouring supplies. I decide to go in and sit with the regular participants. The staff member greets the musicians when they arrive. One of the musicians brings his daughter, and she comes to the table where we are sitting and joins us. The musician is a teacher at one of the local elementary schools.

A little boy and his sister come up to one of the staff members who is colouring with a group of children at the table in front of us. The staff member seems to know both of the children. Eventually the boy makes his way to our table. We spend time together writing a letter to Santa. As the time gets closer to 2 o'clock, the room fills up. The mood in the room is very informal and patrons trickle in and out as the afternoon progresses. The *Games Hour* children who are playing in the next room come in from time to time. One of the staff members smiles and greets people who are lingering at the door, and encourages them to come in. People help themselves to cookies and juice and listen to the music. The families who attend the *Community Open House* represent a range of cultural backgrounds and abilities. One of the staff

members is sitting with adult and child patrons on the floor. Another staff member is standing near the door, smiling and taking pictures of the crowd.

### **Professional Development Day**

It's a *Professional Development* day today for the elementary schools and the library is offering movies and activities for participants. When I arrive, I hear music, talking, and activity in one of the meeting rooms. One of the local organizations is hosting a Christmas party in the meeting room. Participants in the meeting room represent a range of cultural backgrounds. I also notice several individuals with disabilities in the room. I walk into the main library and notice that the library is busy. There are children at the internet computers and on the homework computers. I think to myself that it feels more like a Saturday than a typical Friday with the noise level and the number of children running about in the main area. Several staff members are working. One of the staff members is telling some of the younger patrons that a movie is scheduled to begin in one of the meeting rooms at 2:00 p.m. One participant shows up for the movie and he watches along with a member of the staff who is in the room to supervise.

I decide to sit in the adult section because I notice a group of regular participants are playing at a table nearby. I recognize some of the children, but others are new to me. They are pretty rambunctious. They run around a bit and I hear them swearing and teasing one another. I realize that the staff members may not be able to hear the participants because the participants are quite far from the circulation desk.

### **5.6: Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a thick description of the library. In the first section of the chapter, I described the physical space and identified some of the characteristics of the setting that supported participants with a range of abilities. These included a designated parking space for individuals with disabilities, automatic doors, the fact that the branch is on one level, the availability of a family washroom, and programs including the *Libraries for All* program. The main space appeared to be open and conversations with two of the volunteers with physical disabilities seemed to confirm this observation. There were visible symbols that

communicated accessibility including the universal access symbol and the *Libraries for All* logo in various places. The walls and the shelves were populated with books, flyers, brochures, and announcements that would appeal to individuals from a range of cultures, socioeconomic statuses, and ability levels.

In the second section of this chapter, I described each day of the week at the library. This information was included to illustrate how the library changed from one day to the next and at different times of day. Mornings tended to be very quiet. However, from approximately 3:30 until 9:00 p.m. the library bustled with activity. Many young participants attended the library during these times, and participated in programs including the homework program. Some of the younger participants came in after school and stayed with friends until the library closed. The computers, homework tables and, study rooms were frequently occupied between approximately 3:30 p.m. and 9 p.m. and during most of the time on Saturdays. There was a group of youth who visited the library regularly and who were observed at the library on a number of different days of the week. Many of these young participants seemed to know one another and the staff.

In the final section of this chapter, I described four events that I attended at the library. These included a meeting of the *Teen Advisory Committee*, a class visit to the library by a group of elementary school children, the *Winter Community Open House*, and a *Professional Development day*. These events provide an opportunity to see how the library changed from a regular day to a “special day”. These events also provided an additional opportunity to observe interactions between staff members and young participants.

## **Chapter 6: Analytic Results**

### **6.1: Overview**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an analysis of the culture of the library. The analysis identifies characteristics of the setting that support children with a range of abilities and illuminates some of the differences between the perspectives of individuals who occupy different roles at the library. The analysis in this chapter is based on interviews that were conducted with participants during November of 2007 and May of 2008.

Staff members have first hand insight into the day-to-day activities and operations at the library. Consequently, the perspectives of staff members are the primary perspectives to which the perspectives of other participants (i.e. administrators and partners, families, younger participants) are compared. The perspectives of partners and administrators are combined because individuals in both groups operate at arm's length from the library and have different relationships with patrons (relative to staff members). The participant perspective includes children and youth of all abilities, and families that include children and youth of all abilities.

### **6.2: Dimensions and Themes**

Table 6.1 identifies four layers of organizational culture (Hawkins, 1997), indicates the cultural elements at the library that were associated with each layer, and lists the themes that were identified in the analysis relative to each cultural element. The chapter will review each of the cultural elements and themes in turn and show how the themes evolved from the perspectives of multiple participants.

**Table 6.1: Layers of Culture, Aspects of the Setting, and Related Themes**

| <b>Layer of culture relative to the water-lily metaphor</b> | <b>How this was represented at the setting</b> | <b>Themes</b>  |
|---|--|--|
| Official/espoused   | Policies                                       | Vision, mission, accessibility policy  |
| Enacted   | Physical and structural characteristics        | Accessibility<br>Programs<br>Resources<br>Staff training and development   |
| Enacted   | Social Characteristics                         | Flexibility<br>Safe place and community hub<br>Diversity<br>Relationships<br>Roles for individuals of all abilities<br>Accommodations<br>Attitudes and awareness |
| Invisible   | Values and beliefs                             | For everyone<br>Inclusion as a given   |

**6.3: Participants**

Interviews were arranged with 12 staff members, four administrators, three partners, 12 parents and 15 younger participants. The staff members represented a

range of occupations including Library Supervisor, Children’s Librarian, Library Assistants, and Pages (individuals who re-shelve books). The administrators represented a range of occupations, with expertise in children’s services, public relations, and diversity training. The families included parents with children of both genders and with a range of abilities. Some of the children were developing typically while others had developmental or physical disabilities. The sample of child and youth participants ranged in age from six to 16. Most of the younger participants who were interviewed were developing typically. A table of participants is included in Appendix 12.

The analysis in this chapter is based primarily on the data that were collected in interviews with participants. In the remainder of this chapter, I elaborate on the themes that were identified in the analysis of the interview transcripts and field notes. I conclude the chapter with a summary of the perspectives.

#### **6.4: Policies**

The library envisions itself as: “the Community Hub that strengthens individuals, families and neighbourhoods by connecting them to people and to relevant information, collections, programs and resources” (London Public Library, 2008a). This vision is supported by the library’s mission statement: “we are passionate about making a difference in our community, one person at a time, by enriching lives and empowering people through relevant, accessible, high quality Library services” (London Public Library, 2008b). In addition to the vision and mission statements, the *Accessibility for Library Users with a Disability Policy* recognized that each individual (including those with disabilities) has an equal right to access to the library (London Public Library, 2008c). The accessibility policy included library services, resources, and staff training. The policy applied to all services, facilities, and resources, and was guided by the following principles: respect for the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities; sensitivity to an individual’s disability; equal opportunity to services for individuals with disabilities; integrated services for individuals with disabilities; adoption of the Facility Accessibility Design (FAD) standards developed by the city for all new buildings and

retrofitting according to the FAD standards for older buildings. According to the *Accessibility for Library Users with a Disability Policy*, the following processes, services and policies were identified to support accessibility: processes (including a mutual respect policy, the rules of conduct policy, and endorsement of the city's Race Relations and Diversity Policy); services (including adaptations for blind and low vision patrons, physical alternatives, alternate formats and resources, *Libraries for All*), training, and facility design in accordance with the FAD standards that are outlined by the city (London Public Library, 2008).

At a staff meeting in November of 2007, a member of the administrative team spoke at length about the libraries' vision and described the core competencies that were expected by the library for all staff members. These core competencies included: maintaining continuing education, being customer focused, being cooperative and collaborative team players, being emotionally mature, being an effective communicator, maintaining continual improvement and innovation, high achievement, and leadership. In her presentation, the administrator outlined a number of behavioural indicators for each competency and provided staff members with the criteria upon which these competencies would be evaluated. She distinguished between core competencies (which all staff members were expected to possess) and job specific competencies. She encouraged staff members to speak up, think positively, to engage in respectful debate, and to support the decisions made by the administrative team. She encouraged staff members to listen, and spoke about the importance of emotional maturity.



## **6.5: Physical and Structural Characteristics**

### **Staff Members' Perspectives**

Staff members identified a range of factors that they perceived as supporting children and youth of all abilities. Although the staff members described the library as an open, accessible setting, they also expressed concerns about different structural aspects of the setting and identified areas that might hinder children and youth with disabilities. Suggestions to improve accessibility included improving signage, lowering and raising shelving, and increasing the space between aisles. Although the building was perceived by most as being accessible and up to standards, staff members recognized that the physical setting could still be improved.

*I think this library is an open, friendly, welcoming environment... I think (library name) is definitely accessible because we don't have stairs coming in and we do have the door that I know some people use so in that sense it's certainly accessible.*  
(Staff 5)

*In talking about the physical space, what I am thinking is that (Volunteer's name), she comes in and she has got a wheelchair. How easy is it for her to get through those shelves? You know? I worry about... like right over here we've got that rack sticking out with new books, like is that impeding someone? This big monstrosity here is beautiful, for DVDs but how is a kid supposed to look at that? It's high, right?* (Staff 3)

Many of the staff members discussed the *Libraries for All* program, a program that was included in the accessibility policy and introduced throughout the library system in October, 2005. *Libraries for All* is a program that enhances the accessibility of the library for patrons with communication impairments by equipping each library with letter boards, picture boards, and stickers that promote the program. The stickers are readily visible in different places throughout the library (i.e. on the doors and at the circulation desk). Staff training was perceived to be an important component of the *Libraries for All* program and when the program was introduced, every staff member was provided with training that focused on how to use the letter

boards and how to interact with patrons with communication disabilities. Despite the fact that the accessibility policy lists the availability of seven different training programs for staff members (Accessibility Services-Working with Patrons with a Disability, Clear Language Workshop, Libraries for All Communications Board Training Workshop, Zoomtext Software Training, Microsoft Accessibility Features Training, Adaptive Technology Overview, and Use of Teletypewriters [TTY]), many of the staff members indicated that *Libraries for All* training was the only formal training that they had received related to working with individuals with disabilities.

Staff members expressed a range of opinions about the program and its usefulness in interactions with participants. Many of the staff members said that they were happy to have had the opportunity to learn more about communicating with participants with disabilities, and recognized that the *Libraries for All* program provided a way of ensuring that the library was accessible to a range of participants. The following quotations taken from various interviews reflect staff members' responses to the *Libraries for All* program:

*Very innovative, it really was very innovative at the time. And then coming up and getting ... the boards out and then having everybody go through training because we all did. I remember it was great because ... when you are dealing with the public you want to be able to draw on those skills. (Staff 3)*

Although some staff members perceived that the *Libraries for All* training was helpful, others found the boards awkward, and described ways in which its **implementation** might be improved. There was a sense of reluctance from one staff member regarding the board and the message that might be conveyed to a patron if she were to attempt to use the board. Her comment illustrated that while she appreciated the program, she was hesitant to use the board:

*No, I have never used that board. I think that honestly when I am in that moment ... there is that sort of sense that if you pull it out ... it's the idea of not wanting to sort of presume that you need the board even though it's a tool. I've never actually used the board, but I like the concept of the board. I wish the board was actually sort of on the desk, so I wouldn't have to pull it out all the time or wonder where it is. (Staff 5)*

It was unclear why the *Libraries for All* boards were not kept on the counter. This might have reflected the fact that they were infrequently needed by patrons, which would have been supported by my observations that there were relatively few individuals with disabilities who accessed the library. Alternately it might have reflected an unstated assumption about its perceived importance and usefulness by staff members.

In selecting the library, I had expected to find a number of programs for children between the ages of six and 11. When I arrived at the branch and began observing the setting, I realized that there was only one structured program that was available to children in my specified age groups. Two of the staff members indicated a need for more opportunities for children with disabilities as indicated in the following quotations:

*Let's show them that we want them to be here. Maybe we could make things a little more interesting...it doesn't have to be a major effort. It doesn't have to be an hour program or anything...just "okay, these are the books you may be interested in.*  
(Staff 9)

Two of the staff members indicated that new programs could be inclusive, developed in partnership with local high schools, and could engage local students as volunteers. One of the two staff members seemed to think that the shortage of programs might be the result of inadequate funding. She suggested that additional funding could support the development of new inclusive programs.

When asked about resources, some of the staff members described the resources that supported individuals with disabilities including computer software, books printed in a range of formats, and computers with enhanced screens. Although the library recognized the importance of adaptive resources and services in its accessibility policy the resources that were available from one branch to the next varied. At the library where the research took place, the following resources were available: an enhanced computer screen, and books on tape and compact disk. Other staff members referred to the library's collection of books and described a need for more books that focused on disabilities and "other medical disorders". The following

quotation illustrates one of the staff members' views about the need for additional resources:

*They'd love to have a larger collection of children's or juvenile books dealing with disabilities and any types of medical disorders and stuff like... we do not have the collection that we could have... just general information... that they would just be able to pick up off the shelf and peruse and understand. (Staff 6)*

Finally, staff members shared their perspectives on staff training and development. Some of the staff members indicated that they had received some training through the *Libraries for All* program. This training focused on working with individuals with disabilities, and described the other training opportunities that were available to them on a voluntary basis. When asked about training needs, some of the staff members expressed a desire for additional training relative to working with and including individuals with disabilities. Four of the staff members indicated their perception that additional training might help them to feel more comfortable in their interactions with individuals with disabilities. One of the four described the general training program that she attended as a new employee. This staff member indicated that although a significant amount of training time focused on policies and procedures, relatively little emphasis was placed on how to handle interactions with patrons. Her suggestion was that the administration might consider allocating less training time to procedures and policies and devote more training time to communication and interaction. The following comments from two staff members illustrate a tension between their desire to ensure positive interactions between staff and patrons and feelings of uncertainty about those interactions as noted in the following quotations:

*I think that it would be useful to have a little extra training sometimes. Like we got the Libraries for All we got training on how to use it, which was a long time ago, or how to best interact and approach it and everything so that was good, but I think even more training or awareness I guess of the issues that face people with disabilities or how they want to be treated... how, they would prefer to interact. You know, because it's not always apparent, and you're always afraid and you don't always know. (Staff 4)*

*And it would be nice if we had like something mandatory almost, that we had to sort of participate in, where we did get that perspective, or we at least had an idea of things that we could do, because honestly, like I don't interact necessarily on a regular basis with someone who is disabled, but it would be nice, when I have that experience that it can be a positive experience for them and for me ... because I don't... I honestly don't have that perspective. (Staff 5)*

### **Administrators' and Partners' Perspectives**

Administrators were aware of the messages (both negative and positive) that the physical setting might convey to families and described the challenges they experienced in their attempts to communicate openness and accessibility. In the following quotation, one of the administrators describes some of the considerations a parent with a child with a disability might make in attempting to decide if library would be supportive and the challenge in attempting to communicate that the library was open to all families:

*Is it relatively easy to get to? Is it on a major route? Is there parking once you get there? How inviting is it to, just physically go in, can you get in the building? Once inside the building is there anything, anything (laughing) that lets you know that at some point the people planning this resource, this service thought to themselves, um yes, children are an important market for us... so you know? Where are the... is there a water fountain? How easy is it to get to? How easy is it to get to if you're small... you're a short child? If you are in a wheelchair? And how do you... make it clear in an environment and I am not saying that I have the answer to this, how do you make it clear in an environment that you are reassuring the caregiver who has come through that door with a child who has needs that may differ from others... how do you reassure them that they have come to a place that is going to be interested? (Admin 2)*

Some of the administrators described the renovated space at the library as open, and relatively barrier free. Administrators perceived the parking as being sufficiently accessible but indicated that the washrooms at the library could be improved. They referred to the challenge in keeping up with current accessibility standards and the challenge in trying to enhance physical accessibility on a limited

budget. The following quotation illustrates the concern that one of the administrators had with regard to the physical barriers that some patrons might experience. At the same time, the administrator was challenged to secure funding to improve the physical space at the library. This challenge intensified as the library attempted to serve an increasingly diverse population.

