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Parents' perceptions of how their preschool children acquire literacy

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PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF HOW THEIR
PRESCHOOL CHILDREN ACQUIRE LITERACY

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Division of Teacher Education

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Melanie Campbell Johnson

May 1998

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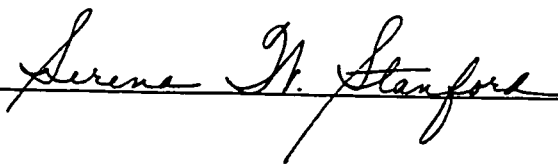


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ABSTRACT

HOW PARENTS FROM DIFFERENT ETHNIC/SOCIOECONOMIC GROUPS PERCEIVE THAT THEIR PRESCHOOL CHILDREN ACQUIRE LITERACY

by Melanie Campbell Johnson

This qualitative study examines how parents from different ethnic/cultural/socioeconomic groups perceive that their preschool children acquire literacy. Participants representing different ethnic/cultural groups were selected. The research sites are two child care centers: one low-income and the other middle-income.

The researcher described literacy themes, generated by the parents themselves, from the two child care centers. The researcher developed case studies of four parent participants, conveying their attitudes towards literacy acquisition. Data were collected through a survey and audio-taped interviews with participants.

Analysis of the data included coding transcribed interviews with parent participants. All data were examined for meaningful patterns.

Findings indicated that socioeconomic level, rather than ethnic/cultural group affected how parents viewed preschool literacy acquisition. While mainstream patterns of literacy acquisition exist, educators can look to the multiple literacies existing in families from diverse ethnic/socioeconomic groups in order to inform curriculum.

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Research Project

Bambi Schieffelin and Marilyn Cochran-Smith (1988) have said that “to understand the observed behaviors of any social group, we have to know what literacy means to that group” (p. 20). For example, the meaning of literacy from a mainstream college educated population may be very different from that of immigrant, refugee, or working class populations. The fact that literacy means different things to different groups is, to me, a fascinating idea with important implications for education.

Literacy in Education

Due to the changing population within the state of California, understanding what literacy means to people of different ethnic/cultural and socioeconomic groups is of fundamental importance. A trend over the last fifteen years has shown an annual increase in Latino and Asian students within California public schools and a decrease in Anglo enrollments. During the 1995-96 school year, Macias (1996) reported the percentages for 5,467,724 enrolled students in California were 40.4% Anglo students, 38.7% Latino students, 8.8% African American, 8.2% Asian students. The rest consisted of Filipino 2.4%, Pacific Islander .6% and American Indian .9%. With many different students coming into the schools, it is important that educators meet the challenge of educating this diverse population.

With respect to specific problems, such as the high dropout rate among Latino youth (Hansen, 1994), there is grave cause for concern. Due to the increasing numbers of

Latino students in the public schools, it is imperative that educators search for ways to reduce the disproportionate rates of dropout in California schools. Without a doubt, many factors point to the necessity to improve our understanding of the population which makes up California's public schools.

In this study, I have focused on the perspective of parents from different ethnic and socioeconomic groups in an effort to gain an understanding of what are their views of their children acquiring literacy. In Auerbach's (1989) deficit vs. wealth model, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 2, the perspectives of parents on literacy should be used to inform educators.

What I Set Out to Do

In this study, which took place from March 1997 to October 1997, I have looked at what literacy means to parents of different ethnic/socioeconomic groups from two different child care centers:

1. The Marina Child Care Center, which represented a middle- income socioeconomic (SES) group.
2. The Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center, which represented a low- income, low SES group.

I wanted to see what similarities or differences there are in how these parents perceive that their children acquire literacy. As background to understanding this question, I have looked at the literature in the area of literacy acquisition and family literacy, which is described in Chapter 2.

Research Questions

The questions for consideration in this study are:

1. How do parents from different ethnic/socioeconomic groups perceive that their children acquire literacy?
2. What is the role of families in children's preschool literacy development?

Relevance of the Study

With the increasing cultural diversity of the student population in the United States and specifically in California, I felt that looking at how literacy was viewed by people from differing ethnic/cultural groups would be informative. I focused on the area of preschool literacy because of the vital importance of the preschool years with respect to subsequent education.

During the years that I worked in elementary education, I often wondered at the great variation which exists between children when they enter a first grade classroom. I was curious to explore what kinds of perspectives on children acquiring literacy parents might have which would lead to some of these differences in their children. I thought it was important for educators to understand what parents' perspectives on acquiring literacy might be in order to better collaborate with parents on their child's education.

Study Limitations

A limitation of the study is that the data are heresay. I did not observe events in the homes of the families. All of the data recorded is from the words of parents. As such,

all of the data reflect how the parents perceived the situation to be or the picture which they wanted to convey of how the situation is.

Another limitation of the study would be the small number of participants. The fact that there are only two people in each of the ethnic/cultural group samplings from each day care center is a further limitation. A larger sampling of people might cause some patterns to form which did not appear here due to the limited number of people in the study. Since I have only two people in each group, the attitudes of these two people are not necessarily representative of the opinions of the larger body of people from that same group. The duration of the study and number of interviews given would be further limitations of the study. A larger study or one using a greater number of interviews might produce more information which could lead to different results than those found here.

Summary

The question of how parents from different ethnic/socioeconomic groups perceive that their children acquire literacy is addressed in the following chapters. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature in the area of literacy acquisition and family literacy. The focus of Chapter 3 is a discussion of the methodology used in this study, particularly with an emphasis on the evolving nature of this qualitative study. Chapter 4 presents a discussion of the data from the two child care centers, the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center and the Marina Child Care Center. Chapter 5 presents the four case studies of Betty, Maria, Janice, and Rita. Chapter 6 is a discussion of the findings and conclusions of the study. In Appendices B, C, and D can be found the interview

questions I used and a discussion of my personal background, which relates to the nature of the qualitative study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of literacy acquisition. How book reading leads to increased vocabularies and promotes abstract thought is shown. Shirley Heath describes the way in which mainstream children are read to. The phenomena of “scaffolding” and “motherese” are presented. I reviewed the literature in the area of family literacy and discussed Auerbach’s deficit vs. wealth model. I then looked at family literacy in the following three areas: (a) Home/school partnerships (b) Intergenerational programs (c) Research exploring naturally occurring literacy in families (Morrow, 1995).

Literacy Acquisition: An Overview

How children should acquire literacy is a point which has long been discussed. In 1908, Huey expressed the idea that “the secret of it all lies in parents’ reading aloud to and with the children” (p. 72). As far back as 1862, Tolstoy wrote of what he described the most effective way to teach reading while teaching at Yasnaya Polyana. This approach, which Tolstoy called “the domestic method, consisted of the teacher reading as a mother would read to her child” (1967, p. 43).

The kind of experiences children gain from their early literacy development is cited by Gordon Wells (1986). Wells emphasizes the importance of reading to children as well as modeling reading to children. Wells suggests that:

In listening to stories, children also begin to gain experience in the organization of written language and its characteristic rhythms and structures. The simple and predictable text found in many picture books, along with repeated readings, lead children to hear patterns and to remember them. Further, stories communicate information, taking children away from their immediate environment, and extending the range of their experiences (Wells, p. 29).

Reading stories results in increased vocabularies. Robbins and Ehril (1994) did a study to show that reading storybooks to kindergartners helps them learn new vocabulary when they listened to stories at least twice and heard unfamiliar words repeated in stories. Children with larger vocabularies learned more words than children with smaller vocabularies. "Findings of our research indicate that reading stories aloud to young children will contribute to their vocabulary growth. Because vocabulary size is associated with school achievement and affects language comprehension, it is implicated in reading success" (Robbins & Ehril, 1994, p. 61).

Bookreading led to increased vocabularies regardless of parent intelligence and education level. Senechal, Thomas, and Monker (1995) did a study to show individual differences in four-year-old children's acquisition of vocabulary during storybook reading. Children with larger vocabularies produced more words than did children with smaller vocabularies. "Correlational analyses revealed that frequency of bookreading at home was related to children's word knowledge over and above parental education level and individual differences in intelligence. Children with larger vocabularies were read to every day" (p. 223).

Bookreading is a medium for encouraging abstract thought. Bookreading is better for introducing abstract thought than playing with play-doh. Sorsby and Martlew (1991) looked at representational demands, or the extent to which it requires the child to engage in abstract thought, in mothers' talk to preschool children in picture book reading and modeling. Researchers videotaped and analyzed the conversation of twenty-four mother-child dyads while reading stories and while playing with play-doh. The researchers were interested in the level of conversation, not the amount of conversation. Although there was more speech during play-doh modeling, the mother's speech was at a higher level of abstraction during the bookreading task. The researchers concluded that "bookreading is a better context for tutorial language teaching and for introducing the notion of abstract representation than a more product oriented task, such as play-doh modeling" (p. 393).

Shirley Brice Heath (1982) points out that in mainstream families, a school-oriented type of bookreading is used. The mother focuses on the personal meaning of the story and connects the story with the child's everyday experiences. In the earliest stages, adults primarily label the pictures in the books. (What's that?) They then move on to ask about the attributes of the items. (What color is the ball?) When children are almost three years old, adults discourage this highly participative role in bookreading children have played. Children are expected to listen and wait as an audience. The adult no longer breaks into the story with questions and comments. Children are expected to listen, store what they hear, and on cue from an adult, answer a question. Heath found

that children whose home literacy practices most closely resemble those of the school are more successful in school.

The way that parents read to their children can be described in the phenomenon of “scaffolding,” and the way a mother speaks to her child can be described in the phenomenon of “motherese.” Ninio and Bruner (1978) did a study in which they analyzed the organization and significance of storybook reading events. They examine the interaction of a mother-child dyad during joint picture book reading activities. Ninio and Bruner found that the picture book reading situation involved a standard action format. Mother and child engaged in a dialogue in which the child named decontextualized items represented in pictures. The dialogue was a series of repeating cycles, consisting of: attention-getting, query, labeling, and feedback utterance. Ninio and Bruner learned that mother and child create a “scaffolding dialogue” with a give and take as the mother leads the child towards understanding. This scaffolding enables the child to participate in the dialogue.

Wheeler (1983) explains how “motherese” or mother’s speech to children, becomes more adult-like as the child grows older. She used the storybook reading context to focus on changes in the mothers’ speech as the child gets older. Mothers mostly described the pictures to the younger children. The mothers talked about the pictures to the younger children. The mothers talked about the pictures to the older children with more requests for information. It was found that the changes in mothers’

speech in the bookreading context suggest that the child is hearing models of bookreading talk that are fine-tuned to his own verbal abilities” (p. 262).

Summary

Tolstoy described the best way of teaching people to read as the way a mother would read to her child. In bookreading, children gain experience in the organization of language and its structures, patterns, and increase their vocabulary. Bookreading leads to more abstract thought. Mainstream families use “scaffolding,” which consists of the steps a mother takes leading her child to understanding a book, and “motherese,” or mother’s speech to children that changes as the child grows older.

Defining Family Literacy

The following statement sums up what has been the traditional approach to family literacy: “A child’s early literacy development is profoundly dependent upon an adult/child interaction in a familiar and supportive social context” (Morrow, 1983, in Cronan & Walen, 1995). In 1991, the Board of Directors of the International Reading Association (IRA) formed the Commission of Family Literacy to study issues in family literacy from a wider perspective. It was realized that with the growing awareness of cultural differences in parenting, that educators are often not able to explain to parents how they can act as partners with teachers to improve their child’s academic achievement. An expanded view of family literacy had to be adopted.

The term family literacy was coined by Denny Taylor in her doctoral dissertation (1978) dealing with the uses of reading and writing within families. Family literacy looks

at reading and writing as activities which have consequences in and are affected by family life. Morrow (1995) speaks of family literacy as a concept of intergenerational involvement in education which focuses on parents as the first teachers of their child, as well as the family as a learning unit. A number of studies have shown the extent to which reading to children is associated with their development in language and literacy.

Deficit vs. Wealth Model

There are two fundamentally different approaches within the field of family literacy. The deficit model approaches family literacy as a means to transmit school practices. This perspective does not take into consideration literary practices inherent in families in the social context in which families live (Auerbach, 1989, in Taylor, 1993). In the deficit view, mainstream ways of using literacy are transmitted to families. The deficit view results in the shifting of the blame for declining skills down through the educational system with the buck stopping at the door of the family (Auerbach, 1995). When the transmission-of-school-practices model does not succeed, problems of schooling are seen as originating from the family. Snow illustrates the deficit view when she says that:

children need both literacy and decontextualized language skills to succeed in school; but it may be that literacy skills are simple enough to be acquired at school, whereas developing the skill of using language in a decontextualized way relies more heavily on experience only the home can provide (1983, p. 187).

A series of studies on family literacy often cited (even though the authors of these studies may not agree with this viewpoint) (Chall & Snow, 1982; Heath, 1983) examine family literacy and show that mainstream children whose home literacy practices most closely resemble the school are more successful in school. Snow (1983) illustrates the trend which emphasizes the importance of the family in the child's literacy development. In the words of former secretary of education Terrell Bell (1988): "Not even the best classrooms can make up for the failure in the family" (Bell, 1988, in Auerbach, p. 168). This viewpoint epitomizes the deficit view, which blames educational failure on the family rather than the educational establishment. It is implicit that nonmainstream families may lack appropriate environments for fostering literacy development because of inadequate parental skills, practices, and materials.

The deficit view is based on the following assumptions:

1. Language minority students come from literacy impoverished homes where education is not valued or supported.
2. Family literacy involves a one-way transfer of skills from parents to children.
3. Children become literate to the extent that their parents extend school-like activities in the home.
4. Existing school practices are adequate, and it is home factors that will determine who succeeds.

5. Parents' own problems get in the way of creating positive family literacy contexts. (Auerbach, 1995, p. 15)

In her pioneering work dealing with immigrant and refugee parents in the University of Massachusetts/Boston English Family Literacy Project, Elsa Auerbach (1989) described what has been termed the wealth concept of family literacy. Inspired by the work of Paolo Friere (1970), the field of family literacy has been expanded so that non-mainstream populations have an increased opportunity for successful literacy outcomes when involved with programs based on their participatory collaboration (Auerbach, 1989).

Auerbach (1995, p. 25) concluded that family literacy based on a wealth model perspective includes the following aspects:

1. Parents or caregivers work independently on reading and writing to develop their own literacy.
2. Parents use literacy to address family and community problems, for example, immigration, employment, and housing issues.
3. Parents address child-rearing concerns through family literacy class (e.g., safety, discipline and intergenerational conflicts).
4. Parents support the development of their home language and culture.
5. Parents interact with the school system and learn to understand and respond to school issues.

In the wealth model, the perspectives of parents on literacy should be used to inform educators. Auerbach asks: “How can we draw on parents’ knowledge and experience to inform instruction” (p. 177). Understanding parents’ perspectives on literacy is necessary before connections between home and school can be built. This is particularly true in cases where the mode of learning predominant in the school varies from the way parents view that children acquire literacy at home. Home-school connections are especially important for lower socioeconomic status (SES) students (Allen & Mason, 1989 in Koskinen, 1994).

By gathering information in informal interviews, teachers can gain information which would enable them to better involve parents in children’s literacy. After gaining an understanding of parents’ beliefs and attitudes, teachers would be better able to design activities which would fit in with parental strengths and beliefs. The wealth model sees parents as a resource, rather than a scapegoat (to blame) for why the child is not learning. The school’s role becomes that of facilitating the connections between the classroom and the home to make learning relevant to the lives of participants in family literacy programs. It is the place of educators to reach out to ensure that the wealth model works.