*Have you ever been a child in an environment where you could reach nothing? You couldn't reach anything... can you imagine what it is like for an older person who can't get down to the bottom shelves? ... You feel like Alice in a world that is way too big or way too small. It's really difficult though again... you are dealing with a large, public organization that is dependent upon municipal taxes and you know how people feel about paying taxes... and because of the planning cycle it takes a long time for the city and all of the other machines to get rolling... so, you may quickly identify the need for a change table in your washroom... not just a change table but a change table that will support more than an infant because you are trying to support a child much older, whose needs make it necessary for the adult working with them to have someplace to put them down... how are you going to persuade the rest of the public that this is a good thing to do? (Admin 2)*

According to one of the administrators *Libraries for All* was introduced throughout the library system because it was “the right thing to do”. When I asked about the significance of the program, one of the administrators indicated that the program symbolized a deeper commitment on the part of the library to create an environment that was accessible to individuals regardless of ability. Programs like *Libraries for All* were evidence of the library’s policies in action. Please see the following quotation from an administrator who championed the *Libraries for All* program:

*Going back to the mission statement, it's one person at a time and that's what I think is so wonderful about the program (Libraries for All)... is that it's not about huge numbers, it's not about increasing circulation stats, because hordes of people are not going to come through the door to use this program. But it is about making that connection and having those tools available so that when that person does walk through the door, you are able to communicate with them. (Admin 1)*

In addition to the benefits that the program offered patrons, *Libraries for All* also included system-wide training for staff members. In the following quotation, an administrator describes his perceptions about the benefits of the program relative to staff training:

*It's a program that doesn't get used very often, but every single library location and every service point at the Central library has the boards and everyone who works in public service meaning right down to our custodial staff, like our maintenance staff...all casual staff...anyone who works behind the scenes but who works in front of the public...all the staff are trained. It's really a different type of communicating and it can be a little challenging, just to use it if you are not comfortable with it. So we try to take some of the fear away from it. (Admin 4)*

Adaptive storytimes were mentioned by some of the administrators as programs that supported children with disabilities. These storytimes modify traditional storytimes so that children with disabilities can participate. The comments from an administrator who had led an adaptive storytime indicated that these storytimes were different from traditional storytimes and required flexibility and patience from the program leader. In the following quotation, an administrator shares an experience leading an adaptive storytime:

*There were four participants but there were 15 people in the room because there are parents, there are caregivers and there's a nurse...and there are, um younger siblings and it's not at all like a "regular" library storytime. You are doing the same book more or less to every child individually and dealing with the way that they communicate back to you...so you have got to be very flexible, you have got to be very patient, and you have got to be a bit of a performer for them as well. (Admin 4)*

*Libraries for All* and adaptive storytimes were both products of partnerships between the library and other organizations. In the following quotation, one of the administrators describes the role that partnerships played in one of the adaptive storytime programs:

*It's funny...and how it all started...it was a Tuesday night on the circulation desk...and I was talking to one of our regular patrons and I didn't know that she was a therapist at (local rehabilitation centre) and she said could you do a program at*

*(local rehabilitation centre)? And I said, "sure" ... so she took back the idea and (Therapists' names) were two speech and language therapists who had been wanting to do the program... so that's how we connected. (Admin 1)*

Although specific program needs and gaps were not discussed by the administrators they elaborated on the resources that the libraries offered to individuals with disabilities. One of the administrators indicated that the following technological resources were available at the main branch of the library: Dragon Naturally, a voice recognition software package and Kurzweil 1000, a program that makes printed text available to individuals with visual impairments by speaking the printed text aloud. One of the administrators also referred to the library website as a potential resource for patrons with disabilities. The resources that were available in each branch varied. Although each library was equipped with a zoom feature on at least one computer and books in different print formats, other resources including the technological resources identified above were housed at the main branch. One of the administrators indicated that these resources could be transferred to the branches if they were requested by a patron.

Staff training was identified by the administrators as a priority for the library.

*Yeah, I mean we have customer service training and we do, we have had sensitivity training but I really think that we could be doing more to engage experts in these fields to come to our staff or to train the trainers, to meet with our service coordinators who then pass it on to the supervisors and that sort of thing. (Admin 4)*

Although the administrators appreciated the importance of providing training opportunities for all staff members, time constraints and the number of staff members who were required to maintain regular operations at the library, limited the opportunities that were available for staff training.

*Well, it's just that everybody, everybody is so busy, you know. Is just really, really busy and feeling really... like there's all these great things that we want to do and so it's just finding the time to do it... and you know, as we do more programs, we increase our stats, then we get busier, right, so it's kind of... so you know, training is always, we always need more time for training. (Admin 1)*

### **Parents' and Participants' Perspectives**



Parents and participants of all abilities commented on the parking lot and indicated that it was small and a potential hindrance for families that included children with disabilities. While some families believed the library was accessible, others described some of the physical barriers that they had encountered at the library. One parent whose son was in a wheelchair described the challenge of getting her son through the doors at the main entrance. She feared that she might arrive at the branch to find the one designated spot occupied.

*I don't see any barriers, other than the parking... I have found the parking not that great at (Library) because it can get really busy and there's nowhere else to go and park... even on a side street... and you can't park across the road, especially if I have (child) with me (Parent 9)*

The *Libraries for All* program was mentioned by one of the parents who indicated that she and her daughter had noticed the sticker on the door.

*No, I mean I know they have those, I mean the communication for all symbols at the desk (they do, yeah), I think that's great... if there was someone who, is non-verbal and, and I am thinking maybe more adults, because not too many kids who are non-verbal would be by themselves (laughing), but you know, they can access... they don't have to get somebody else's help to check out a book... you know they can point. (Parent 9)*

The same parent had participated with her son in an adaptive storytime program at the library. She seemed pleased with the program because it had provided her with some new ways to engage her son. She commented that the program was:

*Positive... it was fun... even for me it was neat to see the other kids and how they communicated, because it was all about communication and about using library materials, and it was nice, like for the kids I still think it was hard for them to connect with each other but they did try...it gave us new ideas. They had carefully chosen these books, and so each child would have a line programmed on their voice output, so they'd each be taking a turn at telling a story. We were encouraged to bring in one book that was a favourite of your child's so I brought in Winnie the Pooh, a book that you didn't mind putting picture symbols in, so that he could get familiar with turning the page. You could put one there or the end...and I never thought to do the*

*end before... I never thought to say it out loud. There was a piece of cardstock that was laminated with a Velcro strip and that was a new idea and that really worked well for (child's name). So he could eye gaze and make choices. And that was something that worked and we were able to take that home at the end of the program. And that was helpful and something that I never thought to do. (Parent 9)*

Some parents and younger participants expressed a desire for more structured programs and provided suggestions about the kinds of programs that would interest them. These suggestions included art and drama programs, dance programs, reading clubs, and writing clubs, music programs, homework and social clubs, and, programs that would teach basic internet and internet safety skills. Some of the modifications mentioned by parents were smaller group programs and shorter program sessions.

Some of the parents that had children with disabilities described the challenges they experienced in attempting to find suitable programs for their children. One parent indicated that as her son (with CP) got older it became harder for him to fit into existing programs because of the additional resources and support that he required. Another parent described her experiences attempting to include her son (with Asperger's syndrome) in group programs:

*Because to be honest as he got older, it became harder to include him in things just because he didn't quite fit. If they had a big group of kids he would talk too much... sometimes it was just easier not to include him in group things. The older he got, and the more abstract it got, the more support he needed. It was okay when he was younger, we'd do a few little strategies to help him be by himself. But the older he got, it was funny because he did need support just to navigate the social part and what was appropriate and not appropriate and... it really is hard in a setting and it can really de-rail what a teacher or leader is trying to do. It's hard. That's what it is. (Parent 2)*

Some families spoke more generally about the resources at the library and described how library resources supported families from a range of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. These resources included the availability of public computers, and books in different languages. In describing the "special needs" of patrons at the branch, one of the parents referred to the needs of newcomers, along

with the needs of individuals with disabilities. Although the interviews with administrators indicated that the library offered a range of adaptive equipment and software, the quotation that follows suggests that some of the parents were unaware of these resources:

*As far as I know, they don't have Kurzweil 1000 and Dragon there... they don't have a quiet room with Dragon on the computer such that someone could go into the room and speak into the computer and do whatever they need to on a computer. I think libraries should... deal with some software... like co-writer programs, smart ideas, inspirations, Kurzweil 1000, um... Dragon, you know so that more kids can use that. And then, I don't see why they can't run some training programs for people that want to use it. (Parent 8)*

Although parents did not speak at length about staff training or development, they did have suggestions about the characteristics of program leaders that would support their children. An ideal program leader would have knowledge and about different disabilities, excellent communication skills, and be comfortable interacting with children with a range of abilities as illustrated in the following quotation:

*Well somebody who definitely, is very kid friendly and who knew and understood about like, developmentally what is good for kids of a certain age and stuff like that. For kids that have communication challenges or ADD challenges, somebody who has some kind of experience in that way. So someone who is a good communicator and who also can try... can get a message across as well as inviting interaction and things like that. (Parent 7)*

## **6.6: Social Characteristics**

### **Staff Members' Perspectives**

Many of the regular participants at the branch were children and youth who lived in the surrounding neighbourhood. A number of the staff members commented on the interaction between these regular patrons and staff members. In the following quotations two of the staff members comment on the challenge in attempting to achieve a balance between being flexible and ensuring that the library was comfortable for the staff and for other patrons:

*You really battle you know, with how many kids should you let go all around. And they're all interacting... you want it to happen that they're enjoying themselves but you have to put a stop to it because they can get really loud and someone will be here trying to work, I mean it can get really loud... they're loud and they're having a lot of fun... it's a public space so you have to say okay and it isn't the worst thing, but part of me thinks, why do I have to do this and wreck a kid's enjoyment? (Staff 3)*

*Yeah... and the fact is, you know demographically, statistically, we have got a lot of kids here... that's our public... I mean obviously you have got to be conscientious of the fact that... if they are getting out of hand, it is a public library and you do have to remind them to be quiet... you do have to... because they forget that it's a library. But for the most part, I have noticed that (other staff members) are fairly tolerant in terms of noise level and I guess our feeling is that... if you want a quiet library... a really quiet library... and there are a lot of other branches that can provide a quiet space. So I think there's kind of... we're aware of it, and we're conscientious, but it's kind of like controlled, slight chaos, but it's manageable chaos and we know when to reign it in... and I think for the most part, most of the customers who come here, the regulars know that the kids are here and they don't tend to complain about it. (Staff 10)*

There were differences in the extent to which specific rules were enforced by staff members. For example, although rules about noise did not seem to be strictly enforced, rules about respecting staff members and other participants were mentioned in at least two of the interviews with staff members. Mutual respect seemed to be a non-negotiable rule.

*When you're here you respect everyone... and it's just, that is the rule here. Or, not the rule, but just that's the expectation... and ultimately, what ends up happening if they can't go along with that, then I will kick them out because that's, if they can't... like I said I want you to be here but when you are here you need to do this... and that's just kind of it at the end of the day. (Staff 4)*

The library was described by staff members as a “safe place” for the regular younger participants.

*It's just a safe haven that you know, so long as they behave that they are not going to be asked to leave. (Staff 6)*

*They do feel safe here and they do feel like it's a place where they are welcome and you know... they just hang out and play games with their friends or play video games on the computer. (Staff 10)*

In addition to being perceived as a safe place, the library was described as a community hub by some of the staff members. The library was a place in the community that was open to a range of participants. The following quotation illustrates that the library's function as a community hub was positively regarded by some of the staff members:

*Like yesterday there was a bunch of kids here and their teacher came in at one point, and they were happy to see their teacher, so in one sense it's a hub, it's where all these people meet and interact and... because there isn't any form of community much anymore, you know what I mean? The library has provided this community place where people can come and meet and it's not, you know, it's not a consumer environment, so there's no pressure and there's no constraints. You can just come and be as you are and settle down for as long as you want. (Staff 10)*

Relationships between members of the staff appeared to be positive. Most of the staff members indicated that they enjoyed working at the library, and with one another. Relationships between staff members were characterized by trust, respect, and equality among staff members. Staff members believed that the positive "vibe" between staff members at the library positively influenced the experiences of patrons at the library (see the quotation below):

*But what I like about it here at this branch is like I felt like I fit in. You just always feel like it is one team. People are supportive of each other and people are team players. And I think we generally have a positive attitude here... I think people here are mostly really positive and... it's just a really good branch and I think people pick that up like I think when you're cohesive as a staff I think the public... I think they pick up the good vibes. (Staff 12)*

Some of the staff members described a period of transition in the branch that had occurred prior to the appointment of the current branch leader. Staff members

highlighted the role played by the current library leader in cultivating a flexible, positive environment for library staff members, patrons, and partners. The library leader was described by some staff members as a supervisor who communicated openly with staff members as illustrated in the following quotation:

*When I approach her with something she usually will decide right away, yes we are gonna do something, no we'll do something later. And that's good, I don't have to agree with her decisions, but she makes them. She keeps us updated with what's going on from things with supervisor meetings... she's really good about passing the stuff that she thinks is important on to us. (Staff 2)*

Some of the staff members described warm relationships with regular patrons. In the following quotation, a staff member shares her views on relationships with patrons:

*Relationships with patrons are friendly... every once in a while there is someone really special. (Staff 2)*

Another staff member compared relationships at the library to familial relationships and indicated that being at the library was just like being at home, but in another place as noted in the following statement:

*You're never leaving your home... you are just visiting other people for a while... I find it very homey... that's the way I see it, just chatting with everybody and stuff like that. (Staff 6)*

Although most staff members indicated that relationships between staff members were positive and supportive, a few staff members offered dissenting views. Their comments suggested that a strong sense of connection was not shared by all members of the staff and that the comfort level between staff members varied.

The cultural diversity of patrons was perceived by most of the staff members. Many of the staff members indicated that cultural diversity enhanced the branch and made it an interesting place to work (note the following quotations):

*But here, people are meshed together all over the place... it's not just like people of an Arabic background or people of a middle Eastern background in one area and stuff like that. (Staff 11)*

*We have a lot of people who...English isn't their first language we have a lot of I believe Vietnamese is one of our big populations and I think that's really neat...I think it's always really neat to have a nice mix and it's not just all Waspy people.*

(Staff 12)

Staff members provided a number of examples that illustrated how individuals with disabilities were included in official roles in the setting. Two regular volunteers, both of whom had disabilities were considered part of the staff. According to the staff, the volunteers had been around for a long time and felt comfortable interacting with staff members (see comments that follow):

*Then we have the volunteers... they help us with... get us slips and divide the slips and get the elastics together, they also help with shelving, alphabetizing the DVDs. (Volunteer's name) arrives with a bus because she is in a wheelchair. (Second volunteer's name) is fine she just comes and they, they just sit right there and they do their thing and (Second volunteer's name) will come back and talk to staff, um, which is great because, you know, how was your day and you know what's happening... you know. It's great, she feels so comfortable with us. They have been around for a long time. (Staff 3)*

*But yeah and, with the volunteers, it's very like they've been here, they're regulars so that's like staff in their own right. (Staff 5)*

From time to time, volunteer and cooperative education positions were created at the library to accommodate students with disabilities. These positions offered some students a chance to develop skills and to be involved. They also provided staff members with the opportunity to interact with individuals with a range of abilities. In the following quotations, staff members comment on their experiences, both positive and negative, working with students with disabilities:

*So he came in once a week for about two years and we would give him little jobs to do, sorting things....he was almost blind, he had very little vocal skills...but they gave him little jobs to do. I would set up a cart for him...storybooks that he and his caregiver could put away so that he would feel that he was doing something. And he, I think he got a great amount of satisfaction out of doing that. Because that was*

*his thing and that was what he wanted to do... it was a program that was set up just basically for him. (Staff 9)*

*I learned a lot and I really like that we do those kinds of things. (Child's name) with autism had fairly severe autism so he didn't really talk. So I had to... I learned from (Caregiver) who always came with him how to read him which was neat because it didn't actually really take me very long to figure him out but he didn't speak at all. (Staff 2)*

*So that was really, really hard... because not only did he not want to be here, but it didn't occur to him to make the best of the situation ...and it really quickly came to the point where (two staff members)...and rightfully... didn't want anything to do with him. He was one of those that really took the hierarchy idea to heart. And he would say you're not my boss... I don't have to do what you tell me. He didn't say that to everyone. But I realized from (two staff member's) interactions that it probably wouldn't go too well for me, so I kind of avoided the whole thing. (Staff 9)*

Several staff members described a willingness to adapt programs to accommodate individuals with disabilities and their families. As the following quotation indicates, staff members were willing to adapt programs to suit participants and expressed a desire to learn more about what they could be doing to include participants with disabilities in library programs.

*Yeah, probably the biggest one, I guess would be willingness to meet the needs of the person. Because, um, we don't we are not experts, obviously on what a particular child would need, but we'd be very amenable and open to... if people were to provide us with that information. Hopefully they wouldn't have to advocate too strongly on their behalf. And also, be proactive... Because it's so, it's incredibly ranging you know, level and things that you do unconsciously that may be, you know, preventing someone. (Staff 4)*

Staff members expressed a range of attitudes and differing degrees of awareness relative to working with and interacting with individuals with disabilities. Although some staff members were very comfortable interacting with individuals with disabilities, others found these interactions awkward and uncomfortable at times.



*I have a neighbour whose son is autistic so I sort of had some idea of what he was like. But again, it's just, if you don't... if you're not used to working with people and you're not used to seeing it, then you don't know. (Staff 9)*

In the following quotation, a staff member shares her experiences observing the changing relationship between a co-worker and a co-operative education student who had a placement at the library. The co-worker seemed resistant to the idea of working with the co-operative education student at first, but with time this resistance diminished and the relationship improved.

*The most interesting part was to see (Staff member) interact with him. At first (Staff member) very, well I taught him to do that, if he doesn't... or oh it will take him forever to do that... on and on. By the time he left we went to do something and we got the next student in and (Staff member) would say, I wish we had (Child's name) back here, he knows how to do things... (Staff member) came in with all of the barriers up ... and you could just see them just going away one by one. (Staff 9)*

#### **Administrators' and Partners' Perspectives**

Some of the administrators emphasized the importance of flexibility and respect. Two of the administrators described the role played by the library leadership in cultivating an environment that met the needs of the youth in the neighbourhood. Like staff members, administrators recognized that neighbourhood youth comprised a core group of patrons at the library and emphasized the fact that the experience that the current supervisor had working with younger patrons and the flexibility of the branch were both factors that encouraged participation by the younger patrons:

*But when you talk about leadership... (Staff name) is the branch supervisor... and (Staff name) and has come from the tradition of having seen it at (other libraries). I think it takes the right kind of person to be the supervisor at those locations. (Admin 4)*

Some of the comments made by the partners and administrators illustrated how the library was perceived as offering a safe place for a diverse range of participants, including students with disabilities. An example follows:

*You know it's just a very, very welcoming, non-threatening place to be. And the staff is most helpful, we have never needed their big, big help with anything, but*

*there are a few things we still need and so they are fine, they are very welcoming and our guys are just part of the gang. (Partner 1)*

Many of the administrators and partners indicated that the library was a community hub that was open for use by other organizations and services. As a community hub, the library fulfilled an important role in the community.

*The branch is a great example, because that neighbourhood doesn't have a true centre. So the library, as a result really does play an active role as a community centre type thing in that corner because they have the space, and they have great meeting room space there and they've got those study rooms. The kids are already there. (Admin 3)*

Being perceived by other partners and organizations as a community hub also created challenges and tensions for the library as indicated by the following comment from an administrator:

*Every single person that you agree with, or that you say yes to, there is potentially someone else that you will have to say no or a qualified yes to because I have already said yes to you... so that means we have to pick and choose... And at the same time, always constantly reminding ourselves that we are still using public funds so that each thing that I do say yes to, I have got to be prepared should someone ask to explain why I have chosen to spend public funds supporting X, Y, or Z. So that's, you know that can be tricky in itself because the demand far outweighs the supply. (Admin 2)*

Administrators and partners commented on the positive relationships that they observed between members of the staff. Staff members were perceived as being welcoming, responsive, and able to juggle the multiple demands placed on them by the needs of the community and other organizations in the community:

*I think that you'll find the staff very welcoming as a group. My sense is that they work pretty well together. (Admin 3)*

*I feel that I have a receptive ear among those staff to be able to say, okay here's an idea, what do you think... there's questions of course, but it doesn't go on ad infinitum... I see that as a fairly positive response to the demands... I mean the*

*demands at that location are large because of the desire of all of these social agencies to have a presence. (Admin 2)*

Administrators described the library system as diverse and always attracting new patrons. Diversity was perceived as a characteristic that enhanced the library:

*We're always attracting new folks to the library too, and that... it just adds more flavour to the mix... we're offering story times in more languages too, but it just adds to the wonderful, kind of, quilt of belonging, I guess. (Admin 1)*

One of the partners who worked for a program that offered supports to families from the library spoke in detail about the challenges that were faced by families that had newly arrived in Canada. She described her efforts to achieve a balance between offering support to these families and respecting the family's cultural backgrounds. In the first quotation the partner comments on the challenge that these families faced in meeting even the most basic needs, as a result of cultural barriers:

*Most of the people from the more diverse cultures... they're looking for some pretty basic needs: 'Can you help us find a house?' 'Can you help us fill out these forms?' 'I don't know what these school forms mean'. You know, I think that they are at such a disadvantage because most stuff is written in English ... they don't know what it means, and so, they need to find somebody. (Admin 2)*

Later in the interview, the same partner described a family that had recently immigrated to Canada. The family included a child with an undiagnosed disability. When the child entered school, the school recognized that the child was delayed and was unable to accommodate the child. The partner described her efforts to work with the school and to support both the family and the child:

*But it was just, again—it was gratifying. Still is—because my job then is to be able to balance the needs of both. I can't overwhelm the family with forms and meetings, and it's kind of funny because to them we have had so many meetings. To the school he needs to be in a developmental class. I have got to try to explain that to the parent, and all they seem to want to see is a normal boy. And you know, you are trying to find that balance to meet his needs and to respect where the family is at. Often services want to offer services, and not all families want to be a part of all the*

*trying to find that balance to meet his needs and to respect where the family is at. Often services want to offer services, and not all families want to be a part of all the services—especially a lot of newcomers. They don't buy into that as much as we do. But at the same time, he will need some special supports because, you know, he is against a lot. (Partner 2)*

Partners and administrators spoke less frequently about the organizational roles that were open to individuals with disabilities. One member of the administration commented on the fact that although the need for accessibility was readily associated with patrons and volunteers, it was not readily associated with staff members. In other words, use of wheelchairs and mobility devices was anticipated in front of the circulation desk but not expected to be needed behind the circulation desk as illustrated in the following quotation:

*When we were designing this building you know... staff was "why do we need so much space back here?", and we would say, "well because if you have a staff member that is using a wheelchair for example, you are going to need this much space". "Oh". So... we seemed to have turned it around in terms of them thinking about the public and the public's needs...and they weren't quite there yet thinking about the staff, what the staff might need. (Admin 2)*

For the administrators and partners, accommodating children of all abilities meant being aware of and sensitive to children with both visible and invisible disabilities as the following quotation indicates:

*I don't know how to address this, but when you talk about things like Aspergers and autism and ADHD, many of those disabilities are invisible disabilities. And I don't know what the best way for that is. I mean, I think in some point in time, we just need to be sensitive in general. You know, sometimes if a child is not presenting to you the way you would expect a 7 year old to act...you have got to deal with that too. So a certain level of sensitivity needs to be within your staff. (Admin 4)*

Administrators were also aware of the need to communicate with parents and the importance of making parents aware of the fact that the library was eager to accommodate their children:

*In many cases it's the parent that we need to persuade that yes the library is a place where you can take your child. It's for everyone... there will be something there for you. So obviously that's a message that we need to be more clear about and feel confident a lot of them recognize that the library is the place for them. (Admin 2)*

Administrators also described observing a range of responses in staff members towards working with children and adults with disabilities. Some administrators explained that different staff members were simply more or less comfortable dealing with individuals who they perceived as different from themselves (see comments from Admin 3 as an example). Other administrators explained these differences as differences in old versus new attitudes about inclusion. One administrator recognized the power that staff members held to take the lead in shaping positive interactions with patrons and indicated a desire to cultivate a sense of advocacy in staff members (see comments from Admin 2).

*If you look at... I bet at any location, some people would be more comfortable dealing with those kids and families than others... Some people are just more comfortable dealing with people who they perceive as being different. Some people don't feel like they're any different... You know... it's not even an issue because it's like, well I don't even notice that, you know. (Admin 3)*

*We have to be creating advocates and then, people who are in those influential positions (Admin 2)*

### **Parents' and Participants' Perspectives**

Many of the participants and parents used the word "comfortable" to describe the library. One of the parents commented that the bustle and noise at the library was part of what made the library comfortable for her child who had a disability. A second parent, who also had a child with a disability indicated that her child felt comfortable in an active setting. According to this participant, the library offered an active setting for her child.

*As I said... they're not gonna flip if he makes noise. It's a very comfortable environment for him. And if he's not comfortable, he lets me know. (Parent 1)*

*Parent 8: It's more of an active library. If you walk into (Branch A) or other libraries, you'll find them dead quiet. And the expectation is that. Whereas (library) is a little more child-friendly... kids aren't dead quiet... I don't feel welcome at (Branch A) or (Branch B) with... with especially her.*

*Researcher: Why?*

*Parent 8: Because she can't be kept completely quiet all the time... you have to talk with her and you can't just whisper and you have to be a bit animated and ... When it is dead quiet and everyone is sitting around reading it's a turn off... especially for someone who has difficulty reading.*

Although a flexible environment was a supportive factor at some times, it was a hindrance at other times:

*So when there is a group that comes in... and generally they come in right around five... um, they can be quite loud and boisterous. There isn't a space for them to go except for that Teen Corner which doesn't work. I had to go then go out and book rooms, and thank goodness they were available so I could move kids to work with them. (Parent 8)*

*And so that's why I said, too, that with some of the people with developmental disabilities coming in if it's too busy sometimes that's... there are too many distractions. (Parent 2)*

Although the idea of the library as a safe place was shared by families with children of all abilities, "safe" meant different things to different families. For families that included children with disabilities, a safe place was a place where their children were accepted, supported, and encouraged to practice social skills. For other families, a safe place was a place where children could do their own thing and parents could relax. Please see the following quotations from several parents about varying ideas regarding the definition of a safe environment:

*But I think he should be able to live independently and I mean, the library to me will be a safe haven in his life. Because I do think libraries because of the nature of them... the fact that they are open convenient hours and that they're open to the public. (Parent 2)*

*You could all do your own thing to a certain extent at the library. That was the nice thing because when (child) was younger, it was always safety, safety, safety, you had to know what she was doing, where is she, hold her hand... whereas if you went into the library, you could let her hand go and she was happy to go to the books and you could do your own thing and you could look at a book, or read a magazine.*  
(Parent 3)

*I just don't like them to be out of my sight. But I know I can pull up and drop them off for fifteen minutes or half an hour and I know that they're fine as long as they are in this building... it's always very organized and a very good environment just in general.* (Parent 11)

Many of the younger participants described the library as a safe place to volunteer as the following quotation illustrates:

*I think it would be more comforting to be in ... like when you see people at the library and you ask them a question they're very kind and helpful..* (Participant 11)

Some of the parents and participants described the library as a community hub where people who attended knew one another:

*Basically, a community...because people who come here, like they know each other...so they like talk to each other, basically, um... that's the only word, I could describe it.* (Participant 15)

Other parents and participants referred to the financial needs of some families in the community and suggested that the library supported these families:

*These are really needy kids. And there's a lot of 'em out there.* (Parent 8)

*They come for the computer because they don't really own one...and a lot of them just come to hang out with friends because usually I don't see a lot of kids reading, I just see them talking and laughing and just playing off the computer.*  
(Participant 11)

Parents with children of all abilities described very positive relationships between their children and the staff members. Staff members were frequently described as being warm and friendly inside and outside of the library as illustrated in the following quotations:

*They don't look down on anybody. And they treat you as a person... like, it may be a job but it seems like they put the personal thing to it... the girls that have been here for quite a while, they'll say "good morning" (patron's name), or "good afternoon" or whatever... they don't look down on people... which is really really nice. Like some places you can go into and you know the staff... it's a job, a pay cheque. And it's just their attitude. And that attitude isn't here. (Parent 1)*