The conflicting perspectives of the deficit and wealth views are the topic of a great deal of debate in the literature, with each side supporting its position strongly. In the deficit view, family literacy is regarded as a means to transmit school practices. The wealth model is the inverse of the school practice view, with Auerbach suggesting that schools should be informed by what is happening in the families and communities they

serve. The wealth model is the inverse of the school practice view, with Auerbach suggesting that schools should be informed by what is happening in the families and communities they serve. The wealth model involves collaboration and partnerships. Auerbach (1995) states: "The blame the families hypothesis may serve an important ideological function of deflecting attention away from the very conditions that give rise to literacy problems-poverty, unemployment, and inadequate health care and housing" (p. 23). Most family literacy programs fall somewhere in between, along the continuum from deficit to wealth models (Auerbach, 1995). Although most programs do not belong strictly to one model or the other, the deficit vs. wealth model is useful for making a point.

Home/School Partnerships

Home school partnerships are designed to work with parents for the primary purpose of improving their children's literacy development in activities that support school-based goals. Home/school partnerships are also referred to as a parent involvement programs. There are innumerable examples of these kinds of family literacy programs.

Cronan and Walen's (1995) *The Development of Project PRIMER: (Producing Infant/Mother Ethnic Readers) a Community-Based Literacy Program* would be one such program. In this program, college students trained Head Start mothers in effective methods to use while reading to their young children. Research has shown that the

development of a child's literacy is strongly influenced by the parents' literacy, especially the mother's (Teale & Sulzby, 1986, in Cronan and Walen, 1995).

In developing the curriculum for Project PRIMER, the following goals were set: exposing the child to reading in a positive and interesting fashion, showing the mother how to develop literacy skills, and teaching and encouraging the mother to be a positive role model for reading. Cronan & Walen state: Project PRIMER is attempting to train mothers as a method of effecting permanent change in the participating mothers' behaviors and attitudes" (p. 46). The hope is that the targeted child, other children in the home, and future generations of children may be positively affected. Instructors taught mothers to include elements of play to make the learning experience as enjoyable as possible for the children. Parents were taught to use positive corrections, rather than negative corrections. Four of the eighteen sessions included visits to the library. Step-by-step procedures were taught in order to ensure a consistent format. Tutors explained to the parents: "we already know from our own experiences that learning is a cumulative process" (p. 41). The results demonstrated that Project Primer was effective in engaging the parents in behaviors that encourage emergent literacy, such as reading to their children, having a library card, using their library cards, taking their child to the library, and checking out books for their children and themselves.

Denny Taylor (1983) refers to the "ethical difficulties of family intervention programs" (p. 94). This is the controversial area of the home/school partnership category. Taylor (1987) said that children need experience exploring the uses of print before they

are taught to read and write in school. In addition, children from diverse social situations need to learn reading and writing as “meaningful complements to their heritage” (p. 94). France and Hager (1993) explain that “with assistance from school, parents can learn to provide an environment that fosters literacy” (p. 568). Swzed (1977) interjects that “attempts to change home practices, even with the best intentions, are not easily accomplished and not necessarily desirable” (p. 11).

Such examples are the essence of the deficit vs. wealth debate. On the one hand, it is recognized that some students, especially those from diverse social situations sometimes need more experience with their print environment. There is a delicate balance with intervention programs referred to by France and Hager, which are set up to provide these print-rich experiences to children. When the program does not take into account certain literacy events which occur in families, then, it may be labeled deficit. If the experiences and perspectives of culturally diverse families are not incorporated into the school curriculum, then, in spite of excellent intentions, these programs have been labeled the deficit model by Auerbach. These programs represent “the transmission of school practices model where the only solution for non-mainstream families is to become acculturated” (p. 169). Only when the attitudes and perspectives of these families inform the curriculum, could they be considered to be a part of the wealth model. Then, they can “build on the literacies that exist in both mainstream and nonmainstream homes, drawing on experiences from these homes to enhance literacy instruction in the school and community” (Morrow & Paratore, 1993, p. 1977).

Intergenerational Programs

Another category within family literacy, intergenerational programs, are designed to improve the literacy development of both children and their parents. Adults are taught to improve their literacy skills, as well as how to work with their children to foster their literacy. Intergenerational programs offer basic literacy skill development for parents in need, teach parents how to help their children with literacy skills, and give parents the opportunity to practice these skills in school settings. Support groups are organized for parents where discussions about parenting, life coping skills and educational goals are emphasized (Morrow & Paratore 1993). Intergenerational programs address problems such as Auerbach (1989) discusses of immigrant children being placed in the role of translator and teacher, a role the child often does not feel ready for. As the parent learns, the parent-child literacy dependency is reduced, thereby freeing the child to develop on his/her own and restoring the parents' original authority.

Studies which fall into the intergenerational model would be Patricia Edwards' (1992) *Involving Parents in Building Reading Instruction for African American Children*. Edwards, an African American researcher, worked in a rural, Louisiana community. Many children, especially low-income African American children, have limited experience with books (Dickerson, 1989, in Edwards, 1992). Edwards states: "Even though I was fully aware of the concerns about blaming parents for their children's school failures, I decided this should not prevent me from developing a book-reading program for low-income African American parents and children. I suggested that low-income

African American parents not only have the right to know that sharing books with their children may be the most powerful and significant predictor of school achievement, they have the right to receive assistance in how to participate in book-reading interactions with their young children” (p. 351).

Edwards (1992) reported that four out of five low-income African American mothers who participated in this study were unable to successfully share books with their children and needed assistance with their own personal literacy skills. Edwards wanted the mothers to realize the impact reading to their children had on their children’s access to school-based literacy. Edwards found positive results. She found that “for the first time, parents were being invited to the school not because there was a problem with their children but to learn how to share books with their children and how to support their children’s growth towards literacy. These parents had previously feared coming to school because of their own past experiences, but now enjoyed coming” (p. 356).

Halsall and Green (1995) learned to assist parents in enhancing the read-aloud experience. This study confirmed previous research which found that all children in our society engage in literacy activities at home during the preschool years (Heath, 1986). The authors conducted Head Start Home-Based Reading Project, a home-based literacy program. The parents were trained to use seven book expansion techniques. “When parents learn specific read-aloud strategies, their children’s success in literacy is facilitated” (Halsall & Green, 1995, p. 290).

I will briefly describe two other programs designed to improve the literacy of parents in terms of sharing books with their children: Beginning with Books and Intergenerational Reading Project. One program, (Friedberg, 1989), is Beginning With Books, in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. Each family whose children were patients at a well-baby clinic in Allegheny County were given book packets with a few high quality paperback books. A social worker told parents about the importance of reading books and a pamphlet with tips for sharing books with children was distributed.

If parents can be shown that it is possible to make story time a regular part of that day's activities, that reading aloud is fun, that it can defuse potentially explosive family situations, that it can quiet a cranky child and help a restless one fall asleep, we can help parents give their children the gift of a lifetime. We can make today's toddlers become tomorrow's readers (p. 16).

Bookreading in families increased between parents, grandparents, siblings, and friends, as a result of the gifts.

France and Hager (1993) describe the Intergenerational Reading Project, a program that focuses on teaching parents with limited reading skills how to read to their children. This project uses choral reading, a natural way to involve children in the reading experience (Morrow, 1989). The Intergenerational Reading Project is a series of workshops in which parents and preschool children together read aloud predictable pattern books found in the school library. The workshop has resulted in improved student achievement for poor minority children in the area of listening comprehension.

Recruit, Respect, and Response are three principles which are a part of Intergenerational Reading Project. An outline of workshop sessions are: echo reading, choral reading, paired reading, storytelling, reader's theater, and chanting. It was found that:

Family literacy influences reading achievement. Parents who are recruited, respected, and provided with a program that is an appropriate response to their needs enjoy a sense of shared responsibility with teachers in setting the state for success in reading (France & Hager, 1993, p. 572).

D.H. Arnold, C.J. Lonigan, G.J. Whitehurst, and J.N. Epstein (1994) taught mothers specific interactive techniques to use when reading picture books with their preschool age children. Arnold *et al.* developed an intervention program in 1988 called dialogic reading, designed to accelerate young children's language development and was based on the assumption that practice, feedback and scaffolded interactions facilitate language development.

Rather than simply reading the text, the adult provides models of language, asks the child questions, provides the child with feedback, and elicits increasingly sophisticated descriptions from the child, thus, gradually teaching the child to become the teller of the story (p. 236).

This study seeks to discover whether an inexpensive videotape training package for teaching dialogic reading techniques works as well as one-to-one training. "The first assignment consists of the following principles: Ask 'what' questions. When parents ask 'what' questions, they evoke speech from the child. Such questions more effectively elicit language than does either pointing or asking 'yes/no questions'" (p. 238). This principle

differs with that of Senechal, Thomas and Monker (1995) who felt in their study that labeling and pointing questions were sufficient to produce learning.

The results of this study show that “variations in the ways mothers read with their children can produce substantial gains in their children’s language skills” (Arnold *et al.*, 1994, p. 241) Further, the results of this study show that videotape training provides a cost-effective means of implementing the dialogic reading program.

In her 1984 study working with Charlene, a 16-year-old high school dropout who attained literacy with her son, De, Shirley Brice Heath described how Charlene learns to take on the scaffolding dialog as she attains literacy with her son. Charlene learned when and where to read to him, how to focus his attention on the book, and to let De make his contribution to reading. Soon literacy had become a part of the life of De and her family as reading stories became a part of their lives and as adults took more time to talk to children and to ask them questions (Heath and Thomas, 1984).

Naturally Occurring Literacy in Families

The third category in family literacy is research on naturally occurring literacy in families. It involves observing and describing literacy events that take place in the routine of families’ daily lives. This research focuses on how families use literacy naturally within their homes. This research often does not have deliberate connections to the school curriculum. Rather, it focuses on how families use literacy to mediate their lives (Morrow & Paratore, 1993). Unlike the first two categories, which describe programs

where parents and children learn about schooling, the third category focuses on what educators can learn from and about families.

The feeling is that families are too often viewed in terms of what they lack, rather than in the richness of their heritages and experiences. Examples of this type of work is the work of Heath (1982), Taylor (1983), and Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988). In Family literacy (1983), Taylor did a 3-year longitudinal study of six families where children were learning to read successfully. Families reported that reading stories was an integral part of their lives. Parents felt that these shared stories were important precursors of literacy. Taylor concluded that “literacy develops best in relational contexts that are meaningful to the young child” (p. 94). Literacy needs to be relevant to the child’s experiences. If literacy becomes socially significant in the life of the parent, it will be likely to be significant in the life of the child.

Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) studied four African American families living in the same inner-city neighborhood who had children in the first grade who were success-fully learning to read and write. A detailed account of the families is provided. Even in these homes where day-to-day survival is a struggle, families use literacy for a wide variety of purposes, i.e., filling out forms, applications, and reading magazines. Homes were filled with print and literacy was an integral part of daily life. Parents understood how education could further their own lives, as well, and often spoke of school courses they would like to take.

A preeminent example of the type of research that emphasizes family's heritages is the work of Shirley Brice Heath (1982). Heath conducted ethnographic research for five years in two working class communities. Roadville was a white working class textile/mill community and Trackton was a black working class farming/mill community in the Piedmont Carolinas. All of the families in these communities were nonmainstream. While families in Roadville read stories before naps or at bedtime, families in Trackton did not. Heath's analysis of the social interactional aspects of these events for very young children were similar to Ninio and Bruner's scaffolding dialogue, where the mother breaks down content, leading the child step by step to understanding.

While Roadville children, as a group, have difficulty achieving literacy in school, mainstream children do not. Heath says this is due to the previously discussed reading practices linking reading with the child's experiences and a school-like question format. Roadville children do well in the first three grades, but do poorly after in activities that require more independence.

In her story of the black children of Trackton, Heath found that these children did not have experience in "treating language in a decontextualized way and as a result, the typifications of literacy they bring to school with them are not continuous with the ways in which the school treats language and literacy" (p. 114). It was found that preschool children are not asked for what-explanations (i.e., asking what a topic is, as opposed to questions asking why or how) of their environment, nor do they have labels or names of

items pointed out to them, and parents do not believe they have a tutoring role in this learning, as in the scaffolding dialogue of Ninio and Bruner (1978).

Although it differs from mainstream practices, Heath found enormous richness in the Trackton preschooler's experiences. Instead of what-explanations, Heath (p. 115) found that "preschool children are asked analogical questions that call for nonspecific comparisons of items, events or persons: e.g., 'What's that like?'" Trackton preschool children tell stories about things in their lives and situations in which they have been involved. Storytelling is highly competitive with only the most aggressive winning out. Trackton stories often have no point and no obvious beginning. Heath concludes that: a unilinear model of development in the acquisition of language structures and uses cannot adequately account for culturally diverse ways of acquiring knowledge or developing cognitive styles" (p. 116).

Schieffelin and Cochran-Smith (1984) focused on literacy as a social and cultural phenomenon. They studied different communities, one of which was a school-oriented Philadelphia community. In this group, it was found that children were being socialized to be literate. Schieffelin and Cochran-Smith continue: "the print interests of children do not emerge naturally, but they emerge out of a particular cultural orientation in which literacy was assumed and which organized children's early print experiences" (p. 6). The adults in this Philadelphia community did not believe in emphasis on academics for nursery school children. Daily life contained dozens of literacy events which were

presented in a relaxed way. (i.e., reading stories, encouraging children to look at books, print-rich environment, providing writing utensils)

Schieffelin and Cochran-Smith (1984) also studied Sino-Vietnamese families in West Philadelphia. They found that the concept of a literate environment was not necessarily a prerequisite to school-based literacy skills. There was no evidence of early parent-child book reading or later pleasure reading by school-aged children. "Yet the children in this study used books as resources and became literate in the course of being acculturated" (p. 16). It was found that Sino-Vietnamese children sought help from outside their family networks, since their parents were unable to help them with school-related tasks, such as homework. It was also found that their environment was very literate in that reading and writing letters were important parts of their lives and they were members of a literate culture.

Urzua (1986) found that school, rather than home factors shaped differences in attitudes and abilities relating to literacy. Urzua studied two Vietnamese refugees at home and at school who succeeded in school. These girls came from homes purportedly less conducive to literacy acquisition in that they contained no books. In contrast, another child whose home was filled with reading materials, had great difficulty with reading and writing. Urzua suggests the greater success of the first children may be due to the classroom experiences of these students. Urzua found that the children in the first group were in classrooms which valued writing, whereas the second student did exercises where he did not write more than one sentence at a time. Urzua asks: "How powerful are

the influence of curriculum and instructional techniques...which either teach children to find their own voices or discourage them from doing so” (Urzua, 1986, p. 108).

Goldenberg, Reese, and Gallimore’s (1992) study of Latino kindergartners’ home experiences provides interesting insights into the home life of low-income Hispanic children. Conditions in the study were not optimal for learning to read. Goldenberg, Reese, and Gallimore report little access to literacy materials in many low-income Hispanic homes: no home in the study had more than five books. As a result, these children do not receive many opportunities with written texts at home.

The authors found that had it not been for the worksheets and booklets sent home by the school, there would have been far fewer literacy-related experiences for children to participate in at home. It was found that parents took an active interest in what children brought from school. Often parents would ask the children on their arrival home whether they had homework to do. All parents expressed deeply held beliefs about the value of formal education for their children’s future life.

It was found “whether children used the Libros (photocopied books) or the control work sheets, the activity involved copy and repetition, either orally or in writing, with virtually no attention being paid to relationships between print and meaning” (p. 515). Parents asked almost no questions, and interactions between parents and children were minimal. Researchers noted that when an activity was perceived as having a non-school purpose, for entertainment, that parents did focus on content and meaning. The results

showed that “the use of worksheets at home, but not the use of Libros was significantly related to literacy development in kindergarten” (p. 525).