*Cause if, say we're walking up the street and (Staff 4) is going to the bus stop to get home after work. (Staff 4) will stop and talk to us. It's not like I am not in the library so I don't need to talk to you now attitude. Which makes it you know, like, really nice. (Parent 1)*

The participants who were interviewed expressed a range of feelings about their relationships with staff members. One of the librarians was a particularly important staff member for the younger participants. The younger participants liked the fact that this particular staff member took the time to talk with them, play games with them, and provided them with information as illustrated in the following quotation from one of the younger participants:

*I usually talk to (librarian's name), because she is nice and she usually tells me about the library what is going to happen. (Participant 6)*

Parents recognized that cultural diversity was a characteristic of the library and the neighbourhood. Some of the parents indicated that this diversity enhanced their experiences at the library. This is noted below by two of the parents:

*It's definitely a multi-cultural building...you definitely walk in here and you see people from all walks of life, all different ethnicities, on a regular basis. You know, you walk in there's people of every way shape, form here at all times and I think that's a really, really good thing. I think it's nice to walk in and see different people from different ethnic groups and different backgrounds. (Parent 11)*

*This library is very diverse...I think, I have met a woman and she was Russian... and, I mentioned the other man and he is Indian... and they're really nice... and we have come back there before and I have talked to them and it's really interesting to talk to because I am Canadian... like six generations. (Parent 12)*



Families that included children of all abilities indicated that the library provided a setting that offered opportunities for children and youth to participate. Families that included children with disabilities explained that the library provided a setting where their children could have the opportunity to make a contribution and develop job skills. Regular participants also expressed an interest in participating at the library as volunteers as illustrated in the following quotations:

*I know for my son, I have sort of thought it would be great if he could get a volunteer job at the library. It is an important part of his day-to day-routine. (Parent 2)*

*I would like to work here ... just sort of like helping or volunteering or ... maybe because you know how you have to do work in high school. (Participant 4)*

Parents with children with disabilities indicated that the library accommodated their children and families in various ways. These included modifying the age restrictions of some of the programs to suit the developmental abilities of children, a willingness to work with children with academic and developmental needs, scheduling programs to meet families' needs, and providing information and resources to families. Some of the parents believed that these accommodations and modifications were unique to this particular library. Please note these ideas in the quotations from three of the parents that follow:

*But that particular year... the staff at the, the staff that were running the program had already done a huge amount of organizing and planning and they had all of the material that they wanted us to do for homework each evening. Well the next day, um myself and another parent who had children who required a lot of personal care said, "it took us two hours, that's far too much we can't do that in our lives", we just didn't have that kind of time, so for the following year, when we took the program they made changes. (Parent 9)*

*She's been keeping me up to date on that. And if I need special books, she'll help me find them, or whatever... And like I say, if there's resource books that they can get in, they will. They will bring them in for me and whatever. (Parent 1)*

*Like you can go into some libraries and a small child makes noise ... SHHHHHHH... that's not the case here. Like they've got a little play area over in*

*that one corner, and the kids can go over there and play, and if they're making noise, no one says "boo" ... which makes it a really nice child-friendly environment... cause kids make noise. (Parent 1)*

Finally, most parents perceived the staff members as being open-minded about working with children with disabilities. Parents indicated a belief that libraries attracted people who are open to learning, diversity, and difference. Open-mindedness and positive attitudes towards working with individuals of all abilities created an environment that was accepting, non-judgmental, and welcoming as illustrated in the following quotations:

*I think the library... um, there was acceptance, whereas sometimes you would go somewhere new, and you would get the stares and... how do you put it, the uh, people kind of unaccepting. (Parent 4)*

*Yeah... it's like, there's no condemning, like if a child is different, there's no condemning. (Parent 1)*

## **6.7: Values and Beliefs**

### **Staff Members' Perspectives**

There were two beliefs shared by staff members that characterized the culture of the library. The first belief was that the library should be for everyone. The second belief was that inclusion was a given. The belief that the library should be a place for everyone, guided day-to-day interactions with patrons and volunteers. In situations where the belief was not respected, violators were negatively sanctioned by staff members. Being for everyone was a characteristic of this library that made it a unique and special place as illustrated in the following quotations from several staff members:

*We had for example, a lady that volunteered... she had a mental disability and, um, some of the kids were making fun of her and she came to the desk and she was in tears, and I remember me and (names two other staff members) all went over to the kids, and we're like, that is completely inappropriate, you are not allowed to do that, you have lost your library privileges for the day. I remember her giving us a hug, she was just very happy that... like this is a place where she, she... if she wasn't*

*okay, that wasn't okay. The idea that she could come into this environment and just be herself, and feel sort of security in the people she was around—that she wasn't just volunteering, that she wasn't just there—but that she was a part of the whole. That was a really wonderful experience... I think that she appreciated, I mean she appreciated that we were... that we were there for her and that, you know, we valued her enough to say, "if you don't treat (patrons' name) good, there's the door". (Staff 5)*

*Sometimes there is negative attention from other kids or participants. Like I have had those situations and usually what I do in those situations, cause that's really important to me to address that because I want this to be welcoming space. It [is] really important to me to have that conversation with the other kids, because I don't think they are horrible kids, I think that's what they do and just to make them aware of the consequences and what's happening. (Staff 3)*

A second belief about inclusion that was frequently articulated by staff members was the assumption that inclusion was a given, and that children with disabilities were children first. Believing that inclusion was a given informed the actions of staff members as illustrated in the following quotations:

*It's funny because... I guess there's a sense that they're included in part of what everyone else is also part of. I think there's a sense of encouraging inclusiveness... a sense just that they that they're as much a part of things as anyone else, you know what I mean. I think there's that sense that when a parent comes in with a child with a disability they don't feel that the child is being treated differently from another child. (Staff 10)*

*I think also for parents who have kids with disabilities, they walk in and you know... and they've watched... a lot of them are regulars, you know they come all the time, and a lot of them have watched all of us employees work and interact with their kids, and they, I think for the most part, we're, we're... um... we're good. (Staff 11)*

### **Administrators' and Partners' Perspectives**

Like members of the staff, administrators emphasized the belief that libraries should be for everyone, including individuals with disabilities, newcomers, and others who faced barriers.

*Because everyone should have access to the library, um and certainly, we are seeing more and more people whose first language is not English, so we need to welcome newcomers into our city and country into our library. (Admin 4)*

Providing a library experience that was for everyone was about more than simply increasing circulation statistics. The ability to provide a library experience for everyone was an important factor that was recognized by two administrators in the following comments:

*You know I think when we introduced the program (Libraries for All), we never expected that we would suddenly double our circulation or that we would really have a significant bump in attendance to programs with those needing adaptive or augmentative communication. So even if we serve, let's say three people a year, that's three people that probably got served better than they would have ten years ago. (Admin 1)*

*We have to keep in mind that in addition to serving everyone else we're doing all of those physical accessibility pieces and helping staff understand that you need to keep asking questions all the time. We have to look to other... like how can we use technologies to help us reach that population? How do we design the washroom so that it's not just space for the wheelchair to turn around, but so that there is space for a personal aid? (Admin 2)*

The assumption that inclusion was a given was evident in some of the comments that were made by the administrators. One example is as follows:

*I don't know how I can put this plainly ... I think that a child with a disability for us, is just a child. You know, first and foremost, they're children. (Admin 4)*

### **Parents' and Participants' Perspectives**

The following comment from one of the younger participants illustrated how the theme "for everyone" was experienced by patrons.

*You can just walk in and just be yourself... you don't have to worry about your skin... you can just like go in and read a book or do whatever you have to do.*

(Participant 13)

Parents and participants commented on the range of abilities they observed in children at the library and some of the benefits and challenges of inclusive

organizations as illustrated by the quotations from a parent below. In the following quotation, one parent with a child who is developing typically comments on her perspectives on inclusive programs based on her experiences as a participant in a library program that included a child with a developmental disability.

*This one would be just a little bit of a different dynamic for him... And I think it's good. Like it's not... when they go and they get one on one all the time... they do have to learn how to, you know, how to act in society, how to act around other kids, how to act around other groups, so this is a really good aspect I think. I think it's disruptive sometimes. It's not bad... it's just different. But again, I shouldn't say it doesn't work... it does work. It just works differently. (Parent 12)*

### **6.8: Respondent Validation**

In August of 2009 a meeting was arranged with two of the librarians who were asked to comment on a draft of the results. The librarians identified two themes that were missing from the analysis: these were the dynamic nature of the library (how much the library had changed since the study was conducted) and the extensive partnerships that the library had developed with other community organizations. These themes were likely more apparent to staff members given their observations of the library's culture over a longer period of time. Their comments indicated a lack of complacency and a desire to constantly look for areas that could be improved. Both of the librarians resonated strongly with the belief that the library is for everyone and with the idea that the library is firmly entrenched in the community.

### **6.9: Chapter Summary**

#### **Physical and Structural Characteristics**

Although the library was perceived as being open and accessible to some children with disabilities, it is not fully accessible to all children. Some physical aspects of the setting including the lack of parking, the height of the shelves and tables in the main library area, the double doors at the main entrance, the relative scarcity of programs for children between the ages of six and 11, and the need for additional adaptive resources were all perceived as barriers to participation.

Many of the staff members perceived the physical setting as open and accessible yet also identified specific areas that could be improved and expressed a desire to ensure that the library could accommodate children and adults of all abilities. The *Libraries for All* program was discussed by most of the staff members in the interviews. Staff members indicated that the training component of the program was helpful but also suggested that the picture and letter boards were sometimes awkward to use. Most of the staff members indicated a need for additional programs for older children and youth. Staff members suggested that programs for older children could be inclusive, developed in partnership with local schools, and would provide volunteer opportunities for local students. Staff members indicated that additional resources, particularly books dealing with specific disabilities and health conditions could be a valuable addition to the collection. Many of the staff members expressed a need for additional training programs to support interactions with patrons with disabilities. Staff members indicated that better training would increase their confidence in dealing with patrons with disabilities and minimize the awkwardness that sometimes accompanied these interactions.

Administrators commented on the specific messages that aspects of the physical environment conveyed to families and described the challenge in being fully accessible given the broad range of patrons that the library serves. Administrators commented about the challenge in continually having to meet changing accessibility standards and reflected on the philosophy and underlying principles guiding the *Libraries for All* program. Administrators added to the information provided by staff members by elaborating on the development of *Libraries for All* and its usefulness to other community organizations. Administrators were able to provide more detailed information about the adaptive resources that were available for families at the library. Like staff members, administrators recognized the importance of ongoing training and development. Some administrators indicated that time constraints limited the availability of training opportunities.

Parents and participants expressed a range of perspectives regarding the physical accessibility of the library. Although parents and participants had little to say about the *Libraries for All* program, the program logo was noticed and positively

described by one parent. Like some of the staff members, all of the families and participants indicated a need for additional programs especially for older children, and offered a range of program suggestions. Parents indicated a preference for inclusive programs and suggested specific modifications that could enhance accessibility. As previously stated, parents were unaware of some of the adaptive resources that were available at the library. Although parents did not comment on staff development or training, they did describe the qualities of ideal program leaders.

### **Social Characteristics**

The library provided a flexible setting with a significant number of younger regular participants. Mutual respect between staff members and the regular younger participants seemed to be important. Staff members described two main functions that the library fulfilled. The library was a safe place for local children and youth and a community hub where local residents, teachers, and students met and interacted with one another. Staff members indicated that the positive relationships shared by staff members influenced relationships with patrons. A positive working environment created a positive feeling in the library. Staff members described special patrons with whom they developed close relationships. One of the staff members described relationships at the library in familial terms.

The diversity of patrons at the library enhanced the library and made the library more interesting. Individuals with disabilities were included in official roles as volunteers and through co-operative educational programs. Programs and interactions were modified in a range of ways to accommodate children with disabilities and staff members recognized the importance of meeting the needs of children and their families. This included listening to and respecting their choices and preferences and providing social support. Although some staff members described awkward interactions with patrons with disabilities, others had friends and neighbours with disabilities and were comfortable interacting with patrons and volunteers with disabilities.

### **Values and Beliefs**

Being “for everyone” was important to staff members and administrators. The need to be “for everyone” was a core belief that provided the rationale for library

programs and policies. Administrators described some of the challenges of being for everyone, and were conscious of the need to minimize the gap between being “for everyone” in policy and being “for everyone” in practice.

Comments from many of the staff members and administrators suggested that inclusion was just the way that things were done at the library. The value of inclusion seemed to be a core belief held by many members of the staff and administration. Many staff members talked about inclusion as though to ask “why would it be otherwise?” While there was a strong desire to be fully inclusive, this was difficult, given the diversity of the needs of the public, limited funding, and frequently changing accessibility standards.

Parents and participants were less likely than staff members, administrators or partners to reflect on values and beliefs that characterized the culture of the library. This could simply be a reflection of their position relative to the library. Patrons would be influenced by the culture of the library differently than either staff members or administrators and partners. Given their perspective (in front of, rather than behind the circulation desk), it is not surprising that library patrons focused less on values and beliefs and more on the visible and enacted aspects of the culture of the library.



## **Chapter 7: Discussion**

### **7.1: Overview**

This chapter presents a discussion and interpretation of the results of this research. The first section of this chapter responds to the first research question by providing an interpretation of the culture of the library. In the discussion, I explore how culture is experienced and described by individuals in different roles, and identify and discuss a range of cultural characteristics that both support and hinder participants of all abilities. This discussion is placed in the context of research findings that have been reported by other researchers.

The second section of this chapter responds to the second research question. I illustrate how different layers of culture link with one another, and elaborate on the relationship between the official culture of the library and the other layers of culture that are described by Hawkins (1997) in the water-lily metaphor.

The third section of this chapter responds to the third research question. I consider the implications of this research for the library and other community-based recreational organizations. I identify the specific physical and social aspects of culture that create an inclusive setting and make recommendations that could be implemented by the library and other organizations to enhance social inclusion and participation.

In the final sections of this chapter, I identify the limitations of this study, and areas for future research.

### **7.2: Revisiting the Research Problem and Research Questions**

This study was undertaken to add to what is known about the culture of community-based recreational organizations that support children with disabilities. Previous research has suggested that there are differences in the participation experiences of children with disabilities and peers who are developing typically (Law et al., 2004). Research has also suggested that there is a “critical gap” in what is known about the environmental factors that both facilitate and hinder children’s

participation (King et al., 2003, p. 66). It was proposed that a detailed study of the culture of one supportive recreational organization could add to what is known about the characteristics of organizations that support children of all abilities. This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the cultural characteristics of a supportive recreational organization?
  - a. What specific cultural elements support the participation of children with disabilities and their families?
  - b. What specific cultural elements hinder the participation of children with disabilities and their families?
2. How well does the water-lily metaphor fit the culture that is observed and described by the researcher and participants?
  - a. How do the official, enacted, and, invisible layers of culture at a supportive recreational organization fit together?
  - b. What are the gaps between the layers of culture?
3. What are the implications for the library and for other recreational settings?
  - a. How can recreational organizations apply the findings from this study to enhance the inclusiveness of their recreational programs?