How can these results be explained? The authors speculated that in this socioeconomic group, reading and discussing stories are not seen as activities that actually teach children to read. Rather, parents believe children learn to read first by learning letters and sounds and how they blend to form words. Parents believe that repeated practice of sounds and blending are essential for learning to read. Similar attitudes have been found in African American Head Start mothers. These mothers “do not seem particularly interested in or comfortable with their children’s playful approaches to writing and reading” (Mc Lue & Mc Name, p. 107 in Goldenberg *et al.*, p. 526). “Regardless of ethnicity, mothers of low socioeconomic status (SES), were more likely to emphasize reading as a decoding process during reading episodes with young children”(Goldenberg *et al.*, 1992, p. 527). Goldenberg *et al.* interpreted their results to mean that worksheets were associated with higher scores because they are more consistent with parents’ views of how children learn to read. Parents, therefore, used them more effectively. These parents do not see reading and discussing stories as activities that teach children to read. Parents believe that repeated practice in writing and pronouncing letters and sounds are necessary for learning to read. The researchers speculate that this way of learning to read may be based on the parents’ school experiences in Mexico or Central America.

Similar results were found in Baker, Sonnenschein, Serpell, Fernandez-Dein and Scher's (1994, in Metsala, 1996) study of low-income African American and low-income European American families in Baltimore. Baker *et al.* found that the home literacy environments of European American and African American families did not differ as strongly as those of middle-income and low-income families. Baker *et al.* found that many middle income parents prefer to provide their children with opportunities for making their own meaning of literacy by making literacy materials available for independent use. Many low-income parents, in contrast, place more emphasis on skills. "Thus, middle- income families tend to adopt a more playful approach in preparing their children for literacy than low-income families" (p. 71).

How are educators to react when the perspectives of the families are at odds with the prevailing educational climate or theories? Baker *et al.* take the viewpoint: "We concur with Goldenberg, Reese, and Gallimore (1992), who argue that it may be more effective and adaptive to encourage home involvement that is consistent with parents' existing beliefs than to try to change parents' views" (p. 71).

Ferdman (1990) analyzed how literacy and culture influence each other. Ferdman argues that the goal of literacy acquisition for all can only be achieved through a better understanding of the connection between literacy and culture. "Literacy education," as Castel and Luke (1987 in Ferdman, 1990, p. 198) argue, "can never be content free. Since schools reflect the dominant culture, students from the dominant ethnic groups are more likely to relate and understand the constructs of literacy than students from minority

groups. In Shirley Brice Heath's study of Trackton, the African American children were certainly handicapped in school by their inability to relate to and understand the dominant culture.

Ferdman discusses the idea that value placed on behaviors that are constructed as literate in the context of one group will not be equivalent to the value given them by a different culture. For example, penmanship may be more valued by Chinese, who spend long hours perfecting brush strokes, than by North Americans who prefer to emphasize content. Ferdman (p. 189) continues: "The process of becoming and being literate involves becoming and being identified with a particular culture. The relationship of the individual to the group forms the basis for cultural identity."

In the case of minority group members or immigrants, the extent to which an individual follows the group's cultural pattern may be an indication of the degree of that person's assimilation or acculturation (Barry, 1986, in Ferdman, 1991). For Puerto Ricans in the United States, the Spanish language is not just a means of communication. It represents their identification as Latinos and their difference from the majority culture. Hence, the importance of allowing individuals to use their native languages in bilingual/sheltered classes. If these Puerto Rican students felt that they could maintain their identity through the use of the Spanish language in their classes in school, they might feel more a part of the dominant culture of the school.

Matate-Bianchi (1986) distinguished five subgroups among students of Mexican descent on the basis of how they identified themselves ethnically and with the behavior

patterns they perceived to go along with these labels. For some of the groups (the Mexicans and the Mexican Americans) success in school was not viewed as incompatible with cultural identity. As they learned the dominant culture of the school, these students did not think that they had to give up what they considered important about their identity as Mexicans. In contrast, for other groups (the Chicanos) maintaining their identity involved acting in ways that reduced their chances for academic success (Matate-Bianchi, p. 233).

The conflict for some minority group members or immigrants arises with respect to the issue of assimilation into the mainstream culture. When some individuals feel that they must take on or become a part of the mainstream culture, they feel that they have lost their ethnic identity. Auerbach's wealth model of family literacy enables individuals to provide input to educators. Giving students the opportunity to share their cultural/ethnic heritage and diversity with educators would enable certain minority group members to feel less alienated from the educational establishment. For example, if Chicanos could inform the culture of the school of their ideas and beliefs, it might be easier for them to identify with the school, thus increasing their chances of academic involvement and success. In the words of Ferdman (1990): "To the extent that the maintenance and development of distinctive ethnic cultures are valued, these cultures must be given consideration in the educational system" (p. 184).

The following two studies suggest that literacy can be acquired in spite of low parental literacy levels, a position which is very interesting. Tizard, Schofield, and

Hiwison's (1982) study which suggests that the context provided by parents and their consistent support may be more important than any transfer of skills. This study showed that children who read to their parents regularly made far greater gains than did children receiving an equivalent amount of extra reading instruction by reading specialists at school. A very significant fact was that low parental English literacy skills did not affect the results. This information is particularly significant for immigrant and refugee families in the United States.

In Wagner and Spratt's (1988) fascinating study of parental literacy and children's reading achievement in Morocco, a third of the highest scoring readers had parents who had never attended school. To put this study in perspective, the rate of adult illiteracy in Morocco is estimated to be more than 60%. The families in the study were representative of the lower middle class sector of Moroccan society, which comprise about 75% of the population. It was found that parents with higher achieving children tended to emphasize parents,' as opposed to teachers,' responsibility in their children's education.

Summary

In order to gain background about my question of how parents perceive that their preschool children acquire literacy, I reviewed articles in several areas. First, I looked at literacy acquisition in general. The articles show the importance of reading to children and the effect which home environment and parents have on children's literacy development. The scaffolding dialogue in story reading helps the child attain understanding. In the following section, I defined the field of family literacy. Next, I

explained how family literacy programs, which are extremely diverse, all provide opportunities for intergenerational learning.

Family literacy provides an expanded view of the multiple literacies which exist in the homes of culturally diverse and economically disadvantaged youth. There is more emphasis being given to the literacy which exists within the home of all students. This is in an effort to maximize the opportunity for home/school cooperation in literacy acquisition.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter opens with a rationale for my choice of research methods. I discuss the methods used in this study to collect the data, how to analyze them, and construct the case studies. My initial assumptions are listed. I also describe the development of this qualitative study over a span of eight months time in two research sites and descriptions of different parent participants. This chapter describes how this study, which took place in three parts, unfolded during this time period.

Rationale for the Study

My study question was how do parents from different ethnic/socioeconomic groups perceive that their preschool children acquire literacy? I chose to conduct a qualitative study to collect ethnographic data from the participants in the study because my research question is subjective in nature. A subjective question such as mine is better answered by qualitative research techniques which are able to determine people's perceptions, rather than a quantitative study which measures more objective data. I wanted to collect data from the participants themselves so that I would find out what their attitudes towards literacy acquisition were. I had no previous background in conducting a study such as this.

Case Study Rationale

I selected the case study approach because it seemed like the best way to show the perceptions of specific types of people whom I interviewed. By presenting an entire portrait of the person in the case study, a greater sense of who that person is and what that person's attitudes are emerges. In general, the case study approach made for a richer sense of the individual in the study.

The case study approach was used to show the parents' attitudes towards literacy acquisition. I wrote four case studies on Rita, Janice, Betty, and Maria. When I completed writing the case studies, I shared them with the individuals involved and asked them if the portrayal seemed accurate and if they thought I should make any changes.

Data Collection

The best way to gather parents' attitudes on how their children acquire literacy was to find out what their perceptions were. The best approach seemed to ask the parents directly what their ideas were. My goal was to get the parents talking about their ideas and to record their responses to certain questions. I took notes as I talked to them and also used an audiotape. The audiotape was used later when I was transcribing what the participants said.

I designed a questionnaire and an interview to use with my interviewees, which can be seen in the Appendices B, C, and D. For the four individuals for whom I did case studies, their interview can also be seen in Appendix D. During the study, I was able to follow up, incorporating the results of the first questionnaire in my interview. Sometimes

data gathered in the questionnaire generated specific questions in the interview. In my second interview with the case studies, I referred to both the questionnaire and first interview before starting my interview. Often, I was able to clarify a point in this way or formulate a question to ask in the interview.

Data Analysis

The process of coding the data is one of searching for patterns or themes. Upon finding a pattern, the researcher returns to his notes or audiotapes, reexamines them, and often sets out to gather new data (Yin, 1984). For example, after studying the results of my survey, I made notes and asked additional questions to clarify a point on my first interview. After reviewing the first interview, I searched for additional data in the second interview. In some cases, I clarified questions which I had from the second interview with an additional phone call to the participant. Hence, the gradually unfolding nature of the qualitative study.

One of the things I liked about a qualitative study was how it grows and evolves. In a qualitative study, the viewpoint of the researcher inevitably colors the data which is collected, even though the researcher tries to be objective. In Appendix E is some information about my background and educational philosophy in order that the reader can better understand my perspective and inevitable subjectivity.

Construction of the Cases

After the case studies were complete, I began constructing the cases and writing them up. Constructing the cases was a process of consulting the notes which I took

down and consulting the responses from the survey and interviews. I listened to the audiotapes again, often listening to particular parts repeatedly. After constructing the cases and writing them up, I shared them with the individuals they were about and asked for any modifications which they thought I should make. Except for some very minor changes, Betty, Maria, Janice, and Rita agreed that the case studies were accurate as I had written them.

Initial Assumptions

In conducting this study, and in analyzing the data, I have strived to be as open as I could to the people I interviewed and the data I analyzed. However, it is inevitable that my experiences might color the analysis of the data.

1. My background could be classified as mainstream: I am from a middle class background, have a college degree, and have worked as a teacher. I think that it might be easier for me to relate positively to parents in the study whose beliefs are closer to my own.
2. The literature which I have read as background for this study will undoubtedly affect my interpretation of the data.
3. Sometimes during the data collection process, I was not accustomed to a parent's off-color language or speech patterns. (e.g., "my mother didn't keep on my butt.") It was easier for me to interview people with speech patterns closer to my own. Still, I tried to be open and accepting.

I thought that parents' beliefs on how preschool children acquire literacy would fall within a range of philosophies from whole language to a phonetic approach to acquiring literacy. However, I had no idea what philosophy the majority of parents would favor. I thought that ethnicity might affect parents' perceptions. I assumed from my experiences with teaching that socioeconomic status would affect parents' perceptions of acquiring literacy. However, I did not know how. I was interested in finding out how those in the study might answer the questions.

Research Sites and Settings

Because the nature of this study was changing and evolving, it grew as I conducted the study. I first began the study at the Presidio of Monterey. Later, I added the research site at the Marina Child Care Center. Still later, I added the case study approach in an effort to add greater depth to the study. I conducted four more interviews: two from the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center and two from the Marina Child Care Center. In the following sections, I will describe what took place in each of the three segments of the study.

I began the process of locating a childcare center where I would be able to interview parents. This proved more difficult than I had anticipated. I had the stipulation that I wanted to interview parents of various ethnic backgrounds: Caucasian, African American, Asian, and Hispanic.

I first tried a state-run day care center in Seaside, CA, a multi-ethnic community on the Monterey Peninsula near my home. I was unable to get a response from the

director. After several visits and phone calls, the director finally told me that her parents were working people who were not interested in participating in a study such as mine. I was frustrated in that this process took a fair amount of time and also because I was anxious to start my study and begin data collection.

Part One: Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center

Since I live on the Presidio of Monterey Annex, I thought of trying the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center to see whether I would receive a warmer response. I was well received by the head of the child care centers, who was interested in the idea of such a study. However, she said that before I could proceed any further, I would have to present the details of my study to the Staff Judge Advocate (See letter in Appendix A) or the lawyers at the Presidio in order to receive permission to conduct a study. I prepared my packet, sent it to the Staff Judge Advocate, and waited for a response. Several weeks later, a letter of approval for my study arrived in the mail.

Pleased to get permission, I set out for the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center, letter of approval in hand. There, I discussed the idea of my study with the director and showed her my questionnaire and interview. She was less enthusiastic about the idea of the study than her boss has been. However, she agreed to help me select families of various ethnic backgrounds for my study. It was already March and I was finally ready to begin data collection. This had taken more time than I had expected.

The first part of the study took place in the spring of 1997, when I gave a questionnaire and conducted an interview with parents from the Presidio of Monterey

Child Care Center, located on the former Ft. Ord. This federally funded child care center is run according to the guidelines of Department of Defense child care centers, following a strict code of regulations. Parents pay for childcare on a sliding scale, depending on their income. There is a large number of personnel in the child care center from administrators to teachers to aides. Parents must attend an orientation in order to enroll their child in the center.

The program features a morning preschool program and afternoon day care. The program runs between the hours of 6:30 am-6:30 pm. Lunch and snacks are served. There is a story time every day. Children are able to play outside in the center's well-equipped playground. The weekly curriculum listing art, cooking, and other projects is posted in the lobby so that parents can read it. A monthly snack and meal schedule is also posted. Information posted as to how parents can file grievances is also on the bulletin board. The staff maintains a ratio of two adults in each classroom at all times, in order to avoid incidents of child abuse. This information, as well as detailed information on what their rights are, is presented to parents in the orientation meeting. Teachers spoke of the inservice training they receive related to early child development.

The director was cooperative in distributing my questionnaire and collected the results for me. She said that I could begin the interview process in the waiting room of the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center. I taped all of the interviews and also took notes on what the parents said to me. I then transcribed the tapes at a later time.

Research Site

The Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center is a new building with offices, many classrooms, and a large parking lot. The lobby is colorfully painted in bright red with posters of multiethnic children on the walls. There are two sofas for waiting on. There is a small, round table for children with stools and many children's books are placed around the room. Facilities in the building are scaled down to the size of the preschool children it serves. It is a bright, neat, and attractive setting.

All of my interviews at the Presidio of Monterey took place on the sofa in the waiting room. On the tapes, the background noise of the telephone ringing and child care workers talking to parents could often be heard. Since my interviews took place as parents picked up their children, there was a lot of activity as parents meet their children after a day in the center.

The Participants

Parents eligible for the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center are civilian or military employees of the Presidio, Naval Postgraduate School, or the Defense Language Institute. The majority of the parents in this educational setting are professional parents with college degrees, reflecting the population employed or attending school at these three institutions. All of the parents that I interviewed at the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center were extremely cooperative and interested in what I was doing.

Interviews lasted from 30-45 minutes. Even though the preschool children were waiting and were often wiggling, conducting the interviews was generally an enjoyable

process. Parents at the Presidio of Monterey seemed to be familiar with the interview format. They were anxious to explain themselves to me and pleased that I was interested in their ideas. Parents in the Presidio of Monterey group had ideas on education which they had formulated. Their ideas flowed easily. They were sure of their educational philosophy. Since I spent many afternoons waiting for parents to come into the center, parents became familiar with seeing me there. Some, even added to their responses the next day after thinking about them overnight.

During the course of the study, I found that my ethnic classifications (Caucasian, African American, Asian, Hispanic) were not always meaningful in that some parents fit into two classifications. Sometimes their child was in another classification. For example, a Caucasian mother would have an African American child. It turned out that it was sometimes hard to categorize people according to the classifications I had selected. People were more ethnically mixed than I had anticipated.

I finished the interview process at the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center by the time the spring semester at SJSU ended. I was pleased with the interviews. However, I was surprised that the parents I had interviewed were of such a high socioeconomic class. All but three of the parents I interviewed had college degrees. Several had graduate degrees or were working on them. All of the families in the study were married couples with the exception of one single mother, separated from her husband. Most of the families in the Presidio of Monterey study were professionals.

As mentioned previously, the nature of a qualitative study is changing and evolving. As the researcher looks at the results, the nature of the study can change. After going over my first results, I felt the desire to expand my study to include families with lower education levels and of lower socioeconomic status in order to find out what their responses would be to how parents perceive that their preschool children acquire literacy.

Part Two: Marina Child Care Center

Once again, I was searching for a child care center which would cooperate with me in terms of conducting my study and which would include families of lower socioeconomic status. I went to the other state-run child care center on the Monterey Peninsula in Marina. I explained to the director what I wanted to do and gave her a copy of my questionnaire and interview. Her response was cordial, and she seemed interested in what I was doing. Much to my happiness, she agreed to let me give my questionnaire and interview. She explained that she would be away the following week. But if I came, one of the teachers, Mr. Chris, would be able to help me locate families.

Research Site

I gave the questionnaire and interviewed people at the Marina Child Care Center through much of June and into July 1997. The Marina Child Care Center is located on the grounds of Ione Olson Elementary School, a part of Monterey Peninsula Unified School District. The school is located in the bedroom community of Marina. The Marina Child Care Center is one of two state-run child care centers for preschool children on the Monterey Peninsula.

I found out about the center from one of their flyers which are distributed to the public schools and libraries. In order to be eligible for the program, parents must qualify as being low income. Preference is given first to parents on welfare and homeless families. Although many families do not pay for the program, parents with higher incomes pay on a sliding scale based on their income. There is a long waiting list for the program.

I made friends with the staff there. My 4-year-old daughter went along and even ate breakfast sometimes or had a snack with the preschool children. It was a very different atmosphere from the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center. At the Marina Child Care Center there was no receptionist. It was a much more informal situation. There was a large number of personnel: 3 teachers and 5 aides who did such things as serve breakfast, snack, lunch, and clean up after the children. Parents seemed to be on an informal basis with teachers and aides, judging from the casual conversation and remarks which they made.

I was able to see more of the school program at the Marina Child Care Center, since it took place in the open room across from the room with the eating tables in which I was conducting interviews. The three preschool teachers seemed knowledgeable about handling children. They were very warm and responsive to the children's needs. However, I never saw either a teacher or an aide read a book nor had a parent speak of reading stories during the entire time I was there.

While the Presidio of Monterey program emphasizes the developmental content of the program, the Marina Child Care Center program emphasizes more the total health and well-being of the children. The program begins each morning when an aide serves breakfast to the children as they individually arrive at the child care center between the hours of 6:30 am and 9:00 am. These breakfasts, served by a Vietnamese aide who talks individually to each of the children and their parent, vary from sugared cereal to pancakes to cinnamon rolls. Those children who have eaten, watch the television in the classroom until the preschool program begins at 9:00am. In the afternoon, day care is provided until 6:00pm.

The Marina Child Care Center is located in two modular classrooms which are attached. Although there are many manipulative toys and educational materials, the facility is very crowded, with items piled all around. Things are not built on the scale of preschool children. This facility lacks the space, individual classrooms, and colorful decor of the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center. During the time that I was interviewing at the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center, the preschool was preparing for their graduation ceremony. Considerable preparation was going into this graduation ceremony, which included caps and gowns and a pizza party afterwards.

Participants

The group of parents was very different at the Marina Child Care Center from at the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center. First, the parents were noticeably younger. Some were only about 19-20 years old. There was a grandfather in his 40's who dropped

off and picked up his grandchildren. The majority of the mothers were single parents; some with three to four children. Parents worked at hourly jobs, some at two jobs. In this group, people other than parents were more likely to pick up the children, perhaps a sister, an aunt, a friend. When I questioned one relative as to why he was picking up the child, rather than the father, whom I was supposed to have an appointment with, I was told it was because the father could not be counted on. At the Presidio of Monterey, only parents had picked up their children when I observed.

More children in the Marina group tended to be of a different racial group than their mother. As a result, it was harder to match the child with the parent, for purposes of interviewing. It was more time-consuming for me to conduct interviews at the Marina Day Care Center than at the Presidio of Monterey. All of the parents at the Presidio of Monterey had come at the time and day they had stated they would, so interviews proceeded smoothly.

At the Marina Child Care Center, parents frequently would not come to an appointment with me when they said they would. Then I would have to wait for them in the morning or the afternoon until they finally did appear. Because of the difficulty with setting appointments, I spent a great deal of time waiting around the Child Care Center observing workers and children or simply reading stories from the bookshelf to my daughter. Because of the large amounts of time I spent waiting, I also got on a more personal basis with these employees.

Parents were not as cooperative about the interview process as parents at the Presidio of Monterey had been. Most clearly did not understand why I was doing this even though I tried to explain it to them. Many parents were suspicious of me and of my motives. They were much less willing to cooperate with me and sometimes only cooperated with me after I asserted myself considerably. In this sense, conducting the interviews at the Marina Child Care Center was more of a struggle.

Parents in this group were less familiar with the interview format. It tended to be more difficult for them to articulate an educational philosophy. When I asked them their ideas on education, I sometimes drew a blank response. However, by mid July of 1997, I was able to complete the interview process. I was pleased with the data which I had collected at each of the Child Care Centers and was anxious to start analyzing it.

At this point, I took a summer vacation with my family to southwest Utah. I said goodbye to my husband, who was leaving for a year's unaccompanied tour with the Marine Corps to Okinawa, Japan. The next few weeks I found myself getting accustomed to my new role as a single mother of a 4-year-old and a 12-year-old, with many added responsibilities.

Part Three: Case Study Interview

The fact that I was going to do case studies meant that I would have to continue with more interviewing. So I contacted four women I had interviewed previously. When I recontacted people in September and suggested another interview, people's reactions

varied. I wanted to select two people from each child care center, representing diverse ideas with respect to how they perceive that their preschool children acquire literacy.

The Participants

I tried to select participants who would represent a wide range of views. I selected Rita because she had a whole language approach to literacy acquisition. I selected Janice because she supported a blended or combination phonetic and whole language approach to language acquisition. I tried to select people who were willing to respond and elaborate easily when I asked them questions. I selected Betty from the Marina Child Care Center because she was so strong in her interest in imparting literacy to her son. I selected Maria because she was available and because her viewpoint supported a blended literacy acquisition with strong phonetic ideas.

Janice was very enthusiastic about being interviewed. She was extremely interested in what I was doing and eager to hear of the outcome. She said, "I'm so important, I'm being interviewed." Betty was flattered that I had selected her. She was happy to let me come over the first day that I phoned her for an interview in her home. Rita was very busy with her job so it was difficult to get in contact with her. I phoned and left many messages on her answering machine before I was successful. However, she replied with enthusiasm, "I'd be glad to help you out."

I had hoped to use Jose for the interview, as he represented a person who advocated the phonetic approach to reading. I phoned his home many times trying to reach him. He canceled the appointment. Next, he told me his nephew was in the

hospital. When I talked to him, he was very suspicious. He asked me “What is it for? Will it affect my son?” I tried to explain, but he did not seem to understand. He told me it was hard to schedule an appointment, to call back tomorrow. After continuing in this vein for over a week, I phoned one evening and got his older son on the line. He told his son to tell me that he did not want to deal with me anymore.

Feeling somewhat discouraged, I tried to get Maria to agree to interview with me. I had to talk very convincingly in order to get Maria to agree to meet with me. She sounded hesitant and apathetic about the entire interview process. However, a gift certificate to McDonald’s seemed to spur her interest on to meet me.

Case Study Setting

The case study process proved to be very interesting and I was glad that I had become involved in this process. Janice’s interview took place at the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center. Betty’s interview took place at the kitchen table of her Marina home. Rita’s interview took place in her office at the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center. Maria’s interview took place at a table in the Marina Bakery where she works.

The participants’ level of comfort varied depending on the case study setting. Rita was very much at ease in her office, surrounded by photos and pictures. Betty was relaxed in the quiet of her home, with her son amusing himself in the next room. Janice’s interview took place in the waiting room of the child care center, where there was a lot of noise in terms of outside interference and parents picking up their children. Yet, the

outside interference did not seem to affect Janice's enthusiasm for expressing her ideas. The person who was the least comfortable in her setting was Maria. She seemed nervous and distraught when her employers in the bakery would call across the room to her, asking her questions. They also wanted us to hurry up towards the end of the hour-long interview, as they wanted to close the bakery.

Summary

This chapter discussed the methodology used in gathering information to answer my study question of how parents from different ethnic/socioeconomic groups acquire literacy. I discuss how I analyzed the data collected in two child care centers and constructed case studies on four individuals. I described the gradually evolving nature of the qualitative study, which took place in three parts. The essence of a qualitative study is that it grows as the researcher learns from what arises from the process. As a researcher, my subjective interpretations influenced my observations. For this reason, I wrote a section on my personal background, found in Appendix E.

Chapter 4

Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center and Marina Child Care Center

Introduction

The following chapter presents a description of the attitudes of parents on acquiring literacy from the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center and the Marina Child Care Center. I selected the different child care centers because they represented different socioeconomic groups. The Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center represented a middle- income socioeconomic group. The Marina Child Care Center represented a low-income socioeconomic group. Within each child care center, I selected two parents each representing the following ethnic/cultural groups: Caucasian, Hispanic, African American, Asian. The Marina Child Care Center had one American Indian parent.

Described below are the themes from my questionnaire and interview. The following parent-generated themes emerged as being important elements in their preschool children acquiring literacy:

1. Reading to Children
2. Parents Modeling Reading
3. Child's Natural Curiosity
4. Home Foundation
5. Family Support
6. Environmental Print

7. Phonics
8. Print Rich Environment

I present a description of these themes first at the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center and second at the Marina Child Care Center. The final section of the chapter is patterns from the data, a discussion of the above themes from both child care centers.

Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center

Family Background and Structure

All of the families in the study were married couples who lived together, except for one: Rosa, a Hispanic mother of three was separated from her husband, who was deployed to Saudi Arabia. Jolene, an Asian first grade teacher, was living with her parents while her husband was deployed to Bosnia .

Education

Six of eight of the participants in the study had college degrees. Two of these had master's degrees and one mother was working on a Ph.D. in literature at Stanford University. The Chens, a couple from Canton, China, graduates of California State University, San Jose (C.S.U.S.J.), were both working on master's degrees. The wife is studying at C.S.U.S.J. in Food Science. The husband, Rick, studies computer science as a civilian at the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA. Although most people find the curriculum rigorous, Rick says, "It's easy because I've worked so long in computer science." Jerome is an Air Force officer who works at the Presidio. He is married to the wife he met in Spain. His Spanish wife is currently studying at Stanford.

Jolene is a first grade teacher at a parochial school in Salinas, CA who attended the University of Arizona, Tucson, as did her husband. Julie works as a trainer of teachers at the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center. She has an M.A. in Child Development.

Janice, a Caucasian, Cherokee mother had an A.A. degree from Monterey Peninsula College. An Army specialist, she recently completed the Korean language program at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, CA and currently works in hospital administration. There was one person in the group whose formal education ended in high school, Sherrie, a black mother of Caribbean descent.

Reading to Your Child

Every parent at the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center mentioned the importance of reading to the child. Rick, who emigrated seventeen years ago from Canton, works for the government in computer science. Rick said that stories should be ones that interested the child. Rita, an African American mother, emphasized that "reading should start at or before birth. That's what I did, since I was working with preschoolers at the time." Julie, a Caucasian mother, said emphatically that "reading should be done on a daily basis." She added "the preschool takes that role on as children are read to once daily." Jolene, an Asian first grade teacher, emphasized the reading program in preschool: "They read daily in preschool. I'm pleased with the storytime/readalouds through the Child Development Services Program."

Parents Modeling Reading

Two parents in the group emphasized the importance of modeling reading. Rosa, a single mother who works as a fitness instructor/personal trainer at the Inn at Spanish Bay, Pebble Beach, CA, put it like this: "Making sure how important it is to read." Sherrie, a black high school graduate, who carefully monitors her two children's progress, related how her six-year-old reads to her two-year old. She explains: "I bought the child (her six year-old) a book every week. I read one chapter ahead, then she reads it." In this group, there was more interest in the parents acting as role models, rather than siblings taking on this role.

Child's Natural Curiosity

Two fathers in the study spoke of following "the child's natural curiosity." Rick, an Asian father, referred to the need to follow his child's interests: "When they feel like it, they grab a book and read it. The book must be interesting."

The Presidio of Monterey group placed more emphasis on, as Jerome, an Air Force officer put it: "the family's responsibility to get them off to the right start." Julia, who gives short, definite answers, referred to the "importance of being talked to in the family" emphasizing the link with communication. Rita is an African American mother who works as a civil servant at Ft. Ord. She listed family activities and excursions as being important in terms of developing her children's experiences and interests: "We do a lot of nature stuff. Visit different parks. Large motor skills. Go to the library. We go to the ocean."

Home Foundation¹

The Presidio of Monterey group placed more emphasis on, as Jerome, an Air Force officer put it: "the family's responsibility to get them off to the right start." Julia, who gives short, definite answers, referred to the: "importance of being talked to in the family," emphasizing the link with communication. Rita is an African American mother who works as a civil servant at Ft. Ord. She listed family activities and excursions as being important in terms of developing her children's experiences and interests: "We do a lot of nature stuff. Visit parks. Large motor skills. Go to the library. We go to the ocean."

Family Support²

Parents from both groups responded equally to the need for family support. Half of the respondents in each group emphasized the need for family support. Janice, Sherrie, and Julia spoke of the "need to be involved in children's school work." Randall spoke of the need for "active parent involvement" in his two-year-old's development. He and his Spanish wife, whom he met in Madrid, Spain, were married for fourteen years before they had their daughter, Alejandra, who is being raised bilingually.

¹ **Home Foundation**: Families take the initiative to establish literacy within the home, e.g., (provide an environment that encourages children in their first attempts at literacy through educational games and toys) Home foundation in the study contrasted with the category of family support. Family support in the study was defined as families reinforcing or supporting the material which the preschool or kindergarten sends home.

² **Family Support**: Contrasts with home foundation. Family support in the study is defined as families reinforcing or supporting the material which the preschool or kindergarten sends home.

Environmental Print

Three parents made use of environmental print at the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center in contrast with two parents at the Marina Child Care Center. Rosa, a single mother of three said: "He (her son) sees words around him on billboards. He remembers." Jolene, a first grade teacher said, "When I see the opportunity to bring in letter recognition, I point to signs. I take the opportunity as it comes to us." Sherrie said: "When we ride in the car, she (her child) recognizes street names."

Phonics

At the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center, five of eight parents, made reference to learning to read through phonics. However, all of these parents advocated a blended approach, or a combination of phonics and a whole language approach, to learning to read. Rick was a representative of this group in that he strongly supported reading books which interested his daughter, in her case, dinosaur books. "Every time I see a book on dinosaurs she likes, I buy it." Rick also made reference to learning to read and write the letters of the alphabet. "I teach her reading and writing the ABC's. Her Mom does the same thing. This is typical in China. Most parents teach their children to read and write very young" (he laughs). Rick, who married his high school sweetheart from Canton, speaks a combination of English, Cantonese, and Mandarin at home. Two mothers, Janice and Rosa, spoke of learning to sound out the letters; Jolene spoke of learning to "blend it all together."

Jolene and Jerome referred to rhyming as being important. Jerome's bilingual daughter learns rhymes in Spanish: "Her mother teaches her Spanish interactive games" that contain a great deal of rhyming. Parents spoke of knowing the sounds which the letters make. Julia emphasized the link with communication when she said: "they would learn by being talked to." Rosa spoke of the need "to introduce him to smaller words." "Sherrie said that children learn to read through conversation. Talking to them. They pick up on sounds."

Sherrie, the only parent who had not attended college, spoke with enthusiasm of using workbook activity books: "I'm always one step ahead of the classroom." At the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center, the emphasis was more on, as Janice said: "making reading enjoyable." As Rita summed it up: "Children must have a love of books."

Print-Rich Environment

Four of the parents made statements indicating the importance of creating a print-rich environment. Jerome spoke of the importance of "having books in the house and showing books to the child." Rick emphasized, "Books must be interesting. Get books that follow the child's interests." Sherrie told how her family "has always used the library."