**Questions 1 and 1a: What are the cultural characteristics of a supportive recreational organization? What specific cultural elements support the participation of children with disabilities and their families?**

The official culture of the library consisted of: the vision statement, mission statement, and the library's policy on accessibility for users with a disability. In its vision statement, the library stated that it was: "the Community Hub that strengthens individuals, families and neighbourhoods by connecting them to people and to relevant information, collections, programs and resources" (London Public Library, 2008). This vision was supported by the mission statement: "we are passionate about making a difference in our community, one person at a time, by enriching lives and empowering people through relevant, accessible, high quality Library services" (London Public Library, 2008). In addition to the vision and mission statement, the policy on accessibility (London Public Library, 2008) described the specific steps that the library had taken to improve accessibility. The stated principles that guided the

accessibility policy included respect for the dignity of individuals with disabilities, sensitivity to the needs of individuals with disabilities, equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities, integration, and a commitment to physical accessibility.

There was a range of physical characteristics that were identified by respondents as supporting children with disabilities at the library. Most of the interviewees described the branch as having a welcoming and open physical space. Many of the respondents perceived this space as being easy to access for individuals with a range of abilities. The physical setting was perceived by many respondents as providing a supportive, comfortable environment. Some of the staff members and administrators were aware of the accessibility standards established by the municipality and attempted to meet these standards. The availability of programs including *Libraries for All*, resources for individuals with disabilities, and the availability of additional support for staff members about how to work with individuals with disabilities were all supportive aspects of the physical culture.

There were also several social characteristics that were identified by respondents as supporting children with disabilities. Staff members were flexible regarding the rules about noise at the branch and emphasized the importance of creating a “fun, happy” place for participants. This flexibility was valued by many of the staff members, administrators, as well as by many of the parents and participants. Some of the parents indicated that flexibility was an aspect of social setting that made the environment welcoming and comfortable for their children.

Some respondents indicated that they perceived the library as offering a safe place for children of all abilities. For example, some of the parents (including those with children with disabilities and with children developing typically) perceived the library as a safe place for their children to practice social skills. Some parents of children with disabilities indicated that the branch offered a safe place where their children were accepted.

Other participants described how they used the branch. The library provided a place for “food and friends” for many of the regular participants, while for some of the families, the library provided a place to find help, information, and support. Some

partners and administrators indicated that the willingness of library staff members to work cooperatively with them helped them to support families in the community.

Positive, warm relationships among staff members and between staff members and patrons supported children with a range of abilities. Many of the respondents representing a range of perspectives expressed positive attitudes about including and accommodating children with disabilities. The importance of including participants with disabilities in programs and in official roles (i.e. as volunteers) was acknowledged by some of the staff members, administrators, and parents.

There were two values that emerged in the analysis: the library is for everyone, and inclusion is a given. Although these values were shared by most of the respondents, the way in which they were expressed by respondents differed according to the role that the respondent occupied at the library. For example, staff members and administrators spoke explicitly about these values and provided examples of the ways in which these values were enacted in interactions with patrons at the branch. In two interviews, staff members spoke about how the library “should be” for everyone (a belief relative to social inclusion), described a situation in which the value was not respected by patrons, and explained how this situation was handled. Patrons who did not respect the library’s commitment to creating an environment that was open and welcoming to everyone were reprimanded by the staff. Inclusion was a value implicit in the comments from staff members and administrators that children were children first. The administrators and staff members who made these comments, made them as though to ask “why would it be otherwise?” Although parents were less likely to be explicit about the values that they associated with the library, some of their comments indicated that their personal beliefs were consistent with the beliefs articulated by staff members and administrators. Some parents with children with disabilities and most parents who had children developing typically commented that it was important for children of all abilities to learn how to interact with one another.

**Question 1b: What specific cultural elements hinder the participation of children with disabilities and their families?**

Some characteristics of the physical setting were perceived as potential barriers for some children with disabilities. Although the library was perceived as being accessible to some children with disabilities, it was not fully accessible to all children, particularly those with physical disabilities. Some physical barriers included a shortage of parking, the height of the shelves and tables in the main library area, the double doors at the main entrance, the lack of programs for children between the ages of six and 11, and a perceived lack of adaptive computer software. Some respondents suggested that signage could be improved to make the library more accessible to individuals with learning disabilities and visual impairments. Some staff members expressed a desire for additional training to improve their understanding about different disabilities so that they might better support student volunteers, participants, and patrons with disabilities.

There were also some social characteristics that were perceived as potential barriers for some children with disabilities. Although flexibility by staff members in enforcing the rules was a social characteristic that was perceived as enhancing the social accessibility of the library for some children with disabilities, this characteristic was a hindrance for others. Negotiating rules and boundaries was a challenge for some of the staff members and balancing the needs of a range of participants and community partners created tensions for some of the administrators. In addition, one of the parents indicated that the library was loud and boisterous at times, qualities that were not perceived as being particularly supportive.

Although many of the parents interviewed in this study perceived that the library was a safe place for their children, some parents doubted that their child would fit in at the library and expressed discomfort at the thought of leaving a child unattended at the branch. Despite the fact that most respondents described positive attitudes towards individuals with disabilities, the interactions were not always easy. Staff members discussed some of the challenges that were associated with including participants with disabilities (particularly disabilities that were associated with social and behavioural issues) in official roles (i.e. as volunteers). Some of the parents in

this study described the challenges that they faced in attempting to include their children in mainstream recreational programs. For example, one parent commented that her son's behaviour had the potential to derail a program leader while another parent commented that her daughter could not stay at the library unattended.

### **Placing the Findings for Research Question 1 in the Context of Other Studies**

Some of the specific facilitators and barriers that were identified by participants in this study were consistent with the facilitators and barriers that have been identified by other researchers (Heah et al., 2007; Lawlor et al., 2006; McManus et al., 2006; Messent et al., 1999; Rimmer et al., 2004). Heah and colleagues' (2007) study emphasized the importance of creating programs that are perceived as being fun by participants of all abilities. Staff members in this study recognized the importance of creating a setting that was perceived as being fun and many of the participants who were interviewed indicated that the library was indeed a fun, comfortable place.

Lawlor and colleagues (2006) emphasized the importance of supportive policies in facilitating participation for children with disabilities and their families. A review of the vision, mission, and accessibility policy at the library indicated that these policies were being enacted. Several researchers (Lawlor et al., 2006; McManus et al., 2006; Messent et al., 1999) have identified the importance of the attitudes and perceptions of staff members towards individuals with disabilities in both facilitating and hindering the participation of individuals with disabilities. Interviews with some of the administrators indicated their awareness of the role that staff members played in cultivating a supportive recreational setting. Moreover, interviews with some of the staff members and administrators revealed awareness about the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, an openness and receptivity to supporting the participation of individuals with disabilities, and inclusive attitudes.

The findings from this study also supported the conceptual model of recreational and leisure participation proposed by King and colleagues (2003). This model identified a range of environmental factors (physical and institutional barriers, supportive relationships for the child, supportive relationships for the parents), family factors (financial and time impacts, family demographics, home environment, and

family preferences), and child factors (self perception, physical cognitive, and communication function, behavioural and social function, and activity preferences) that influence the participation of children with disabilities in recreational programs (King et al., 2003). The role played by physical and institutional environments, and the importance of supportive relationships for children and parents, were all described by participants in this study. Many of the parents indicated that the library was a preferred recreational venue and a part of familial life, highlighting the influence of family preferences in children's participation.

Finally, the results of this study support the findings of Baker and Donnelly's (2001) research on supportive school environments. According to Baker and Donnelly (2001), supportive school settings occur where professionals demonstrate egalitarian attitudes and actions (prefer unstructured, informal, and flexible relationships), policies are inclusive (children with disabilities are like everyone else), and the school setting is characterized by an ethos of clemency where empathy, caring, respect, and affection are emphasized. In this study, staff members, administrators, parents and participants all described a flexible setting, characterized by egalitarian relationships. Policies at the library were guided by an implicit belief in the value of social inclusion. Staff members and participants described an ethos of clemency at the library where mutual respect was the one non-negotiable rule. Further evidence of an ethos of clemency was given by the warm relationships that characterize interactions between staff members and patrons and among staff members themselves.

**Question 2: How well does the water-lily metaphor fit the culture that is observed and described by the researcher and participants?**

In this study, the metaphor of a water-lily was invoked as a way of conceptualizing culture (Alvesson, 1993; Hawkins, 1997). The results from this study supported the use of the water-lily as a metaphor that could be used to better understand the culture of a supportive recreational organization. In this metaphor, culture exists on several layers: the top layer or espoused culture is seen, known, and stated; the middle layer or real culture is seen and enacted in the setting on a day-to-day basis; deeper layers of culture are shared and invisible.

The espoused culture of the library reflected a desire to be inclusive by valuing people one at a time, enriching lives, and empowering people. This espoused culture was supported by two values related to social inclusion that formed the invisible layer of culture at the library: the belief that the library was for everyone and an assumption that inclusion was a given.

The official policy at the library and the values and beliefs shared by administrators and staff members were enacted at the branch through the physical and social characteristics of the branch. Concrete features of the branch (designated parking space, accessible main and family washrooms, automatic doors, an open main space on one level), the introduction of programs like *Libraries for All* and adaptive storytimes, the availability of resources including adaptive software and books in different formats, and staff training programs were all concrete, tangible cultural characteristics that enhanced the accessibility of the library. These characteristics represented ways in which the administrators, staff members, and management enacted the espoused policy that the library was for use by everyone.

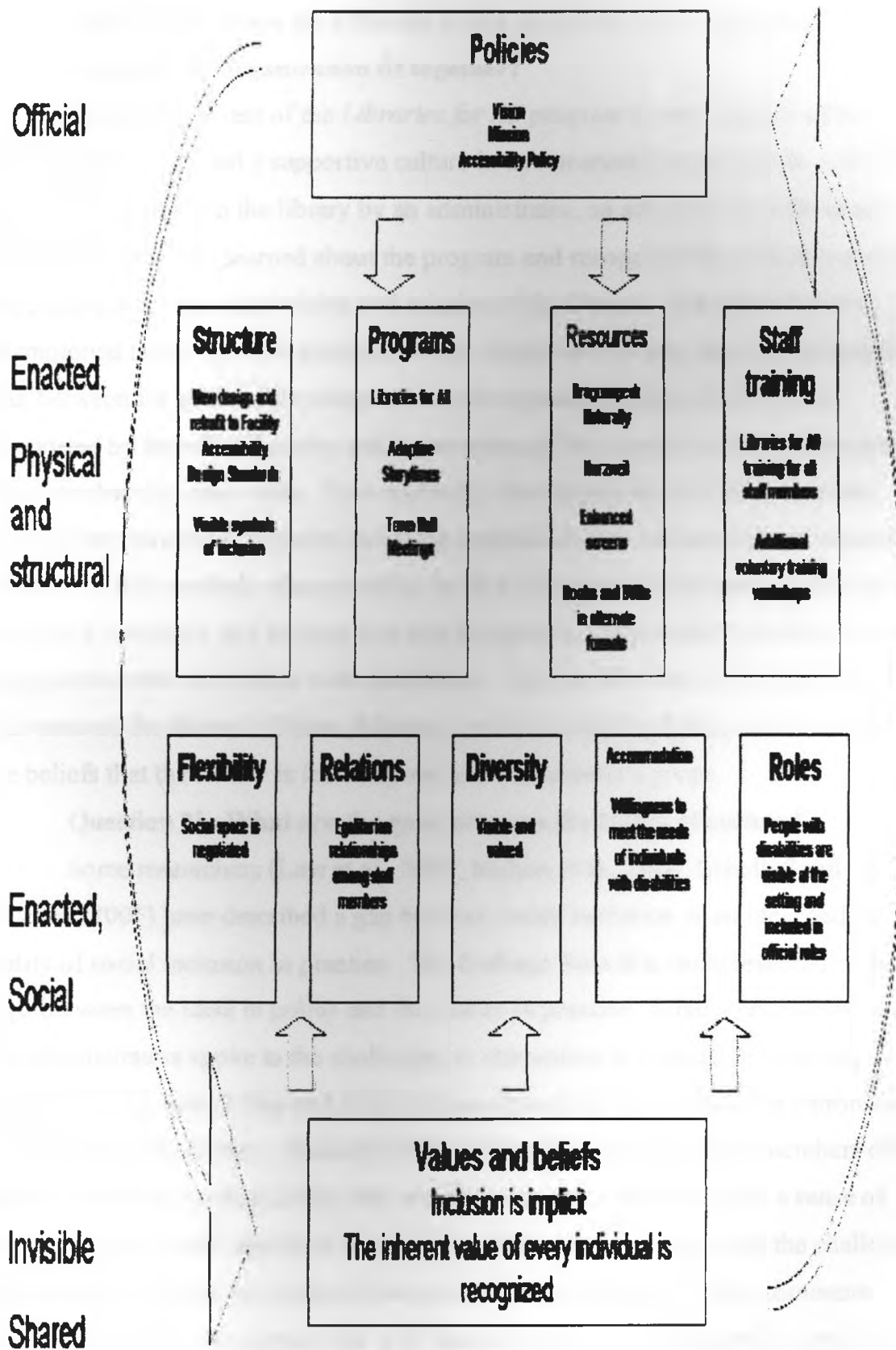
A number of social characteristics were enacted at the branch and also helped to create a supportive culture. Flexibility created a comfortable, welcoming, and accepting environment for patrons. By providing a safe place for many patrons, and by functioning as a community hub, the library offered a setting that was open and accessible to diverse members of the community. Positive relationships between staff members and staff members and patrons, the cultural diversity of the patrons that participated at the branch, the attitudes that were expressed by staff members, participants, and parents, and a willingness on the part of the library to include individuals with disabilities in official roles (i.e. as volunteers), also contributed to the library's supportive culture. These social characteristics provided evidence of the fact that the library's espoused policy and its guiding values and beliefs about inclusion were enacted at the library.

Figure 7.1 proposes a model of supportive recreational program culture. The model illustrates a transactional relationship between different layers of organizational culture. Official documents (i.e., the vision, mission statement and accessibility policy) directly relate to one another and influence each other. The



physical and structural characteristics and social characteristics that comprise the middle layers of culture are influenced by official documents and the values and beliefs that guide the organization.

**Figure 7.1: A Supportive Organizational Culture**



**Question 2a: How do different layers of culture at a supportive recreational organization fit together?**

The development of the *Libraries for All* program is one example of how different layers created a supportive culture in a recreational organization. *Libraries for All* was brought to the library by an administrator, an advocate for individuals with disabilities who learned about the program and recognized the link between the program and the espoused vision and mission of the library. The administrator championed the program to members of the administration who also recognized the link between the goals of the program and the espoused culture of the library. Supported by the official policy and by members of the administration, the program was introduced system-wide. This resulted in the introduction of other concrete physical and structural supports including communication resources (communication boards), visible symbols of accessibility at all of the branches (stickers placed on the doors and counters), and training that was designed to support staff members in their interactions with individuals with disabilities. The introduction of *Libraries for All* thus enacted the library's Vision, Mission, and Accessibility Policy and also enacted the beliefs that the library is for everyone and inclusion is a given.