Marina Child Care Center

Education

All of the families in the study had completed high school. One had a GED, two attended high school in the Philippines, and one in Peru. One single black mother had finished one year of community college and an American Indian father was attending community college.

Family Background and Structure

There were four single mothers in the study: two Caucasian mothers and two African American. Doris, a Caucasian mother, had four children ranging in age from six years to two years; the two-year-olds were twins. Hillary, the other single Caucasian mother, had earned her GED. She had two children by different fathers. She described one child as Mexican American and the other child as Filipino American. Hillary was a substitute aide at the Marina Child Care Center.

Both of these single mothers received support from their extended families. Doris' sister often picked up the children at the child care center. Hillary's mother took care of her two children on weekends.

The Jimenez family emigrated in 1995 from the Philippines. Iris, a single Filipino mother of two, lived with her parents, who took complete responsibility for the children. Her father, William, described her as "twenty-three years old, but looking fifteen. She works off and on, asks for money from her parents. "Gas money."

The Hispanic families in the study were both married and appeared to have a solid family structure. Jose, who emigrated from Peru in 1980, emphasized the importance of "families making the time to help their kids." He was extremely proud of his older son, who had recently been named student of the month at Los Arboles, a Marina Middle School. Mickey, who is an American Indian, and his girlfriend's have two children. Mickey is pursuing a degree at Monterey Peninsula College in Criminal Law.

Both African American mothers in the study were single mothers. Carry, who graduated from Seaside High School had three children. Betty had one son and lived with her parents. She received considerable support from her mother, who was Danish, and her retired military African American father. Betty had completed one year at Hartnell College in Salinas, CA. She was proud of having been in Honor Band at Seaside High School.

Reading to Your Child

Six of nine parents thought that reading stories to their preschool children was important. Carry, an African American mother, thought that choral reading with her child would help her child to read: "By repeating the words as you go along. Reading along with you. Pointing to each word would help." Betty, a single African American mother emphasized the importance of reading daily to her son. "We have over 1,000 books in the home. We read a lot. I read to him at night. He reads to himself. He's

interested." Mickey, an American Indian father, reads to his two children two to three times a week: "Not as much as I would like to. I work nights."

Two parents who did not mention reading to their children spoke of the importance of learning the letters of the alphabet. Jose, a father from Peru, spoke of how he works with his son copying the letters on a chalkboard and on papers: "I have more patience than my wife. At home we have a blackboard. I put letters. He (his son) tries to do it." Deomina, a mother of two from the Philippines is a part time sales clerk at K-Mart. She says children need to practice learning the letters: "When a child reads the letters, he learns the letters. We help him (her son) at home to read. Teach him letters. Names and sounds. Help him before he goes to kindergarten."

Parents Modeling Reading

Carry spoke of modeling reading. However, she confessed that she does not like to read. "I read for the children.... Would help if she saw me reading, too. Got to find something more interesting. Then I would read more." The rest of the entries consisted of siblings, rather than parents modeling for the preschool child. Four of the parents were single, working mothers, two of them with three and four children respectively.

Doris is a divorced Caucasian mother of four, including two-year-old twins. In Doris' family, the oldest sibling reads to the three younger children. Doris, who always seems to be in a rush, describes this as being a positive time for the family to be

together after a busy day. "He reads out loud enjoying the story. The younger children listen. It's a family thing."

The majority of the families that reported instances of modeling were in the category of the older child doing the homework and the younger child modeling it. Jose said: "My 12 year-old does his homework. My 4 ½-year-old tries to do the homework." Families reported the case of the older child setting the tone for the younger child as being positive influences in their homes. Hillary says: "When my 6-year-old does homework, my 3-yearold wants to do it."

Child's Natural Curiosity

Two of the parents referred to the child's natural curiosity as being something that would help him gain literacy. Mickey, an American Indian father, felt that the child's natural curiosity coupled with preschool would help further literacy. "She will start to pick up (reading) eventually. What are they looking at? I want to learn. Curiosity."

Parents frequently expressed the importance and influence of their child's preschool education. Jose, a Peruvian father, said: I put my son in preschool so he would learn when he's 2, 3, and 4 and then be ready for kindergarten when he's five. He learns very much. He learns here (at preschool). We try to help him." Mickey said that preschool had really helped his younger daughter. She had learned things at a faster rate than her older sister: "There's a big difference with the older child who didn't go to preschool. The 3-year-old knows things the 6-year-old didn't know." Deomina said:

"They teach the kids so much stuff at the preschool." During the interviews, parents frequently spoke with pride of how much their children were learning in the preschool program. There was no criticism, only praise for the state-run preschool program, the Marina Child Care Center.

Home Foundation

None of the parents in the group emphasized the importance of home foundation with respect to their children acquiring literacy. One parent, Mickey, an American Indian, felt that "spending time with each other" would help children to become more literate.

Family Support

Although the families did not see themselves as responsible for setting the tone of the child's home foundation, they did express a lot of interest in the areas of family support, or parent involvement in the child's homework. Hillary, a Caucasian mother, spoke of "helping them at home." The Luiz family spoke of the need for family support, of "helping the children helping them read out (sound out) the letters."

The Jimenez family spoke of the need to help children with homework. William, a Filipino grandfather said: "if they get stuck, I can help them, if they get stuck. O.K. What's that? Give them a little bit of a push." The families in the study were very supportive of work which came to them from the school. They saw their role more in terms of reinforcing the tone which the school was to establish. The Luiz

family explained: "We read the books they send home." Deomina said: "I can help him to read every night. I can help him with his homework."

Environmental Print

Hillary, a single Caucasian mother, shared the activity of reading signs around her with her child. "When we ride in the car, he points out signs and tries to read them. It's a game." Betty also said that her son tries to read signs when they are riding in the car.

Phonics

More parents in this group emphasized the importance of phonics in learning to read. The emphasis was on learning the letters, rather than the sounds. Two parents used the term "sounding out." The two Asian couples in the group, both Filipino, supported a strongly phonetic approach. Both agreed about the importance of learning the letters of the alphabet. The Filipino grandfather said that after learning the letters, one must learn to write the letters. He told how he and his wife, the children's grandmother, play games to teach children the letters: "Like in games. D is for dog. Learn the letters. What does that letter stand for? They learn from the game. What does dog start with? When I watch TV, what does it start with? I don't want to correct."

Betty emphasized how she read daily to her son. She teaches him to sound out the letters as she reads. They also work in workbooks twice a week writing letters and numbers. Jose, a Peruvian high school graduate, spoke of helping his son learn to copy

the letters. He said that he devotes considerable time to helping his son. He teaches his son to copy letters on a board and on papers. The Luiz family told how they have taught their daughter the alphabet. As they read to the child, they help her sound out the letters.

Hillary, a single Caucasian mother of two, was the only parent in the group to advocate a completely whole language approach to reading. She said that children become literate in the following ways: reading environmental print, having books read, having children look at books, and through adults helping the child. Doris explained how, as her four children were being read to, they "figure out letters that go with words." She also reflected the whole language approach when she said: "We read a lot. We read along with the pictures. Then we let them tell us the story."

The Marina Child Care Center parents tended to emphasize the notion of practice. Deomina says: "He must practice reading, I can help him to read every night." Parents thought that repetition was necessary in order to attain literacy. The need for the child to learn the alphabet and to be able to copy the letters of the alphabet were seen as important. No mention was made of the concept of rhyming.

Print-Rich Environment

In the Marina Child Care Center group, a print-rich environment was mentioned by two out of nine individuals. Hillary, a single Caucasian mother referred to a print-rich environment when she said: "kids learn to read by being read to and having them look at books." Betty, a single African American mother, who enjoys writing poetry,

told how she has her young son follow as he reads along in a computer book. "It helps him sound it out. He's following along with me. He listens to the tape and follows. We read every night," she says emphatically. Her mother also sends her son mail, since he enjoys receiving it.

Chapter 5

Case Studies

Introduction

Case studies of four parents are presented in this chapter. There are two parents from each child care center, the low-income Marina Child Care Center and the middle-income Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center. I tried to select parents from each child care center representing a wide range of philosophies of education. I was not entirely successful in getting people representing each philosophy to interview with me. For example, I was unable to get anyone representing the phonetic approach to acquiring literacy to agree to do a case study with me.

From the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center, I selected Janice because she represented a blended approach, (part phonetic, part whole language) to acquiring literacy. Rita was selected from the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center because she represented a whole language approach to acquiring literacy. From the Marina Child Care Center, I selected Maria partly because she was available and because she represented a blended approach to acquiring literacy. I selected Betty from the Marina Child Care Center because she represented a blended approach to acquiring literacy and because her fervor for passing literacy on to her son was very unusual in this group. I also selected parents for case studies from a variety of ethnic groups. The following case studies represent people from the following ethnic/cultural groups: Janice-Cherokee/Caucasian, Betty and Rita-African American, Maria-Filipina Hispanic.

Betty-Case 1

Betty is a twenty-five-year-old African American woman. She has a pretty face, which resembles photographs of her Danish mother. Betty is articulate, organized, and has clearly defined ideas on all of the subjects we discussed. She has a deliberate approach, which is reflected in her answers. Betty is divorced and has a 5-year-old son, Marcelis. Betty clearly adores her son and spends a great deal of time with him. "I give him time, she says.

Betty was married and lived in both Georgia and Washington. During this time, Betty's mother sent letters to her grandson. This is a practice which the grandmother continues. Marcelis enjoys receiving mail, reflecting the interest in literacy in the family:

Actually, the first three months we'd been here, (living with her parents in Marina, CA) she (my mother) didn't send him nothing. Then he asked my mom how come she stopped sending him mail? She said, 'It's cause you're here.' He said, 'You still get mail.' So once a week, she'll send him something. So he gets personal mail.

Betty's father is retired from the army. While overseas, he married Betty's Danish mother. Betty recalls that when she was young, her mother "had a limited vocab" (vocabulary) and could not always understand everything. I visited Betty in the Marina, CA home where she lives with her parents. It is a modest home in a neighborhood near Ione Olson School. Books, nicknacks, and photographs are placed around the living room. A large, burlwood coffee table sits in the center of the living room. It is a quiet, orderly environment for 5-year-old Marcelis to live in. As we talked at the kitchen table, I could see Marcelis quietly amusing himself with books in the bedroom adjacent.

Betty graduated from local schools: Olson, Los Arboles, and Seaside High School. "I did well in school." Betty recalls with pride playing the flute in honor band in high school. She told me how she plays classical music for her son, Marcelis. Betty often writes letters to friends and speaks of her interest in writing: "I write poetry." Betty completed one year at Hartnell College in Salinas, CA before getting married. Betty speaks of her school experiences: "I enjoyed everything about school up until college. My mom was always there when it came to school. My mom was real involved. Up until she didn't understand it anymore. She lost control (in college). Then, it was a problem of not staying on my butt, you know, really."

Betty works full time for a publishing company, McGraw Hill, in Monterey, CA. She works in the PQS Department, the Quality Service Station, which packages proficiency tests up before they are shipped out to customers. Betty has definite and concrete goals for her future. Starting next semester, she will attend night school at Monterey Peninsula College.

Betty explains that she will pursue a double major: Art and Administration and Justice. She explained to me that Administration and Justice is the correctional field. Betty hopes to become a probation officer. She says: "Right now, I'm just going to take the 2-year program that they have (at MPC, Monterey Peninsula College). I can get into that type of work after the two-year program. But I haven't decided, I'm not sure I'm not going to be decided, if I want to continue it or if I want to take it any further."

Betty traces her interest in reading to family influences: “I remember my sister (2 years older) reading to me. With her getting excited about learning to read in school, she always wanted to read to me. I kinda picked up on how to read earlier than my classmates did, I think, from her.”

Betty speaks of her son’s natural curiosity. “Like if I come to pick him up early from school, the other kids are doing what they’re told to do. My son kinda grasps. He’s outgoing. He doesn’t just go along with the program. He’s just naturally curious about whatever. He’s got a mouth on him. So he’ll ask” (questions). Betty adds with a mixed tone of pride and reverence in her voice: “He loves kindergarten.”

Betty feels that following her son’s interests has helped with his development in reading. For example:

Actually, the computer book was like the best thing I did for him. But when I went into the store and got it, I had no idea it would have that effect on him. Um, know you take a kid to a store, and he’ll look at the thing that catches his eye and the book caught his eye. And I believe it was just the colors and the fact that it was a book. And, um, I really didn’t read what it was about, and when I gave it to him, it has a hundred activities and everything and it talks to him. So if there’s anything he wants to know, it would tell him how to find out.

Betty thinks that for children to love reading “has a lot to do with parents being involved in reading. I read every night.” She emphasizes that parents must “always stay involved.” When Betty was growing up, her father worked the night shift, so he couldn’t read to her. Her Danish mother couldn’t always read due to her limited English. Because

Marcelis is an only child, Betty says: "I've taken the approach to read to him myself."

She continues emphatically, "We read every night."

Betty describes how she works with her son in workbooks. "He has the concept that school has homework. In kindergarten he doesn't have homework." She works with her son in workbooks every Tuesday and Thursday after school.

He knows Tuesday and Thursday we have homework. When he comes home from school, he gets his snack. He'll work in it for about 30 minutes. On Tuesday and Thursday, I didn't do it everyday. Cause he wants to learn. I didn't want to overwhelm him with it. It might push him away.

Betty and other parents that I interviewed referred to their own past problems with learning. "I know, when I was little, I enjoyed it up until I couldn't understand the books. Then, I felt it was pushed on me. So, I thought I'd try another approach with him."

Betty speaks of how Marcelis sounds out the letters of the alphabet:

Everywhere. Everywhere we go. Right now, he's got the 2 letter words down. Some 3 letter words. Even some 4 letter words. But, you know, the simple, basic words. He's now got every letter. Then he kind of slowly puts them together. Then, if he's right, I've got this box of stars. I put them right next to each word that he gets right. But he'll sound them out. But, like if we're riding in the car or something, he sees market. He'll say, that's almost my name (his name is Marcelis)! He knows the MAR in the beginning in market or Marina. Anything. He knows (She emphasizes with obvious pride). He knows all his letters. But right now, he's really trying to learn how to read. He's pretty good at teaching himself how to figure out some words.

Betty forcefully sums up her thoughts on education in the following statements which she expressed with both feeling and emphasis:

I feel education is important. I don't want him to be scared to learn. So, I thought I'd grasp it while he was young and make it fun for him. If I read to him every night, he'd think reading was natural-like eating and brushing his teeth. So, I thought I'd make it part of his life. And, then, as far as learning, to make it fun for him so he'd want to learn.

Maria-Case 2

Maria, who is Hispanic/Filipina, is a 23-year-old mother of her 5-year-old daughter, Lynda. Maria's hair is long and her lipstick dark. Her attractive, almond eyes are the only sign of her Filipina heritage. Maria is quiet and cooperative. Her answers are often a short, "um hum." From time to time, she laughs nervously. Maria lives with her husband, Gerardo, at the home of her parents in Marina, CA.

Maria grew up in Seaside, CA and graduated from Monterey High School. She told me emphatically that living with her mother is preferable to living in Seaside, a multiethnic community with a high crime rate: "I don't want to live in Seaside. I have a house in Seaside (laughs). I don't want to live there, anymore (laughs). I just don't like the area any more. I grew up in Seaside. It was never this bad. Crime, just everything" (laughs).

Maria lives in a home environment where she hears a great deal of Spanish. She tells me: "My mom and my husband speak Spanish. I speak broken Spanish. I can understand. I can't speak Spanish. My mom and father (whom she lives with) speak to my daughter in Spanish. My mother-in-law doesn't speak a word of English." Maria proudly tells an incident that shows how much Spanish her daughter has learned. Much to Maria's surprise, when her grandmother asked Lynda in Spanish: "Where's your Dad?" Lynda replied in English, "He's working." Maria says that she didn't know Lynda had picked up so much Spanish.