**Question 2b: What are the gaps between the layers of culture?**

Some researchers (Law et al., 2007; Mahon et al., 2000; Scholl, Smith & Davison, 2005) have described a gap between social inclusion as an ideal and the reality of social inclusion in practice. The findings from this study revealed several gaps between the ideal in policy and the reality in practice. Firstly, comments from the administrators spoke to the challenges in attempting to create a recreational setting that was barrier free and fully inclusive given the diversity of the patrons who participated at the library. Although there was a strong desire among members of the administration to create a setting that was fully inclusive and to inspire a sense of advocacy among staff members some of the administrators recognized the challenges of attempting to meet the needs of everyone in the community. Their comments reflected a desire to do a great deal with limited resources. Although the importance

of and need for staff training was identified by some staff members and administrators, constraints on staffs' time to undergo training posed challenges.

There was a sincere desire to facilitate full inclusion on the part of the administration and some of the staff members but there were relatively few programs for children between the ages of six and 11 at the branch. Some of the participants, parents, and staff members indicated a need for additional programs for children of all abilities between the ages of six and 11. Many of the staff members and one of the parents indicated that more structured opportunities could attract more children with disabilities and their families to the library. There seemed to be a belief among some staff members that more structured opportunities would reassure these families that their efforts to transport their children to the library would be worthwhile.

While conducting field work, the researcher observed only a small number of children with visible disabilities at the library. Although the researcher asked several staff members and one administrator why there were so few participants with physical disabilities at the library, there were no clear explanations. Two of the administrators wondered if parents who had children with physical disabilities assumed that the library would not be able to accommodate their children. It is possible that some parents assumed that the library would be unwilling and/or unable to accommodate their children. Discussions with three of the parents indicated that their children participated in specialized recreational programs. Parent with children with disabilities might have preferred to enroll their children in specialized recreational programs. Issues with transportation (RACSN, 2002) and time (for caregiving children with disabilities) that are factors external to the library also offer potential explanations for reduced attendance.

**Question 3: What are the implications for the library and for other recreational settings?**

Heah and colleagues (2007) emphasized the importance of the relationship between parents and organizations and suggested that these relationships can create successful participation experiences for children with disabilities. Although the library has partnerships with organizations that provide services to families that include children with disabilities, cultivating direct relationships with parents and families (through the creation of a parent advisory council or the introduction of another mechanism for directly communicating with parents) could benefit both families and the recreational organizations themselves. Closer ties could provide parents with information about the resources and opportunities that are available to their families and children at the library. Direct communication between recreational organizations and families that include children with disabilities could also provide parents with a way of informing staff about the unique needs of their children.

Although many of the staff members in this study described positive interactions with patrons including those with disabilities, staff members recognized that these interactions were sometimes challenging, uncomfortable, and awkward. More direct communication between parents and organizations could provide staff members with additional information about different disabilities, and could facilitate the development of specific strategies for supporting children with disabilities. Direct communication could help the library identify the facilitators and barriers that are experienced by families that include children with disabilities, facilitate program planning, and assure staff and administrators that they are reaching families and children with disabilities. Together the library staff and parents with children with disabilities could plan creative ways of accommodating children with a range of abilities.

Table 7.1 lists a number of specific implications that follow from the findings of this study. These implications have relevance for the library and for other community-based recreational organizations that are interested in facilitating inclusion and enhancing physical and social accessibility.

Inclusive policies that are prioritized by program leaders and administrators facilitate the enactment of inclusion on a day-to-day basis. These policies reinforce the values and beliefs that guide supportive recreational settings.

Structured, inclusive programs, a range of resources, and regular staff training programs are physical and structural characteristics of a supportive organizational culture. Recreational organizations should ensure that groups are aware of the programs, resources, and opportunities that exist.

A flexible social space that is welcoming and comfortable for a diverse range of participants is also a characteristic of a supportive culture. The attitudes held by staff members and other parents play a key role in shaping positive participation experiences for all participants, including those with disabilities. As the example of *Libraries for All* illustrates, advocates who believe in the value of social inclusion are instrumental to ensuring that supportive policies and become concrete, supportive recreational environments. Although staff training programs can enhance individual understanding about the challenges and needs of children with disabilities, a personal commitment to inclusion on the part of individuals in all positions (i.e. staff members, administrators, parents whose children participate) within an organization is critically important.

Table 7.1 proposes a list of characteristics that could be used by community-based recreational programs to enhance the accessibility of their programs. During the respondent validation meeting, the librarians were asked to comment on Table 7.1. Both librarians resonated with the suggestions included in the table. One of the librarians emphasized the importance of direct communication between programs and families

**Table 7.1: Recommendations for Recreational Organizations****Official: policies and documents**

Policies and documents that emphasize community, individuals, families and neighbourhoods, connections, emotion, advocacy, people (one at a time), equality, independence, sensitivity, integrated services, and universally accessible physical spaces.

**Enacted: physical and structural characteristics**

A building that communicates accessibility through its features, signs, and structural modifications (i.e., accessible shelving, chairs, tables, parking, family washrooms).

Programs that are available to participants of all ages, that are planned in collaboration with participants and parents. Partnerships between mainstream and specialized programs to support children with disabilities and their families.

Resources that support individuals with a range of abilities including voice recognition software, computer-based reading programs, and, other adaptive resources. The availability of these resources should be communicated to parents and participants.

**Enacted: social characteristics**

An environment that is flexible and adaptable.

Collegial, egalitarian relationships between staff members and the organization's leadership and staff members, and the organization's leadership and participants

A setting that is culturally and socio-economically diverse and that includes individuals of all abilities.

Direct communication between the program and parents to reassure parents, identify aspects of the environment that are not perceived as safe and to identify how these might be improved. Direct communication could be facilitated through the creation of advisory committees, parent newsletters, and through parent representation on boards and planning committees.

Awareness of the importance of social inclusion and sensitivity among staff members about the needs of children with disabilities.

A willingness among staff members to accommodate children with disabilities in programs and official roles.

Staff advocates who recognize the importance of inclusion and champion inclusive practices within the organization.

**Invisible and shared: values and beliefs**

A culture that values inclusion and recognizes the needs of individuals

The findings of this study suggest that community libraries make many contributions to communities. These contributions go well beyond the provision of books and information.

**7.3: Limitations**

This research was limited by the decision to focus on one recreational setting. Although the focus on one recreational organization provided an opportunity for in-depth study of a supportive organizational culture, this focus limited the study because there were only a few families that included children with disabilities at the library. Had other organizations been included, a larger number of families that included children with disabilities might have been available. Although there were few families that included children with disabilities in the sample, the library did serve a diverse group of patrons. Some of the factors that facilitated or hindered the participation of members of other groups were perceived by some participants as potentially hindering or facilitating individuals with disabilities.



There were three families whose perspectives might have enhanced the study. I was unable to recruit the families to the study. Two of the children in these families had participated as volunteers at the library and the other child was a regular participant. All of the children had developmental disabilities and I was eager to enhance the information that I had from the staff members with information from these children and their parents but was unable to establish contact with them.

#### **7.4: Strengths of the Study**

The study provides a detailed description of one community-based recreational program based on extensive observation and interviews with individuals in a range of roles in the organization. The description and analysis made explicit some of the key characteristics of supportive environments that will be helpful to others. The iterative nature of the analysis provided a way of clarifying aspects of the culture from different stakeholders' perspectives. The analysis also illustrated the importance of a range of physical, social and attitudinal characteristics that form a holistic, supportive culture. Significant strengths of this work are the practical implications provided for families, librarians, and administrators and staff members of other recreational programs.

#### **7.5: Future Research**

Future research studies might extend this study to other recreational settings. It would be interesting to compare the culture of this library to the cultures of other recreational organizations and to begin to look for consistencies and differences in the organizational cultures of different recreational programs. Extending this study to include other organizations could improve access to families that include children with disabilities. The perspectives of these families could enhance our understanding about the organizational culture of recreational environments that support children with disabilities.

Other studies have indicated a need for tools that assess the culture of recreational organizational cultures (McManus et al., 2006; Mihaylov et al., 2004). The findings from this study highlight the influence of recreational environments in shaping participation experiences and opportunities for children with disabilities and

reveal some of the cultural characteristics that support children of all abilities in community-based recreational settings. The findings from this study could inform the development of a holistic recreational assessment tool that could be used by community-based recreational organizations to evaluate their recreational environments. Although there are several assessment tools that have been developed to measure different environments, no tool exists that focuses specifically on the physical, social and cultural characteristics of community-based recreational settings (Law, Baum & Dunn, 2005). An assessment tool could help organizations evaluate the physical and social cultures of their organizations and could help to identify specific aspects of their cultures that could be enhanced to facilitate social inclusion. An assessment tool could be used to enhance the inclusiveness of community-based recreational organizations, supporting staff and volunteers and, facilitating communication between program participants, parents, and, organizations.

### **7.6: Conclusions**

This dissertation contains a detailed description of one supportive recreational organization and identifies thirteen themes that characterized a supportive recreational environment. Although there are other approaches that can be used to study organizational culture, the findings of this study suggest that the water-lily was an apt metaphor. A list of characteristics is proposed that could be used by community-based recreational programs to enhance inclusion.

## **Chapter 8: Reflection**

### **8.1: Chapter Overview**

Reflexivity enhances the rigour of qualitative research (Hammel, 2002; Long & Johnson, 2000). The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on the research experience and to identify some of the assumptions and challenges that shaped the research.

### **8.2: Being at the Library**

I enjoyed being at the library and respected the work that was accomplished there and it was difficult for me not to comment on this when I was speaking with staff members and patrons. The following reflection was written following my participation in the Winter Open House. As I was leaving the branch I felt “warmed” by the experience of having been there. I remember thinking to myself that the library really was a special place.

*People seemed very at home there. The kids just took the cookies and played with each other. It was a neat place to be. The Open House reminded me of the church picnics and Italian festivals that I used to go to with my parents when I was a kid. You would have all of these people in a park. Some of the people were related and others were not, but everyone just seemed to know one another. All of the kids would run around and the adults would take care of each others' kids. It was just a really big family kind of event. That's what I felt like being in that room.*

Over the course of my time at the branch I came to know several of the younger participants. One participant in particular greeted me each time I was at the library. She sat with me on a number of occasions and we chatted about different things. Although I really enjoyed having a relationship with this child, I found the relationship difficult because of my assumptions about how I should have been acting as a researcher. I remember an incident that happened towards the end of my time at the library. The child had given me two drawings that she had made during an art program that afternoon. I was so touched by the fact that she had given me the drawings that I reached out and hugged her before I could stop myself. I quickly realized what I was doing and the implications of hugging a “strange” child in a

setting where I was supposed to be a professional. I chastised myself and felt terrible for crossing a boundary. The constant sense of self-doubt and uncertainty made field work difficult.

### **8.3: Ethical Issues and Personal Concerns**

I struggled with ethical and personal concerns during data collection and for months after as I became increasingly aware of the implications of observing participants (especially vulnerable participants including children and families who were immigrants and/or refugees) in a public setting. There was this constant fear that I was seeing something that I should not have been seeing, or that I was inadvertently and unintentionally deceiving participants. I thought a lot about the participants. There is no way of knowing if the people in the setting are truly informed participants and I realized this more and more as I came closer to finishing the dissertation.

Many of the regular patrons were children under the age of 18, and a number of families who participated at the library communicated in a language other than English. Although I informed all of the children that their parents' permission was required for them to participate in the study, and obtained completed parental assent forms, I wondered whether or not I should have been doing more to inform the parents about the research. I realize now, more than ever, how much power researchers have in the research process.

While I was writing the final dissertation, I became more preoccupied with these concerns. Although the library and the participants had consented to participate in the study, the weight of these concerns affected me and I found it necessary to stop, take a step back, and re-evaluate the research. I returned to the dissertation with a different perspective. As I edited the final draft of the document, I edited with a new appreciation for the participants and an increased recognition of the inherent subjectivity of ethnographic research and the implicit limitations of the methodology.

### **8.4: The Incompleteness of Ethnographic Research**

According to Geertz (1973, p. 29), "cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete... and the more deeply it goes the less complete it is. It is a strange science

whose most telling assertions are its most tremulously based". The closer I came to finishing field work, the more I wondered whether or not I had collected enough information. I was concerned about the relatively small number of families that included children with disabilities at the library and struggled to explain what this observation was telling me about the setting.

*I just can't decide what to make of the small number of families that include children with disabilities that I have recruited. I don't really know what it means or how to deal with it. There may be children at the library who have disabilities that are not visible. Or, it may be the case that when someone with a disability comes in, no one including me notices. Does the fact that I don't see many people with disabilities mean that the site isn't accessible or open (or used) by people with disabilities? I am not sure. I don't think this can be entirely true because I know from one of the parents that one of the things that her son likes about the library is that it provides a place where he just fits in. This is something that I have also heard from other participants. I also wonder if differences in other demographic variables are more significant than differences in ability at the library. I think it's interesting that when I have asked the kids about differences and similarities between people, most of them describe ethnic or cultural differences rather than other differences.*

I also wondered if I would ever really feel as though I had spent enough time in the field. As I completed the analysis and began writing the dissertation, I realized the truth in Geertz' (1973) comments about the incompleteness of ethnography; an ethnographic study would never be fully finished and there would always be new things that could have been discovered. This was an unsettling truth, but a truth just the same. I wrote the following in one of my last field notes:

*I have been there for six months and...I have to put my faith in what I have collected and move forward. So that is the decision. Field work is finished.*

### **8.5: Inspiration and Learning: The Library and the Participants**

Before returning to graduate school in 2005, I worked as a community-based researcher for several local organizations. Through this work, I developed an appreciation for the contributions that the library and other local organizations make

to the community. Although the library was selected for this study because it was one of the organizations that was positively regarded by the group of parents who were interviewed in the first phase of this research, my passion for the library and my desire to do the research at the library also influenced this decision.

I learned a great deal from the families that I met and interviewed at the library. I enjoyed meeting them and was pleased that they were willing to entertain my questions and share their experiences with me. Many of the parents had a deep commitment to their children and to ensuring that opportunities were available regardless of their child's ability. It was eye-opening to hear first-hand about the challenges some of the families faced in attempting to participate in the community.

I was also inspired on several occasions by the staff members and administrators. Staff 4 had a very positive relationship with patrons of all ages, and some of the parents. She seemed to relate as easily to a group of mothers as she related to groups of young people. She was someone who I enjoyed being around and who enhanced the setting by being herself. I commented about the relationships that Staff 4 shared with the patrons on several occasions in my field notes:

*I went to the library this morning to observe the morning group. I arrived and saw several moms with babies in front of the library chatting to one another. They seem to have a real social bond that extends beyond the confines of the program. I went in and saw that Staff 4 and two of the parents were still chatting in the room. Staff 4 was talking about how she arranges visits to the schools. I didn't catch the whole conversation but I think that one of the moms wanted Staff 4 to go to one of the schools and was trying to find out how she does this.*

I was moved by the commitment that staff members and administrators had to being inclusive and to supporting everyone. It was inspirational to hear staff members and administrators explain how and why this was important to them. Following one of the last interviews that I had with a member of the administration, I expressed this in a field note:

*If you want to understand factors about the culture at the library that support people of all abilities just spend some time talking with Admin 1... One of the most powerful things that came up during our meeting today was something that one of the*

*participants told her during a meeting that she organized last week. The participant said that she wished that the police and hospitals had letter and picture boards. She said that she had told someone that she had been abused and was told that there was no sense in telling anyone else because she would not be believed.*

*One of the things that I notice about the staff and administration at the library is that they really are committed to working from the perspective of whatever group they are supporting... The person who facilitated the meeting was an augmentative technology user. The meeting was set up so that the participants could speak for themselves. Admin 1 told me that the introductions alone at the meeting took 45 minutes. Some of the participants told her that they usually felt bad talking during meetings because they waste other peoples' time. When you are a person that doesn't fit the norm (able-bodied) you have to either censor yourself or shrink yourself down so that you can fit yourself into the space that society says you should fit into. The unspoken message is that you are the problem—you need to alter yourself... Once people begin to realize they are not alone in their problems they realize that there is more to the problem than themselves. That's when change can happen.*

*I asked Admin 1 what she would say to someone who might ask her to justify the two hours that was spent during the Town Hall on an event that was attended by only four people. She asked how it could not be justified. The more time that I spend at the library, the more I see that they are about imagining and attempting to work towards an ideal. They are about possibility. Although it might take time and it might not work perfectly the first time, they are open to the possibility of trying things and taking chances. That is just powerful stuff. Wow.*

### **Epilogue**

In an inspiring collection of essays and insights that combine philosophy and anthropology Geertz (1999), comments on the “moral tension” that is at the heart of field work:

... usually the sense of being members, however temporarily, insecurely, and incompletely, of a single moral community can be maintained even in the face of the wider social realities which press in at almost every moment to deny it. It is this fiction---fiction, not falsehood---that lies at the heart of successful anthropological field research; and because it is never completely convincing for any of the participants, it renders such research, considered as a form of conduct, continuously ironic. To recognize the moral tension, the ethical ambiguity, implicit in the encounter of anthropologist and informant, and to still be able to dissipate it through one’s actions and one’s attitudes, is what encounter demands of both parties if it is to be authentic, if it is to actually happen. And to discover this is to discover something very complicated and not altogether clear about the nature of sincerity and insincerity, genuineness and hypocrisy, honesty and self-deception. Fieldwork is an educational experience all around. What is difficult is to decide is what has been learned (p. 37).

As I was writing the proposal for this research, I was moved by Geertz’ (1973) insights about the process of studying and interpreting culture. I continue to identify with Geertz’ (1973; 1999) writing; it is true that doing field work is an educational experience. My hope is that this dissertation and the reflections that have been presented in this chapter are a fitting testament to the learning that was done during my time in the field.



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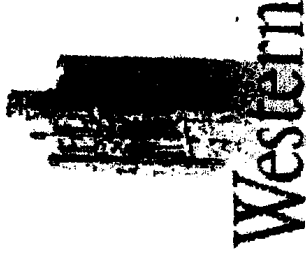
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## Appendix 1: Phase 1 Ethics Approval



### Office of Research Ethics

The University of Western Ontario  
 Room 00045 Dental Sciences Building, London, ON, Canada N6A 5G1  
 Telephone: (519) 661-3036 Fax: (519) 850-2486 Email: ethics@uwo.ca  
 Website: www.uwo.ca/research/ethics

### Use of Human Subjects - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. O. Bartlett

Review Number: 1319ZE Review Date: February 21, 2007 Revision Number:

Protocol Title: Exploring the environmental factors that facilitate participation of children with disabilities in leisure and recreation programs through a discussion group with parents

Department and Institution: Physical Therapy, University of Western Ontario

Sponsor:

Ethics Approval Date: March 7, 2007

Expiry Date: December 31, 2007

Documents Reviewed and Approved: UWO Protocol, Letter of Information and Consent

Documents Received for Information:

This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Health Sciences Research involving Human Subjects (HSREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the Health Canada/ICH Good Clinical Practice Practices, Consolidated Guidelines, and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has reviewed and granted expedited approval to the above named research study on the approval date noted above. The membership of this REB also complies with the membership requirements for REB's as defined in Division 5 of the Food and Drug Regulations.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the HSREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information. If you require an updated approval notice prior to that time you must request it using the UWO Updated Approval Request Form.

During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol or consent form may be initiated without prior written approval from the HSREB except when necessary to eliminate immediate/serious hazards to the subject or when the change(s) involve only logistical or administrative aspects of the study (e.g. change of monitor, telephone number). Expedited review of minor change(s) in ongoing studies will be considered. Subjects must receive a copy of the signed information/consent documentation.

Investigators must promptly also report to the HSREB:

- a) changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study,
  - b) all adverse and unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected,
  - c) new information that may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study.
- If these changes/adverse events require a change to the information/consent documentation, and/or recruitment advertisement, the newly revised information/consent documentation, and/or advertisement, must be submitted to this office for approval.

Members of the HSREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussion related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the HSREB.

## **Appendix 2: Phase 1 Discussion Guide**

### *Welcome and Overview*

I would like to take a few minutes to thank you for agreeing to participate in this discussion group and to provide some information and reminders before we get started.

Just to remind you, our discussion today will explore the environmental factors that facilitate the participation of children with disabilities. Environmental factors can include things like the physical structure of buildings and transportation, social factors like the support that is received by program staff and leaders, and attitudinal factors like the beliefs that other people have about children with disabilities. I am looking forward to hearing about your experiences and learning more about some of the things that have been most helpful to your child and family in participating in leisure and recreational programs. Leisure and recreational programs can include sports programs, gymnastics lessons, reading and library programs, art and drama programs, music lessons, camps, as well as programs offered by associations like the Girl Guides and Boy Scouts.

I also wanted to invite you to share your experiences with the group in the way that is most comfortable for you. You can speak about what is important to you and you do not have to share anything that you do not want to share at this time. There is nothing you can say or do wrong. I will begin the discussion with a very broad question. The discussion that follows the question will be determined by each of you.

Finally, I want to emphasize how valuable your experience and insights are. The thoughts and comments that you share with me tonight will be used to inform a future research project. Your views can help us to better understand the things that have helped your family and your child, and that may help other families, program leaders, staff, and volunteers who are involved in community-based leisure and recreational programs. Your identity will never be released in any publication or presentation.

Before we begin with the discussion, I wondered if we could take a moment to introduce ourselves.

### Announce start of discussion

I'd like to begin the discussion tonight by inviting you to think about the ideal environment or characteristics you envision for your child to actively take part in recreational and leisure activities.

As you begin to think about/have enrolled your child in recreational and leisure activities, what characteristics about the program or organization support your child's participation?

What characteristics/environmental factors influence your decision to select one program over another for your child?

*If time permits, I will ask participants to discuss the following questions:*

“I wondered if we might talk more about any social factors that facilitate your child’s ability to participate.” (Possible probe: include specific examples of social facilitators)

“I also wondered if we might talk more about any attitudinal factors that facilitate your child’s ability to participate.” (Possible probe: include specific examples of attitudinal facilitators)

“Finally, I wondered if we might talk more any physical factors that facilitate your child’s ability to participate.” (Possible probe: include specific examples of physical facilitators)

**Appendix 3: Phase 2 Ethics Approval**

**Office of Research Ethics**  
 The University of Western Ontario  
 Room 800-45 Dental Sciences Building, London, ON, Canada N6A 5C1  
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 Website: www.uwo.ca/research/ethics



**Use of Human Subjects - Ethics Approval Notice**

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. M.K. Kerby  
**Review Number:** 134535  
**Review Level:** Full Board  
**Review Date:** August 10, 2007  
**Protocol Title:** An Ethnographic Study of a Community-Based Recreation Program in London, Ontario  
**Department and Institution:** Communication Sciences & Disorders, University of Western Ontario  
**Sponsor:**  
**Ethics Approval Date:** September 21, 2007  
**Expiry Date:** December 31, 2008  
**Documents Reviewed and Approved:** UWO Protocol, Letter of Introduction and Request for a Meeting, Letter of Information and Consent, Program Site, Site Information Poster, Letter of Information and Consent, Adult, Parent/Permission/Child Assent, Flyer/Website Information Statement, Documents Received for Information: Physical Accessibility Measures for Schools

This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMRERB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval for the above named research study on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMRERB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information. If you require an updated approval notice prior to that time you must request it using the UWO Updated Approval Request Form.

During the course of the research no deviations from, or changes to, the study or consent forms may be initiated without prior written approval from the NMRERB except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazards to the subject or when the change(s) involve only logistical or administrative aspects of the study (e.g. change of monitor, telephone number). Expedited review of minor change(s) in ongoing studies will be considered. Subjects must receive a copy of the signed information/consent documentation.

Investigators must promptly also report to the NMRERB:

- a) changes impacting the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- b) all adverse and unexpected experiences or events that are not serious and unexpected;
- c) new information that may adversely affect the safety of the subject or the conduct of the study.

If these changes/adverse events require a change to the information/consent documentation, and/or recruitment advertisement, the newly revised information/consent documentation, and/or advertisement, must be submitted to this office for approval.

Members of the NMRERB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussion related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMRERB.

**Appendix 4: Letter of Contact****An Ethnographic Study of a Community-Based Recreational Program in London,  
Ontario  
Letter of Introduction and Request for a Meeting**

Delilah Deane Cummings  
Program and Community Relations Coordinator  
Central Library  
251 Dundas St.  
London, ON  
N6A 6H9

September 24, 2007

Dear Ms. Cummings:

I am contacting you today because you are a leader offering one or more recreational and leisure programs to children and youth in London. I am a doctoral student with an interest in better understanding the culture of community programs that foster participation for children, including those with disabilities. Your program was recommended by a group of parents who have children with disabilities, and who participated in a discussion group in May, 2007. The purpose of this letter is to introduce the research and myself and to explore your interest in having your program participate in a qualitative study of its culture.

Although participation in organized leisure and recreational program is important for all children, children with disabilities have been shown to participate less. Research indicates that the social environment is an important factor that influences the participation rates and experiences of children. My interest in this research is to explore the culture of a program that provides a positive environment for children of all abilities. Our hope is that the knowledge that we gain from this study can be used to further enhance the program that is studied, as well as other, similar programs that are interested in enhancing their own environments. This knowledge may help to support programs and the community in creating environments that support leisure and recreational for children of all abilities. Staff and volunteers may also benefit from the opportunity to reflect on and share some of the program's strengths and participants may benefit from the opportunity to discuss their experiences and insights with the researcher. Finally, this work may help to identify and inform training and development opportunities for program staff and leaders.

Ethnography is the methodology that I will use to study the culture of your program. This methodology involves in depth observation and interactions with staff over time. I will spend between four and six months at your program location, observing, talking with participants, staff, and volunteers, taking photographs of the building that will help me to describe characteristics of your program. I hope to observe three, half days per week (between 15 and 20 hours) and can arrange my observations to accommodate staff schedules

and the timing of daily or weekly events. I will be on site at different times of the day, observing different events and procedures, and reviewing mission statements, brochures, and promotional materials that are provided by your program. I will also complete an evaluation of the accessibility of the building that houses your program using an instrument that was developed in 2003.

Because this research will involve a four to six month commitment on the part of your program, I have prepared an information package that provides comprehensive information about the research and would really appreciate the chance to meet with you to talk in detail about the research and to answer all of your questions. I will follow up with you in approximately one week to ask if you have had a chance to think about the research and to arrange a time to meet. If you have any questions in the meantime, please contact Dr. Marilyn Kertoy who is supervising this research at The University of Western Ontario.

Sincerely,

Angela Conti-Becker

## **Appendix 5: Letter of Information: Study Site**

### **Letter of Information and Consent-Program Site An Ethnographic Study of a Community-Based Recreational Program**

**Your program is being invited to participate in a research study** that is being done to contribute to what is known about social environments and participation, particularly for children with disabilities. The purpose of this research is to add to this knowledge by studying the culture of one community-based recreational program that is inviting to children with disabilities and their families. The study is being conducted by Angela Conti-Becker, a Doctoral student at the University of Western Ontario under the direction of Dr. Marilyn Kertoy and Dr. Doreen Bartlett.

We are interested in studying the culture of a program that provides leisure and recreational opportunities to children between the ages of six and twelve and that provides opportunities that are welcoming to children of all abilities. Your program has been selected as a possible location for the research based on the recommendations of a group of parents who have children with disabilities and the suggestions of service providers who work with children with disabilities and their families in London.

**What will be involved if you participate?** This research will involve a commitment from your program to the researcher of a maximum of six months. During this time, the researcher will spend 3 half days per week (between 15 and 20 hours each week) at the program site observing participants, settings, events, and procedures. The researcher will observe the physical, social, and attitudinal environment and will evaluate the physical structure using an instrument that has been developed to measure physical accessibility for individuals with mobility limitations (RACSN, 2003). The researcher will also be taking photographs of the building. You will be asked to provide copies of formal documents, communication brochures, promotional information, mission statements, value statements, and other program artifacts that will be described in the research report. You will be asked to assist with the process of informing program patrons, participants, staff, and volunteers about the research by posting information brochures at the program site, in your program newsletter, and on the program website. A contact person at your program will need to be identified to assist with questions or concerns that might be expressed by participants.

In addition to observation, the researcher will be conducting interviews with program participants, volunteers, and staff members. These interviews will be informal (i.e. questions or conversations that are asked when programs are happening) and formal (i.e. interviews that follow a topic guide and that last for a maximum of 60 minutes). You may be asked to assist in developing lists of individuals who may be contacted and asked to participate in an interview. The purpose of the interviews is to determine how the participant, staff, and parents view the environment provided for recreational and leisure services.



**Are there any risks or discomforts?** The participants in this study may experience some discomfort or inconvenience in being observed or interviewed. Participants will be informed about the ongoing observations and can choose not to be observed or interviewed. The researcher will do everything she can to minimize the inconvenience to participants and to ensure that staff are able to maintain the normal day to day operations at your program.

**Are there any benefits to you program, program participants, staff, volunteers, or other programs?** This research may provide an opportunity for the program to learn about its strengths and to identify opportunities for growth. Studying the culture of an exceptional program may encourage other programs to undertake a similar inquiry of their own culture with the goal of identifying strengths and opportunities for growth. It may make explicit some of the tacit or unacknowledged cultural factors that contribute to a positive program environment. This knowledge may help to support programs and the community in creating environments that support leisure and recreational for children of all abilities.