Maria works in a small bagel/doughnut shop located in the Lucky shopping center in Marina, CA. When I arrived at the bagel shop to interview Maria at 2 p.m., she had already worked an eight hour day, beginning work at 5 a.m. She says that her job in the bagel/donut shop involves “doing everything: (laughing) you know, helping customers, cleaning, cashier.” When I left the shop, the Chinese owners of the shop were discussing a problem related to the cash register with Maria. When I asked her if she used her Spanish in the shop, she replied, “Every day.”

Maria’s husband, Gerardo, is a polite, neatly kept man who shook my hand when I met him. He also graduated from Monterey High School, the place he and Maria met. Gerardo works from 7 a.m.-5 p.m. at the recycle place in Castroville, CA. He sorts recyclable material and also “goes on the route.” Gerardo says that he works with his daughter “I’ll say, 1-2 times a week. I take the time out to explain to her, read to her, paint with her, color with her.”

Maria looks back on how she learned to read:

I remember my mom said, ‘sound it out’ (laughing).”
That’s about it. I can’t remember, you know, exactly. In school, (Pause) it was kind of embarrassing, actually (laughing). Cause, you know, when you’re (laughing) reading out loud, you know. You don’t want to sound like you don’t know how to read. But my teacher said, ‘Take your time, sound it out, if it doesn’t sound right to you, try it again.’ They were nice teachers.

Maria is proud of how much her daughter, Lynda knows: “She knows the alphabet. She knows her numbers. She knows how to add. She knows her one’s. She

knows some two's. She knows like $8+2$. Count 8 of your fingers. Count 2 more. She'll count 'm. She's catching on."

I asked Maria where she got the idea that the alphabet and numbers would be good things to teach her daughter? Maria replied (laughing):

From my mistakes. O.K.? I was bad in (laughing) school. I have to admit. Like, I don't want her to be like that. I mean, I had good grades and stuff through elementary and 6th grade, stuff like that. But when I got to high school. Oooh (laughs nervously)! My goodness (laughs)!

I asked Maria whether she was interested in other things in high school or if she had not understood the material? She responded:

I think I knew the stuff, but the work, I just...I don't know.... See, I was good, like in some classes: science, English (stuff like that) But math and history (laughs nervously) Forget it! I was so bad in math, you know. I still am! So that's why I try to teach her that now. You know, adding, subtracting, you know. It will be easier for her, I think, too. Going through school.

When I asked Maria about the program at the Marina Day Care Center, she responded:

You know, they did a pretty good job (laughs). They used to send home flyers about helping your children read. I forgot what the other thing it was they said in that flyer.... But... 'Cause they would send books home with her, too. And I would read them to her. And we would have to send them back. She likes me to read to her, you know, anything. You know, she might not understand it, she just likes it, when I read to her.

Maria continues describing the value of preschool for her daughter, Lynda: "You know, that's why preschool helped her. Cause before, she wouldn't listen to me

(laughing). She wouldn't listen (laughs). You know, she gets tired quick. She would start moving around. Playing. Watching TV. Not paying attention. Now she sits there and watches me read to her. She pays attention.

Maria tells how her mother, whom she lives with, gives her advice and helps her with her daughter, Lynda:

My mother gives me lots of ideas. I don't know what I would do without her (laughs). She helps me a lot. If she knows I'm tired, he'll say, 'come here!' (to Lynda, the 5-year-old) Even though she could be tired. My mother reads to her a lot, too. And she always tells me all the time, too: 'You should read to her more often. Help her when she asks you a question. Don't just say, I'll tell you later on or Ask me later, I'm busy. She just says, 'You know, let her know right now and then, you know. If she wants you to read to her, um take the time out. You might be tired, you know, or frustrated (laughs). But, you know, take the time out. 'Cause she'll learn that way.'

Maria feels that it is important to help 5-year old Lynda learn to sound out words.

Maria describes how she works with 5-year-old Lynda:

I tell her: 'You have to sound it out!' I told her the same thing my teachers told me: 'If it doesn't sound right to you, then repeat it again.' You know, I told her, Mommy will be there to help you. But it's kind of difficult. At times. It is hard. Cause she gets frustrated, too. 'I don't know what you're talking about!' (says Lynda) I'm trying to help her now, so when she does get English classes, like in first grade, she'll know. I'm trying to prepare her for that now. But it's hard. And I'm tired, too, when I get home.... But, I have to...(laughs)

Maria read to her child before she started preschool. She says, "I helped her before she went to school. I was home with her until age three." Maria speaks of the bag

of books which the doctor gave her when she was pregnant. The doctor said that “if I read to my stomach, that she (my daughter) can actually hear it. I used to read a lot of magazines and things.”

In the second interview Maria tells me that she doesn't like to read, even though in the first survey she told me she did enjoy reading:

And I never really liked to read, either, to tell you the truth. When I read that.... Let's see if it really works, (reading to the fetus) you know, just to see. They told me to read to her, too, after she was born, like hold her and read to her even though you might not think she understood, but because, I guess that the first three months was, I don't know, let me think. What did they say it determines? I don't remember exactly what the book said. Anyway, it helps. I think they said it determines what they're going to be in the future, or something like that. It was helpful.

Maria considers the Bible Studies, which she took at St. Jude's Catholic Church in Seaside, CA to be a positive influence. She continues:

I plan to put Lynda there. They taught you a lot of stuff. Not only about the Bible. To be kind. You know, not to fight. At school, they see fights, they say don't do it again. They won't say why. Bible Studies explains it to you. I don't think the schools will. Just, don't do it. With the kids I've grown up with, at school they'll be wild. At Bible Studies, they'll be calm. I don't know if they were scared. You can notice the change in them, they're more quiet and stuff. They learn, I think, from it.

Maria looks towards the future and speaks of the R.O.P. course, which captured her interest in high school. In the future, Maria says:

I want to go back to school. In high school, I was taking dentistry (through the R.O.P. Program at Monterey High). I loved it. I loved it (with enthusiasm). It just fascinates me. I like it. I don't know why. It was fun practicing when I was in high school. You go to a dentist's office or you go to another school, where they have the dentist's stuff in there. They have dummies and stuff and you could practice on them. Even if I don't become a dentist, that's fine too. But I really want to be a dentist. I prefer to go farther.

Janice-Case 3

There is a brightness in her eyes. Janice has an intensity which penetrates you, a self-assured, calm demeanor. She chooses her words carefully and uses emphasis for greater meaning. From time to time, she stops to ask if she has communicated with the interviewer, if she is making sense: “Does that make sense? Sometimes I get these concepts out and I think they’d be easier in Korean! I Koreanize my English so often. So, if it sounds totally backwards to you, just stop me!” She constantly makes eye contact.

Twenty-six years old, Janice is Caucasian, American Indian (Cherokee). Janice is a Specialist in the Army. She currently works in hospital administration, waiting an assignment to Korea. She has just completed the Korean language course at DLI, the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, CA. Janice is married. Her husband is the assistant hotel manager of the Quail Lodge, an exclusive Carmel Valley resort. Janice speaks with enthusiasm of the 63-week course in which she was immersed in Korean for 40 hours a week, 5 days a week, from 7:55-3:30 pm. “I loved the program.”

Janice explained how she was immersed in the Korean culture, as well as the language. Janice speaks Korean and also passes the culture and stories on to her son, 15-month-old Colby. She described her son as speaking fluent Martian, since many of his words are nonsensical. When speaking to her son, “I try to keep (the stories) conversational, so that he can pick up on the different patterns of speech, and learn different words and stuff.”

Janice is also involved in passing to her son the stories which she remembers her Cherokee grandmother telling her. "I try to pass on as much as I learned from my grandmother, as possible. You know, the moon, and different animals, the sun. Basically, just how the world works according to the Cherokee view. I tell Colby stories. He seems to enjoy them."

Janice will receive her AA degree in Korean from Monterey Peninsula College at the next graduation as a reciprocal agreement with DLI. Janice plans to get her BA in computers or Korean "depending on what the army does with me" using military education benefits. With characteristic enthusiasm, Janice explains:

I have like 60 different majors that I want to pursue. That's been my biggest problem getting my Bachelor's because I start one major. Then I find out I like this other one, too. Double major for awhile. Triple major. It gets a little confusing! I'm only about 30 credits away from my bachelor's. But I've got to get one solid major before I get it.

Janice looks back on her early literacy experiences: "My mother read to us continually. From three to five, I was in the hospital a lot (she had pneumonia 13 times) and the nurses read to me. My brother and I were four when we learned to read." When I asked Janice how she learned to read, she said, "You could say I learned to read a phonetic way. But I've got almost a photographic memory. I have a photographic memory. I see it. I know it. Generally I see pages, more than specific words so I have to mentally run down the page.

Janice explains learning to read both phonetically and through sight words:

The bigger words, like over four or so letters, were the ones that basically we would sound out. I think that on some words, like if you took the word, elephant, just cause it's the first word that comes to my mind, that would be a harder one to know if you just look at it. Oh, well, that's elephant. You know. But if you can sound it out, well, you've heard the word before, so then you know it. With some words, like, more common words, those are the ones that I always knew on sight, without ever sounding them. So, kind of a little of both.

Janice looks to her own family experiences for explanations as to how children acquire literacy. She recalls:

My brother and I are both bookworms. I mean, constantly reading (with emphasis). My brother and I breezed through school. Whether or not we'd studied, we'd take a test and still get A's. Which, you know, is not something I want to pass on to my children. But I want him (her son, Colby) to have that kind of ability.

Janice speaks of children who do not learn to read well and the negative effect which it can have on their lives: "Sara, my younger sister, struggled with school. My mother didn't have the time. She had to work during the day." Janice says that her younger sister, Sara, "struggled with school all her life because my mom didn't have as much opportunity to read to her. She never liked reading. Never felt she was as good at it."

Janice's experiences with her brother and sister point to how knowing how to read well can affect one's self image. Janice reflects on her ideas about children acquiring literacy:

It just made me think that if you've got that enjoyment of reading and you've got a good ability, then it's easier for you to be able to keep up with your schooling. Like, when you're assigned the book reports, or whatever, my sister, Sara, would take three weeks to read the book that it would take me and my brother, Charles, one day to read. Her book reports were always late. And they didn't show as much understanding as my brother's did. I would look at the ones (book reports) my brother did, compared to the ones my sister did at the same grade level. He understood the concepts better. It's easier for him to grasp abstract concepts, as well. My sister is really, really smart. Just as smart as my brother. But she doesn't believe she is. And she'll even tell you. It's because she doesn't read as well. So that, to her, says she's not as smart. I guess that's where most of my ideas about it came from.

Janice has already succeeded in getting her 15-month son, Colby, involved with books. Her encouragement of early literacy experiences is evident in the following passage:

Colby picks up books and tries to read them. Which I think is incredible. I'm really pleased about that. The only problem is that half the books are upside down (laughs)! Other than that, he really does good. He loves animals of any kind. And all of them are dogs. Doesn't matter what the animal is, it's all, well, "da," rather than dog. But, you know. Anytime there's an animal in the book, then, he'll always go back to that page and read dog, dog, dog, dog. So dog shouldn't be a hard word to learn (laughing). And he'll flip to another page and start talking from it: dog, dog, dog.

Janice reflects on the importance of making reading enjoyable for the child:

I think he's (Colby) got the love of books now: whether he knows it or not. But, I know he associates it with, good feelings and happy times, because if he didn't, obviously, he wouldn't be running to a book every chance he got. If he sees a book, he's picked it up and he's reading it or a

magazine or anything with writing on it. Reading it.
Obviously, I don't mean he understands what he's reading.

Janice speaks of the importance of reading and how she believes that reading must relate to a child's interests:

And I think if one particular way doesn't help him in learning how to read, you know, I'm perfectly willing to try another way. Because that's how important I think it is (with emphasis). I think it's one of those things you do whatever it takes (with emphasis). I think it's important to find things the child is interested in. Colby loves animals. If I see a book with an animal in it, I always buy it. I'll spend money on books, before I buy diapers (laughing)! I mean, I'm that bad about books. It's really important to find things that really interest the child. And you really have to develop those talents that the child has. If his biggest talent is, you know, as a football player running somebody over, then, like I would find books on that subject. So that we could get him reading. But it would be something he enjoys.

Janice also seeks out other viewpoints on how children acquire literacy.

Because I'm such a reader, I've read everything ever written about reading to kids and how important it is. But that mostly just confirmed what I believed. It's nice when you get a bunch of experts confirming what you believe (laughing). Makes you feel, I'm doing something good or right (laughs)!

Janice emphasizes what she learns from reading other viewpoints and incorporating them into her way of thinking: "I like to try and read all of them. Even if I may not agree with a viewpoint that's slightly different or another way to go about it. You know, if this isn't working with Colby, then, we're going to try this."

Rita-Case 4

Rita is a warm, relaxed African American woman who speaks slowly and easily in a forthright tone. There is a hint of a South Carolina accent. She reflects about life and speaks with a certain wisdom. She said, “My husband and I talk about our past (growing up in South Carolina) compared to how children are raised now.” Rita seems at ease with herself and laughs heartily, often at herself. When I explained my study to her, Rita immediately responded, “I’d be glad to help you out.” She told me, laughing, “I could talk all day.”

Rita, 38 years old, Rita has two children, ages three and twelve. Rita told me “I just love kids. I would like to have had more (children). But the cost of living didn’t allow that. I’ve got two girls. I’m happy.”

Rita’s husband works for the Post Office. Rita received a B.A. from Clark College in Atlanta, Georgia. Rita has worked in government child development centers for the past eight years. When I first interviewed Rita in May, she was working as the Family Child Care Coordinator for the Presidio of Monterey. Her responsibilities include monitoring the homes of the family child care providers living on the Presidio of Monterey, recruiting people to be providers, and training them.

I interviewed Rita in her office, which is filled with books, papers, and photographs of her family. She showed me the photos of her two children. “This is the baby (her 3-year-old). I wish you could meet her,” she said with pride.

At the time of our second, October interview, Rita was elated and in extremely good spirits. Rita just received news the week before that she had been promoted to become the Director of the Child Care Center in Yuma, Arizona. She would be moving to Arizona next week, her husband to follow. "This has been a long time in coming," she said to me smiling and nodding her head in obvious happiness. It was a pleasure to interview an adult who was in such good spirits.

Rita told how she had started working as a child care provider. Then she went to Nurmberg, Germany, where she was the assistant director.

Over in Europe they really give you a lot of extensive training," she said. She returned to the United States as a teacher. Currently, she works as the family child care coordinator. Rita explains her philosophy: "I'm an advocate for children. No matter what the child is doing, or who the child is, still I feel strongly about looking out for that child. Although sometimes I don't interfere, like if I'm out in public, I mean, you can't, interfere, unless you actually see the child getting hurt. I just love kids. I never thought I would be that way. You know, I want to make a difference in a child's life.

Rita speaks of how she got her ideas about education in her eight years working in the area of child development, which she refers to mainly as "on the job training." She says:

It was nothing formalized, just experimenting, seeing a different situation-how to deal with it. I think a lot of it has been embedded in me. It becomes my natural way of doing things with the job I'm in. I don't think people really have children down, pat yet (laughs). I mean, what goes, what makes this child tick. You know, just by experimenting. Through the years.

Then with my own kids, I used the child development ideas. And it worked. I mean social, emotional skills and cognitive skills. And then not really strong insistence on how to do math or how to do writing and reading and arithmetic. But once you work on those things, (social/emotional) then, they're ready to listen. But the skills are going to come out regardless, if you do the right things with them. If you put them in front of the TV all day, then those skills won't come out.

Like, for some reason, my 3-year-old knows how to hold a pencil to write. She can write the tiniest little "a." But I never showed her how to do it. And I never showed her how to hold a pencil or nothing. It just came automatically. I guess, through the years, what happens in child development is that they let the child create what they want to create. Give them the things, the equipment to use. Then the child has the opportunity to create whatever they want to create. And it's always open.