Staff and volunteers may benefit from the opportunity to reflect on and share some of the program's strengths and participants may benefit from the opportunity to discuss their experiences and insights with the researcher. The research may support parents, children, staff, and volunteers in envisioning, exploring, and expressing service and program possibilities. Finally, this work may help to identify and inform training and development opportunities for program staff and leadership.

**Your participation is completely voluntary.** Participation in the study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw from the study at any time. Information obtained through your participation may be described in oral and written presentations and may be published in professional journals; a summary of the findings will be provided to you if you wish.

**If you have questions about this study,** please contact (program contact person) at (program) or Dr. Marilyn Kertoy at The University of Western Ontario. A copy of this document will be given to you to keep.

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant, please contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario, (519) 661-3036. Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may contact you or require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

Sincerely,

Marilyn Kertoy, PhD  
Associate Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences  
Communication Sciences and Disorders

**Angela Conti-Becker, M.A.**  
**Doctoral Candidate in Rehabilitation Science, Faculty of Health Science**

**Doreen Bartlett, PhD, PT**  
**Associate Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences**  
**School of Physical Therapy**

**An Ethnographic Study of a Community-Based Recreational Program in  
London, Ontario**

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Program administrator's name \_\_\_\_\_

Program administrator's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Person obtaining consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Person obtaining consent signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 6: Letter of Information and Consent-Adults**

### **An Ethnographic Study of a Community-Based Recreational Program in London, Ontario**

**You are invited to participate in a research study** that is being done to contribute to what is known about social environments and participation, particularly for children with disabilities. The purpose of this research is to add to this knowledge by studying the culture of one community-based recreational program that is inviting to children with disabilities and their families. The study is being conducted by Angela Conti-Becker, a Doctoral student at the University of Western Ontario under the direction of Dr. Marilyn Kertoy and Dr. Doreen Bartlett. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a \_\_\_\_\_ (specify participant type) who is currently associated with \_\_\_\_\_ (specify program).

**What will be involved if you participate?** If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to participate in an interview. Your total time commitment will be approximately one hour.

**Are there any risks or discomforts?** There are no known risks in taking part in this study.

**Are there any benefits to yourself or others?** If you participate in this study, you may benefit from the opportunity to share your experiences and insights with the researcher. The research may support parents, children, staff, and volunteers in envisioning, exploring, and expressing service and program possibilities. The knowledge that we gain from this research may help to identify and inform training and development opportunities for program staff and leadership. This may encourage this program and others to further enhance the opportunities that they provide for all children.

**If you change your mind about participating,** you can withdraw at any time during the study. Your participation is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate and refuse to answer any questions. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with (specify program).

**Your privacy will be protected.** Information that you provide will be kept confidential. All information will remain in a secure location and will only be available to the research team. Your name will not appear in any reports of the study; code numbers will be used instead of names.

Information obtained through your participation may be described in oral and written presentations and may be published in professional journals; however the results will

be presented as a group and you will never be personally identified. A summary of the findings will be provided to you if you wish.

**If you have questions about this study, please contact (program contact person) at (program) or Dr. Marilyn Kertoy at The University of Western Ontario. A copy of this document will be given to you to keep.**

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant, please contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario, (519) 661-3036. Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Health Sciences Research Ethics Board may contact you or require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

**Marilyn Kertoy, PhD**

**Associate Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences**

**Communication Sciences and Disorders**

**Angela Conti-Becker, M.A.**

**Doctoral Candidate in Rehabilitation Science, Faculty of Health Science**

**Doreen Bartlett, PhD, PT**

**Associate Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences**

**School of Physical Therapy**

**An Ethnographic Study of a Community-Based Recreational Program in  
London, Ontario**

I have read the letter of information and I understand the nature of the study and the time commitment that is required of me (an hour long interview). I agree to participate.

Participant's name \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 7: Parental Permission/Child Assent**

### **An Ethnographic Study of a Community-Based Recreational Program in London, Ontario**

**Your child is invited to participate in a research study** that is being done to contribute to what is known about social environments and participation, particularly for children with disabilities. The purpose of this research is to add to this knowledge by studying the culture of one community-based recreational program that is inviting to children with disabilities and their families. The study is being conducted by Angela Conti-Becker, a Doctoral student at the University of Western Ontario under the direction of Dr. Marilyn Kertoy and Dr. Doreen Bartlett. Your child has been selected as a possible participant because he/she currently participates in programs at the London Public Library. Since your child is age 18 or younger we will need to ask for your permission to include him/her in the study.

**What will be involved if your child participates?** If you decide to allow your child to participate in this research study, your child will be asked to participate in an interview. The interview will be audio-recorded and your child may ask that the recording be stopped at any time during the interview. His/her total time commitment will be approximately one hour.

**Are there any risks or discomforts?** Sometimes people feel awkward being observed by a researcher. I will do everything possible to minimize intrusion in inconvenience. Feel free to ask questions at any time.

**Are there any benefits to your child or others?** If your child participates in this study, he/she may benefit from the opportunity to share his/her experiences and insights with the researcher. The research may support parents, children, staff, and volunteers in envisioning, exploring, and expressing service and program possibilities. The knowledge that we gain from this research may help to identify and inform training and development opportunities for program staff and leadership. This may encourage this program and others to further enhance the opportunities that they provide for all children.

**Your child's participation is completely voluntary.** He/she may refuse to participate and refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time. His/her decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize his/her future relations with the London Public Library.

**Your child's privacy will be protected.** Information that you provide will be kept confidential. All information will remain in a secure location and will only be available to the research team. Your child's name will not appear in any reports of the study; code numbers will be used instead of names. Information obtained through your participation may be described in oral and written presentations and may be

published in professional journals; however the results will be presented as a group and your child will never be personally identified. A summary of the findings will be provided to you if you wish.

**If you have questions about this study, please contact (program contact person) at (program) or Dr. Marilyn Kertoy at The University of Western Ontario. A copy of this document will be given to you to keep.**

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant, please contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario, (519) 661-3036. Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Health Sciences Research Ethics Board may contact you or require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

**Marilyn Kertoy, PhD**  
Associate Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences  
Communication Sciences and Disorders

**Angela Conti-Becker, M.A.**  
Doctoral Candidate in Rehabilitation Science, Faculty of Health Science

**Doreen Bartlett, PhD, PT**  
Associate Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences  
School of Physical Therapy



**An Ethnographic Study of a Community-Based Recreational Program in  
London, Ontario**

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I wish to have my child participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Participant's name (child) \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/caregiver signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Person obtaining consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Person obtaining consent signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 8: Site Information Poster**

**Attention London Public Library members,  
volunteers, staff, and visitors.**

The library is currently involved in a research study on leisure and recreational that is being done by a researcher at the University of Western Ontario. To complete the study, Angela Conti-Becker, the researcher will be here at the library between October 2007 and April 2008. While she is here, she will be observing activities, programs, and the day-to-day occurrences that are part of your program. The researcher may approach you, and ask for your permission to speak informally with her. If you do not wish to speak with her you do not have to. Angela will be taking photographs of the building and the structure. She will not take any pictures of staff or participants without verbal permission to do so.

\_\_\_\_\_ is the staff member at the library who is working with Angela to organize the observation portion of this research. If you would like additional information about the study, please contact \_\_\_\_\_. If you have concerns or if you do not wish to be observed please let \_\_\_\_\_ know.

### **Appendix 9: Field Note Template**

Field Note: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Location/Setting: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Briefly set the stage:**

#### **Answer the following:**

1. Describe the physical place or places in which this observation took place?
2. Who is involved?
3. Describe the activities that people are doing?
4. What physical things are present?
5. What single actions do people do?
6. What events (sets of activities) are people doing?
7. Comment on time. How is it being used, what is the flow of activities as they relate to time?
8. What are people trying to accomplish during the time they are being observed?
9. What emotions are expressed by the participants?

#### **Please comment on:**

1. The way that the setting looks
2. The way that people interact with one another (body language, facial expressions, use of space)
3. Any thing special that has happened
4. My feelings today---anything that could be influencing what I am seeing.
5. Things to follow up on:

## **Appendix 10: Interview Topic Guide (Adult)**

### **An Ethnographic Study of a Community-Based Recreational Program**

I will open the interview with a brief reminder of the nature of the research, the time commitment, and the participants' rights:

*Hello. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes. I am interested in your ideas about culture and the way that you would describe the culture of this program. I have a few questions that I am going to ask you to describe these experiences. You may refuse to answer any questions and you may withdraw from the interview at any time.*

In the interview, participants will be invited to explore the following areas:

What culture means for them

How they describe the culture of the library

Elements/aspects of the environment that they really like

Elements/aspects of the environment that they would like to change

The day to day happenings in the program (at the library)

How different kinds of people work together at the library (i.e. how staff members work with participants, who the volunteers are and what they do, etc.). For children, exploring how different kinds of adults work with them. How things change when parents are there, versus volunteers, etc.

Things that are important to the people who are at the library (probe for staff, volunteers, participants, parents)

Which programs or events are popular? Why is that?

**Appendix 11: Interview Topic Guide (Child)**

**An Ethnographic Study of a Community-Based Recreational Program**

**Participants' Age:** \_\_\_\_\_

I will open the interview with a brief reminder of the nature of the research, the time commitment, and the participants' rights:

*Hello. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes. I am interested in your ideas about culture and the way that you would describe the culture of this program. I have a few questions that I am going to ask you to describe these experiences. You may refuse to answer any questions and you may withdraw from the interview at any time.*

In the interview, participants will be invited to explore the following areas:

General questions about their participation at the library

Why do you come to the library?

What do you do when you come to the library?

How often do you come?

What is the best place to hang out in the library?

General questions about interactions at the library

When you come do you spend time with others (friends)?

When you come do you talk much with staff?

Who do you talk with most?

Why?

Do most of the kids who come here come by themselves, with others, or with parents?

Are most of the kids here like you or different from you?

If you owned the library what things would you do more of?

If you owned the library what things would you keep the same?

If you owned the library what things would you change?

**Appendix 12: Libraries for All Logo**

**Appendix 13: Field Visit Log**

| <b>Date</b> | <b>Purpose or Settings</b>  |
|-------------|---|
| Oct 25      | Initial visit   |
| Oct 27      | Initial visit   |
| Oct 29      | Initial visit   |
| Oct 30      | Homework tables   |
| Oct 31      | Meeting room B  |
| Nov 2       | Backroom, children's area   |
| Nov 6       | Children's area, resources/ref shelf, early literacy centre           |
| Nov 7       | Homework area, meeting rooms  |
| Nov 10      | Meeting room B, internet computers                                    |
| Nov 13      | Meeting Room A,<br>Child's area, Early literacy area, homework tables |
| Nov 14      | Meeting Room B  |
| Nov 16      | Children's area   |
| Nov 17      | Meeting rooms   |
| Nov 21      | Meeting Room B  |
| Nov 24      | Main area<br>Meeting Room B<br>Study Room B                           |
| Nov 28      | Main area   |
| Nov 29      | Meeting room  |
| Nov 30      | Study Rooms, homework tables  |
| Dec 1       | Teen annex, meeting rooms   |
| Dec 4       | Not specified   |
| Dec 5       | Meeting room B  |
| Dec 6       | Study room B<br>Homework tables                                       |
| Dec 7       | Study room B, early literacy tables, adult section                    |
| Dec 12      | Meeting room B  |
| Dec 13      | Homework tables,<br>Adult section                                     |
| Dec 15      | Homework tables<br>Teen annex<br>Children's area                      |
| Dec 18      | EL tables<br>Study room B (played games with regular participant)     |
| Dec 19      | Meeting room B  |
| Dec 22      | Early literacy area, teen annex                                       |
| Dec 28      | Homework area, circulation desk                                       |
| Jan 3       | Study Room A  |
| Jan 8       | Study Room A  |
| Jan 15      | Homework area, circulation desk                                       |
| Jan 16      | Study Room A  |

| <b>Date</b> | <b>Purpose or Settings</b>                                 |
|-------------|--|
|             | Main area  |
| Jan 25      | Main area  |
| Feb 19      | Adult section<br>Study Room A                              |
| Feb 28      | Meeting room A   |
| March 11    | Meeting room B   |
| March 12    | Main area, Early literacy area                             |
| March 20    | Teen annex, adult section, circulation, internet computers |
| March 26    | Meeting room B, Main area                                  |
| March 28    |  |
| April 1     | Lobby and children's area                                  |
| April 4     | Children's area, teen annex, early literacy tables/area    |
| April 8     | Homework, children's, "cool table" adults section          |
| April 12    | Study Room, homework tables                                |
| April 22    | Homework tables  |
| April 23    | Homework tables  |
| April 24    | Teen annex   |
| April 27    | Lobby, meeting room  |
| May 1       | Children's area  |



**Appendix 14: Tables of Participants**

| <b>Participant ID</b> | <b>Role</b>   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Staff 1               | Page  |
| Staff 2               | Library Assistant   |
| Staff 3               | Librarian   |
| Staff 4               | Librarian   |
| Staff 5               | Library Assistant   |
| Staff 6               | Library Assistant   |
| Staff 7               | Page  |
| Staff 8               | Library Assistant   |
| Staff 9               | Page  |
| Staff 10              | Library Assistant   |
| Staff 11              | Page  |
| Staff 12              | Library Assistant   |
| Admin 1               | Selection Librarian   |
| Admin 2               | Coordinator, Community Programs and Outreach Services                 |
| Admin 3               | Coordinator, Children's Services                                      |
| Admin 4               | Community Outreach and Program Services Librarian                     |
| Admin 5               | Director, Operations (not interviewed, but included in first meeting) |
| Partner 1             | Teacher   |
| Partner 2             | Neighbourhood Facilitator   |
| Partner 3             | Literacy and Resource Coordinator                                     |
| Parent 1              | Developmental delay   |
| Parent 2              | Asperger's Syndrome   |
| Parent 3              | Autism  |
| Parent 4              | Autism  |
| Parent 5              | Autism  |
| Parent 6              | Autism  |

|                |                                       |
|----------------|---------------------------------------|
| Parent 7       | Autism, developmental delay           |
| Parent 8       | ADHD and hearing impairment           |
| Parent 9       | Cerebral palsy                        |
| Parent 10      | None                                  |
| Parent 11      | None                                  |
| Parent 12      | None                                  |
| Participant 1  | None                                  |
| Participant 2  | None                                  |
| Participant 3  | None                                  |
| Participant 4  | None                                  |
| Participant 5  | None                                  |
| Participant 6  | None                                  |
| Participant 7  | Autism                                |
| Participant 8  | Developmental disorder non- specified |
| Participant 9  | Asperger's syndrome                   |
| Participant 10 | Hearing impairment                    |
| Participant 11 | None                                  |
| Participant 12 | None                                  |
| Participant 13 | None                                  |
| Participant 14 | None                                  |
| Participant 15 | None                                  |