Rita continues, "I believe in the philosophy that children learn through play."

Rita says,

I read a lot. Every night I read to drop to sleep. I read (the magazine) *Young Children*. I read a lot of their magazines. I just learn different things that would work with kids. And I practice on my own kids, too. Weekends, if I don't have anything to do, I do activities with them. You know, like cooking projects. Stuff like that.

Many of my ideas also come from:

You know, we have books all over this place (the child care center). Whatever I needed to know, whenever I wanted to enhance a child's skills, I would look up an activity. What our goal is, is to find out where the child is at in development. And then try to take the child to the next level. And develop at their own pace. So you would do activities like, my child wants to learn to tie her shoes. I would do things with her that would go towards this skill. Or how to snap.

In the May interview, Rita stated that she started reading to her children before birth. She said, “mothers should start reading at birth. Before they come to daycare. I read while I was pregnant, also. They need to love books.”

Rita explains how in the Child Development Center,

the books, such as *the Little Caterpillar* or *Corduroy* always repeated themselves. Every room you worked in the same stories were there. So these kids grew up reading the same stories from room to room. Toddlers and preschool. You get to the preschool age, they already know what happened. Then, like, you know, how you’re trying to rush, like lunch is here. And you try to skip a page. They’ll be like, ‘No Miss C., you missed a page!’ My oldest child, she used to be able to do that, too. It’s really wild.

I know my youngest’s favorite story is *Corduroy*. She knows exactly what happens in that story. And, if I try to rush through it, she will let me know. We would even hide it (*Corduroy*) among a lot of books and she would go right for it. And it’s just about a teddy bear with a missing button (laughs)! And you try to hide it (laughs)!

Rita explains that children learn to read through “the repetition of us reading them books. They need to love books. To pick up books. Appreciate books.”

Rita spoke of how she and her husband tell stories in order to help their children deal better with the present situation:

I think, you know, those stories just come out in time. For instance, my daughter she just broked her arm, just recently. And, you know, we tell stories about how we broke something. Just to make her feel that this is a childhood thing. Everybody going through it. No one survived childhood without some kind of scar.

Rita emphasizes:

I don't think anybody survived childhood without a scar, some kind of scar. And, you know, we tell her stories about that, how that happened to us. And, you know, it made her feel this is not just me. It'll help making the kids feel better about themselves. We survived that (laughs)!

Rita emphasized that she does not want to work outside what they are doing at school. This idea stems from problems which she had in school. Rita explains that, since she already knew the material, "I got into trouble. I talked too much. I want to let my children stay with the group. They don't have to be top "A" students."

Chapter 6

Analysis of the Data

Introduction

This chapter discusses the results of the data in the light of the main research questions: (a) How do families from different ethnic and socioeconomic groups see their role in their preschool children's literacy development? (b) What is the role of families in children's preschool literacy development?

The case studies of Betty, Maria, Rita, and Janice stand as evidence of the kinds of attitudes that parents have towards their children acquiring literacy from the Marina Child Care Center and the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center. I looked at these research questions by examining the themes which the parents themselves listed as being important to their children acquiring literacy: (a) Reading to the Child, (b) Parents Modeling Reading, (c) Home Foundation, (d) Family Support, (e) Environmental Print, (f) Phonics, and (g) the Child's Natural Curiosity. I compared these themes between two child care centers, the state run low-income Marina Child Care Center and the federally run Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center. I then formed conclusions and listed implications. Due to the small number of participants in the study, it would be inappropriate to form generalizations such as one could with a larger sampling of people.

Reading to Your Child

Reading to the children was seen as important by both groups, with six out of nine parents supporting reading in the Marina Child Care Center and all of the parents at the

Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center supporting the need to read to their preschool children. Three parents at the Presidio of Monterey mentioned the reading which goes on in the preschool program. No parents at Marina Child Care Center mentioned reading at preschool. Whether this was because the parents themselves were more aware of the importance of reading, or whether more reading occurred in this program than at the Marina Child Care Center, I am uncertain, since I did not formally observe the classes. However, I mentioned in the Methodology section that I never saw books being read while I was at the Marina Child Care Center. Both parents and teachers reported to me that books were read daily at the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center.

Of my four case studies, all of the parents recognized the importance of reading. Maria was the least emphatic about the need for reading. Betty, Janice, and Rita were extremely strong supporters of reading to their preschool children. This is evident in Janice's statement, "I buy books before I buy diapers. It's that important." Still, Maria recognized the need for families to read to their preschool children. Particularly interesting to me, was how Maria received the packet of books from her doctor before her daughter was born. She started reading aloud before the baby was born and continued reading afterwards, as a result of the doctor's advice. Maria spoke of the difficulty of finding the time to read, when she was tired from work or frustrated.

Maria also confessed that she did not like to read herself, as opposed to Betty, Janice, and Rita, who were avid and enthusiastic readers. Janice explained how she felt that reading had helped her and her brother develop abstract thoughts.

This study did not show that parents reading to their children varied according to their ethnic/cultural groups. There was a difference across socioeconomic groups, with more parents from the higher socioeconomic group, Presidio of Monterey Day Care Center, supporting reading to their children, as opposed to the lower socioeconomic group, the Marina Child Care Center. The higher socioeconomic group also has higher education levels. All parents but one attended college and some graduate school. The lower socioeconomic group had lower education levels, with one parent receiving a GED, the others high school degrees, and two with some community college experience. According to my data, the majority of the parents felt that reading to their preschool children was the family's role first and then the school's role.

Parents Modeling Reading

Two of the parents from the Marina Child Care Center told me that they did not enjoy reading, with a third parent saying she did, in a very hesitant voice. Although some of the parents did not enjoy reading themselves, they recognized the importance of reading to their children. They recognized that they should, and said that they tried to read aloud to their children. Of the three parents who did not read aloud to their children, Jose and Deomina favored a phonetic approach to learning how to read. Mickey saw reading more as something students would start to pick up through their natural curiosity.

All of the parents from the Presidio of Monterey said they enjoyed reading, some saying "when they had the time." Janice stated that she loved to read and read everything she could get. Betty said that she reads every night. Rita says that she reads every night

to go to sleep and expressed the idea that a lot of her thoughts on education have come from reading books and magazines in the Child Development Center. Four parents from the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center, all professionals, a teacher, child development coordinator, computer programmer, and an air force officer spoke of the need to read in order to keep up with their profession. This was not the case at the Marina Child Care Center, where there were no professional parents. In other words, jobs requiring higher literacy skills, force parents to read in order to keep abreast of developments, which in turn fosters development of literacy skills in their children.

There appeared to be no difference across cultural groups with respect to parents reading to children. There was a difference across socioeconomic groups, with more parents from the higher socioeconomic group, Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center, supporting reading to their children, as opposed to the lower socioeconomic group, the Marina Child Care Center. Clearly, the majority of the parents felt that reading to their preschool children was the family's role first and then the school's role.

More parents at the Presidio of Monterey believed in the importance of modeling reading for their children. They felt it was important for children to observe the adults reading. Since all of the adults said they enjoyed reading, except for time constraints, it is inevitable that children would see parents reading. More parents in this group were involved in continuing education, which would also make modeling reading evident in home life as parents read for their classes.

At the Marina Child Care Center, Carry spoke of the importance of modeling reading. Yet, Carry said that she did not enjoy reading. The majority of families at the Marina Child Care Center that reported modeling were instances of the older child doing the homework and the younger child modeling it. Several families reported the influence of the school through the older child reading and the younger child following to be both important and positive influences. Three of the families were immigrant with a limited command of English. In these cases, an older sibling who spoke English fluently might be able to model English reading more effectively than a parent. In these cases, the older sibling might be the main modeling figure.

At the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center, there were several bilingual families. However, their English was not limited, in that they were able to function at a professional level in English. In this group, parents spoke Spanish, Chinese, and Korean to their children.

Habits for Reading to Children

Parents at the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center read more frequently to their children, with half of them (4) reading daily to their children. At the Marina Child Care Center, only Betty, about whom I have written a case study, read on a daily basis. The other half, (4) at the Presidio of Monterey, read 2-3 times per week to their children. At the Marina Child Care Center, all the rest of the parents said that they read 2-3 times per week to their children.

At the Presidio of Monterey, a majority of the parents, 6, read in the bedroom at bedtime. Three others read in a comfortable place, such as a couch. Four parents read in “no special place or time.” At the Marina Child Care Center, half of the parents (4) read to their children in the family room and half of the parents in “no special place,” with the remainder reading in the family room.

Home Foundation

Home foundation was seen as an effort for families to establish the tone which would lead to the foundation of literacy. At the Marina Day Care Center, parents made little mention of creating a home foundation which would lead to literacy. The philosophy of education of this group was less defined as evidenced by parents’ difficulty in expressing their ideas on education. Many answered questions with a simple yes or no answer and did not elaborate. Two parents referred to spending time with their children as leading to literacy. Mickey expressed the idea that “spending time with each other” would help children become more literate. Betty was exceptional in this group in her emphasis on daily reading. Betty tried to set the tone when she said: “If I read to him every night, he’s think reading was natural: like eating and brushing his teeth.”

The Presidio of Monterey group placed greater emphasis on home foundation. Jerome referred to “the family’s responsibility to get them off to the right start.” More parents thought that it was the family’s role to introduce the child to literacy. Rita, Janice, Jerome, Rick, and Janice all easily expressed their ideas on setting a good home foundation. In Rita’s words, “Even scribbling is writing. It’s my responsibility (to

introduce my child to writing) regardless.” The Presidio of Monterey group saw it more as the family’s role to establish the tone which would lead their child to acquire literacy. It is significant in the area of setting a home foundation that more parents thought it was the parents’ role (9) or both the parents and the school’s role (7) combined to introduce their child to books. Only one family saw it as the school’s role alone to introduce their child to books.

Family Support

Families at the Marina Child Care Center and the Presidio of Monterey placed a great deal of importance on family support or parental reinforcement of and involvement in the child’s homework. They responded in equal numbers to the need for family support. Most of the parents referred to the need to help the child with his/her homework. It would appear from my study that parents across socioeconomic levels and across ethnic/cultural groups perceive the need to help children with their homework to be important. Parents generally spoke of taking on this role themselves, rather than leaving it to a sibling, which was the case with reading.

Environmental Print

The use of environmental print was made by families in both groups. Two parents at the Marina Child Care Center and three parents at the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center made use of environmental print. Most of them spoke of reading signs as they went places or when they rode in the car. Rosa said, “He sees words around him

on billboards. He remembers.” Making use of environmental print is a natural conclusion of parents across socioeconomic and ethnic groups.

Phonics

Three parents at the Marina Child Care Center advocated a phonetic approach to reading. These parents were all immigrants: two Filipino and one Peruvian. It is possible that these parents are repeating the system in which they learned to read in their own countries. Parents at the Marina Day Care Center emphasized the need for practice and repetition when learning to read. Learning to read and copy the letters of the alphabet were seen as important. Maria was typical of parents in this group, working hard to teach her daughter to sound out words, in the way that her teachers had taught her, even though her daughter is sometimes frustrated and it is hard to work with her.

In contrast, at the Presidio of Monterey, 5 out of 8 parents referred to phonics when learning how to read. However, all of these parents advocated a blended approach, or a combination of phonics and a whole language approach to learning to read. No one advocated a completely phonetic approach. Parents spoke more of knowing the sound which the letters make than of learning the alphabet. “Parents said rhyming is important in learning how to read.” Janice had the concept of sight words in her understanding of how children learn to read.

Print-Rich Environment

Creating a print-rich environment was mentioned by two individuals at the Marina Child Care Center. Hillary felt that having books for her children to look at was

important. Betty estimated that she had eighty to one hundred children's books at home for her son to read. A print-rich environment was mentioned by half of the parents at the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center. Providing a home with interesting books available was mentioned by Rick, Jerome, Rita, Janice, and Jolene. Rick spoke of the need to have lots of books linked to his child's interests. Jerome spoke of the importance of "having books in the house." Rita and Sherrie both spoke of the importance of family trips to the library.

Child's Natural Curiosity

Two parents from each group thought that the child's natural curiosity would help a child attain literacy. Mickey felt that a combination of the child's natural curiosity and preschool would cause the child to attain literacy. All but one of the people who spoke of the quality of natural curiosity were males. Rick spoke of the need to link up his child's interests with her natural curiosity. Janice referred to linking reading to her child's interests when she said that "if my child's biggest talent was as a football player running somebody over, then I would find books on that subject."

The child following his/her natural curiosity is related to a child following his/her interests in a whole language approach to reading. Rita, Jerome, and Rick advocated a whole language approach to reading. Rita explains how children learn to read through repetition. "The books, such as *The Little Caterpillar* and *Corduroy* always repeated themselves. The kids grew up reading the same stories from room to room.... I know

my youngest daughter's favorite story is *Corduroy*. She knows exactly what happens in that story. And if I try to rush through it, she will let me know.”

Findings

What do I think the data mean? After studying the data to both of my research questions; I have reached the following findings:

- a. How do families from different ethnic and socioeconomic groups see their role in their preschool children's literacy development?
- b. What is the role of families in children's preschool literacy development?

SES and Cultural Factors

1. According to my research, ethnic background did not affect how parents perceive that their children acquire literacy, while socioeconomic level did. The sampling of people might have been too small to see the results of ethnic/cultural background. Had the sampling of people been larger, there could have been some evidence of difference in attitudes with respect to literacy acquisition amongst people of different cultural/ethnic backgrounds.

Reading to Children

2. Parents across socioeconomic levels thought that reading to their children was an important step in the child's literacy acquisition. This reiterates the findings in the literature from Tolstoy (1967), Huey (1908), Wells (1986), Taylor (1983). Time constraints were often given as a conflicting factor.

While parents from higher socioeconomic levels were more likely to read to their children daily, all of the parents in the study said that they read to their children at least 2-3 times per week. In the higher socio-economic group, reading to children ranked as the most important element in children acquiring literacy. In the lower socioeconomic group, reading to children and phonics received equal support in terms of parents' perceptions of children acquiring literacy.

Reinforcing Work from School

3. Helping children with their homework or reinforcing the work which the school sends home was seen as an important element in their children acquiring literacy by parents in both socioeconomic groups. Lower socioeconomic groups sometimes employed siblings in helping with homework.

Phonics and Repetition

4. Parents from the lower socioeconomic group emphasized phonics, knowing the names of the letters, copying the letters, and practice and repetition as important elements in acquiring literacy.

Phonics and Literature

5. Parents in the higher socioeconomic group thought that phonics should be taught through a blended approach or a combination of phonics and whole

language. Parents in this group thought that reading should be something that was fun.

Environmental Print

6. More parents in the higher socioeconomic group thought the child should be encouraged to recognize environmental print. These same parents saw it as the family's role, rather than the school's, to set the tone for literacy. More of these parents emphasized the importance of creating a print-rich environment.

Modeling Reading

7. More families in higher socioeconomic groups believed in the importance of modeling reading. In the lower socioeconomic group siblings modeled reading.

Chapter 7

Findings, Conclusions, and Implications

Conclusions

I began this study because I was curious to see whether parents from different ethnic and socioeconomic groups saw the process of their preschool children acquiring literacy differently. The case studies are examples of parents' attitudes towards literacy acquisition. The case studies contain a lot of richness in terms of portraying these individuals which would be difficult to capture in simple descriptions.

According to this study, ethnicity had little discernible effect on how children acquire literacy. The greater factor affecting how children acquire literacy was that of socioeconomic status. Consider two cases: Carry is a low-income, single African American mother of three with a high school degree who works at an hourly job. Rita is a married African American mother of two with a college degree who works as a professional. There is a world of difference in how these two women of similar race see the process of their children acquiring literacy. Carry's educational opportunities have been far more limited than those of Rita. In addition, Carry says that she does not enjoy the process of reading, whereas Rita reads herself "to sleep every night."

This research revealed that there is a strong tie between parents' love of reading and their enthusiasm to pass the love of reading on to their children (Taylor, 1983; Wells, 1986). One sees in these parents' words the enthusiasm for passing literacy on to the next

generation. Rita said: "Children learn to read through repetition of us reading them books. They need to love books. To pick up books. Appreciate books."

Mainstream Families

This study is similar in its findings to the studies, discussed in Chapter 2 at greater length, of Heath (1983), Wells (1986), Schieffelin and Cochran-Smith (1984), Taylor (1983), and Baker *et al.* (1994 in Metsala, 1996) in its examination of families from mainstream culture and defining what these families' attitudes towards literacy are. Heath said that mainstream families set children up for a later life of literacy through mainstream patterns of talking, reading, and writing. She showed the multiple ways that parents immerse their children in literacy habits in her study in the Piedmont Carolinas.

Schieffelin and Cochran-Smith (1984) see literacy as a social and cultural phenomenon. They show in their study of middle class Philadelphia preschoolers how these children are socialized to be literate. Wells' (1986) longitudinal study in Bristol, England followed children from speaking their first words to the end of their elementary education. Wells showed the importance of parents' own interest in literacy and the model provided by adult behavior. He found that listening to stories was the one preschool literacy experience which clearly affected later test scores.

Baker *et al.* (1994 in Metsala, 1996) studied families of middle income African American and European American preschoolers and found that these families tended to view literacy more as a source of entertainment, such as joint story book reading or interacting independently with print. For families participating in Taylor's (1983) study,

reading stories was an integral part of their lives. Parents thought that the stories they shared were “important precursors of literacy” (p. 96).

Nonmainstream Families

I will briefly reiterate some of the findings of the literature from Chapter 2. Both my study and the literature, Heath (1983), Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988), Schieffelin and Cochran-Smith (1989), Auerbach (1989), Goldenberg *et al.* (1992), and Urzua (1986) show that nonmainstream families have a different relationship with literacy from more school-oriented mainstream families. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) give powerful descriptions of how literacy functions in the lives of poor African American families living in the inner city. Heath’s (1983) work with rural families in the Piedmont Carolinas showed a difference in the way that literacy was used and perceived (p. 173). Schieffelin and Cochran-Smith (1984) show how in Sino-Vietnamese families without books and where children are not read to, children learn a different set of interactional and literacy-related skills (p. 16).

The middle class or mainstream families at the Presidio of Monterey mirrored the findings in these studies in the following ways. Presidio of Monterey parents acknowledged the importance of reading to their children, as did Heath (1983), Wells (1986), Taylor, (1983) through the frequency of reading stories. Middle class parents realized the importance of modeling reading, as described in Wells (1986). Emphasis on environmental print and creating a print-rich environment is similar to Schieffelin and Cochran-Smith’s (1984) view of mainstream children being socialized to be literate. The

whole concept of setting the educational foundation is synonymous with this mainstream concept of acquiring literacy. The fact that more parents at the Presidio of Monterey saw reading as something which should be enjoyable follows the findings of Baker *et al.* (1994 in Metsala, 1996) that reading is more a source of entertainment.

Goldenberg *et al.* (1992) speak of families from lower socioeconomic levels emphasizing learning letters, phonics, copy and repetition in acquiring literacy, rather than using reading and discussing stories. In this study, the nonmainstream Marina Child Care Center families also tended to emphasize phonics, copy and repetition, and learning the names of the letters. Goldenberg *et al.* also refer to parents' eagerness to reinforce homework sent home from school. In this study, helping children with homework was an element which all of the families supported strongly.

Baker *et al.* (1994, in Metsala, 1996) found fewer print-related activities in the lives of the low-income African American and European preschooler's families which they studied in Baltimore. Baker *et al.* also found that literacy activities were designed for the cultivation of literacy skills. My study corroborates this information on literacy used to teach skills rather than used for enjoyment in the lower socioeconomic group.

This study points to the fact that there exist different ways of acquiring literacy in mainstream and in nonmainstream families. My position is not to point out that one way is right or wrong, but to show that these different approaches to acquiring literacy exist. As Schieffelin and Cochran-Smith (1984) have shown, children eventually pick up literacy regardless of what their family orientation is. This study attempts to understand

the ways of acquiring literacy of different kinds of families in our society so that educators can use the knowledge of parents to inform instruction.

The significance of this study is that it seeks to understand the ways of acquiring literacy of individuals from specific ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic groups within California. With the current desire of educators to let families of different backgrounds collaborate with them, descriptive studies, such as this one, are necessary. I think the value of the study lies in the words of the case studies of Rita, Janice, Betty, and Maria, as they describe their relationship in acquiring literacy with their preschool children.

Additional Findings

In addition to the conclusions which I reached, the following points have come from reviewing the data:

Importance of Literacy Acquisition

It is the premise of this study that although many low-income families do not necessarily provide school-like contexts for literacy development, they strongly support literacy acquisition (Auerbach, 1989) in their preschool children. In conducting these interviews, I was impressed by the interest which all of the parents had towards their preschooler's literacy acquisition.

In fact, a common pattern was for parents to look back on their own failures in the educational system and to encourage their children so the same thing did not happen to them. For example, in the case study with Maria, I asked her where she got the idea she should teach her daughter the letters and numbers. She responded: "From my mistakes,

o.k.? I was bad in school. I have to admit. Like, I don't want her (her daughter) to be like that.”

Preschool /Outreach Programs

Families' interest in assisting their preschool children points to the importance of effective preschool programs that could guide families in which directions to take with their children. In cases like Maria, the book program for newborns which she participated in at the suggestion of her doctor could help provide the missing link for her to pass a love of reading on to her child.

In 1984, Schieffelin and Cochran-Smith, found that Sino-Vietnamese refugees were unable to get the help they needed with homework from their families due to language barriers. Instead, they had to rely on models outside the home to help them. It is important for schools and communities to remember that families may be unable to help students, especially at the higher levels with homework, and to provide adults who can support students.

Extended Families

In this study, it appeared that many of the low-income mothers benefited from living in an extended family situation, where older family members were able to lend assistance to younger family members. In Maria's words: "I don't know what I would do without her (her mother). She helps me a lot. If she knows I'm tired, she'll say to Lynda, (Maria's daughter) come here!" (She reads to her).

Building on Educational Beliefs

Parents at the Marina Child Care Center emphasized learning phonics and reading stories to children in equal numbers. This often included learning and copying the names of the letters and practice and repetition of the letters. Most educators do not favor these as important elements in literacy acquisition. The dilemma comes when educators who are looking for families to inform them, disagree with the position on education taken by the families. I support the position of Goldenberg *et al.* (1992) who opted to build on what are the parent's educational beliefs, rather than challenging the educational theories of parents they are trying to involve in family literacy programs.

Community College and Vocational Programs

This study points to the importance of community college programs and vocational R.O.P. programs in high school for allowing single, low-income mothers to continue with their education and to get off public assistance. Betty's ambition to complete the two-year program at Monterey Peninsula College in order to become a probation officer stands as a concrete and attainable goal whereby she can improve both her and her son's life. The fact that Maria's R.O.P. courses in high school were the only courses which really sparked her interest and which have given her an idea for further education and career direction is significant.

Richness of Diverse Languages

Families at the Presidio of Monterey Child Care Center were aware that the languages spoken in their homes, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, Spanish should be

passed on to their children. Janice consciously attempted to pass her Cherokee background of Indian folklore on to her son. Parents at the Marina Day Care Center did not voice these sentiments as readily. An American Indian father made no mention of his Indian background when questioned. Parents at the Marina Day Care Center must be made aware of the richness of languages, Spanish and Tagalog, and culture which exists in their homes. The children should be encouraged to participate in these languages and traditions. Educators can help to make parents aware of their traditions.

Implications for Educators

- a. Educators must find ways so that families and schools can collaborate to learn from each other.
- b. Educators must continue to point out to low-income families the strengths inherent in their situations:
 - (1) Availability of siblings and extended family members as resources.
 - (2) Cultural traditions and languages which can be passed on to the younger generation.
- c. Educators must continue to disperse information on reading daily to one's children.
- d. Alternative programs must be created to encourage preschool literacy experiences for all children.

Implications for Public Policy

- e. State run child care centers with quality programs must continue to be available to low-income mothers in order to improve literacy acquisition in preschool age children.
- f. Public funding must go into programs which encourage preschool literacy experiences for all children.

Implications for Further Study

- g. It would be useful to follow the progress of these children in their primary school years to see how they actually acquire literacy.
- h. It would be beneficial to observe in depth the teaching which goes on at both child care centers.
- i. Since all of the data which I have comes from the parents and their perspective, I would like to make direct observations in the homes of the children.
- j. A more extensive study should be done on a larger sampling of different ethnic groups lasting a greater amount of time and involving a greater number of case studies.

Due to the nature of a small study such as this one, a limited number of conclusions can be drawn with respect to the attitudes of people in different ethnic/cultural groups. The reader can look upon the information presented in this study as representing specific individual's attitudes. However, broad conclusions with respect to

specific attitudes towards literacy of a particular ethnic group should not be drawn from the data as presented.

Appendix A
Study Request



REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER
AND PRESIDIO OF MONTEREY
PRESIDIO OF MONTEREY, CA 93944-5006

March 11, 1997



Office of the Staff Judge Advocate

Ms. Melanie Johnson
315 Metz Road
Seaside, CA 93955

Dear Ms. Johnson:

I am pleased to inform you that your request to conduct a survey of parents with children enrolled in our child development services is approved.

Please conduct your survey under the guidelines that you outlined in your letter requesting permission. You must use volunteer parents. Mr. Tod Lane, the acting Director of Community Activities is aware of this survey. Please use this letter when contacting the Child Development Center Director for assistance in identifying volunteer parents.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Andrew D. Stewart".

Andrew D. Stewart
Lieutenant Colonel, US Army
Staff Judge Advocate.

Appendix B

Questionnaire

1. How old are your children?

2. What is your ethnic background?
 White Asian African Hispanic Other _____

3. Please indicate the highest grade in school you have completed:
 Elementary High school College Graduate Certification _____

4. Do you read to your children at home?
 Yes No At a special time? _____ In a special place? _____

5. How many times a week do you read to your child?
 Every day 2-3 times a week Once a week Don't have time

6. Please indicate which of the following you have in the home:
 Books Magazines Newspaper Comic books t.v. guide

7. Do you use the public library? Yes No
 Do your preschool children attend story hour? Yes No

8. Do you buy books for your children? Often Sometimes No I would like to, but I can't afford it.

9. Does your preschool child enjoy listening to stories? Yes No

10. At night, our family likes to:
 watch t.v. read talk with family, friends play games other _____

Appendix C

Home Interview

Name _____

1. Review first questionnaire. Any questions coming from the first questionnaire?
2. How many generations has your family lived in the U.S.?
3. Do you like to read? Do you read for pleasure?
4. How many books are in the home?
5. Are their children's books in the home?
Is there a special area for reading children's books?
6. What television shows does your preschool child watch?
Does he/she watch videos? Which does he/she like?
7. Does your child ever see you reading?
8. Do you think reading books to your preschool child is important?
9. Is it the school's role or the family's role to introduce your child to books?
10. Is it the school's role or the family's role to introduce your child to writing?
11. Do you play games in your family?
What kind?
12. Do you have a family tradition of story telling?
13. Are there any special family activities you would like to share that might help your child become literate?
14. When does your child see you writing?
In English? Another language?
15. How do you think that children learn to read?
16. How can you help your child become a better reader/writer when he/ she goes to school?

Appendix D**Second Interview**

1. Age _____ Marital Status _____
2. Job/ Responsibilities
3. Describe your educational background.
4. How did you learn to read?
5. Would you use the same approach with your child?
6. Based on your previous responses, how did you come to your beliefs on how children acquire literacy? Why do you have this view?
7. What do you mean by _____?
(Please elaborate)

Appendix E

Personal Background

The personal background of the parents participating in this study influenced their ideas on literacy. Similarly, my personal background has influenced my research. In this section, I describe important events in my life and my experiences with literacy.

I grew up in a middle-class family in Patterson, a small agricultural community of 2,000 people in California's Central Valley. Small-town life was an experience in close contact with everyone in the community from wealthy farmers to Mexican migrant workers who worked in the fields. In retrospect, after having lived in larger, more anonymous situations, I realize the value of getting to know people as well as we did in that small town. Also, knowing and understanding people from all socioeconomic levels was something I would experience less after leaving that small town.

I have one brother, five years younger. My father worked in quality control at the local frozen food plant. When I was in the sixth grade, my mother went to work at the local library and was the town librarian for many years thereafter. Because of my mother's involvement with books, there were always stacks of books around the house. It was a peaceful life with time to walk by the nearby apricot orchards, bike ride in the foothills, and weekends hiking and skiing in Yosemite.

My early literacy experiences center on my mother reading to us. She always read aloud to my brother and me a great deal, even after we were teenagers. I remember receiving letters from many family members, most often from my paternal grandmother,

who expected us to write to her. Exotic postcards from throughout the world would arrive from my Uncle Howdie, an oil geologist, who worked throughout the world. The places on the postcards contrasted sharply with the small town we lived in. I can remember dreaming of going to the far away places on the postcards.

Boxes of books, which arrived from my great aunt, Meme, a librarian, and later a bookstore owner, were a part of every birthday and Christmas. I would say that there existed in my family, including my extended family, a strong expectation that the younger members of the family would all grow to love books. My Uncle Mike sent me a subscription to a Japanese child's magazine before I entered school while he was serving with the Army in the Korean War. This magazine greatly impressed me and I can remember pouring over the pictures in the magazines and thinking about what the life of the boy in the magazine must be like.

Finally, when my brother and I did not have anything to do, we would often go into the living room and look at the large picture art books on the bookshelves. I can remember that I liked to look at a picture of Gainsborough's Blue Boy. I felt proud that I had seen it on a trip to the Huntington Museum in Pasadena, CA. I also remember being especially interested in a large book published by Life magazine on the world's great religions. My mother had explained to me how the people pictured in the book were Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, and Christians.

My parents always sat in the living room and read in the evening. One of the things that I remember most about learning to read was how excited I was to become a

part of reading in the living room, which seemed like an adult activity to me. I learned to read with a sight word method using Ginn's *Fun with Dick and Jane*. I loved the stories and found the illustrations to be particularly amusing. I especially remember laughing at what happened to Sally, Spot, and Puff. To this day, the images in that reader remain vivid in my mind. What most impressed me about my first grade teacher teaching me to read was how she used a big book to show us the words and pictures which were in our readers. I brought home lists of words to memorize, which my mother would practice with me and make into flash cards. After I learned to write, I spent a lot of time writing and illustrating small books, which I made.

Upon graduation from high school in 1967, I went off to Scripps College in Claremont, CA. This represented a huge change in the life I had known thus far. At Scripps I majored in art and minored in Humanities and French. I enjoyed working at Mary B. Eyre Nursery School as a part of child psychology courses. Two summers were spent as a Girl Scout Counselor, first in the Redwoods and next in the high Sierra. Due to the influence of my child psychology courses and work as a counselor, I began to consider teaching as a career.

I also had a great deal of wanderlust and wanted to see the world. Upon completion of college in 1972, I had a tremendous yearning to travel in Europe, especially to see the sights and great museums which I had learned about in my humanities and art history courses. I had learned on a previous European trip that I was enthralled with speaking French and learning about French culture. My years after

college were marked by numerous trips to Europe in between various jobs and getting my teaching credential.

I got my teaching credential in 1974 at San Francisco State University. It was exciting to do my student teaching in the San Francisco Unified School District, where in the 1970's notes went home to families in five languages. My second student teaching experience was in a bilingual Spanish second grade class. I was fascinated by the whole idea of bilingual education and became interested in the idea of learning Spanish so I could become a bilingual teacher.

I originally became interested in education in the late 1960's and early 1970's. The field of education, like a lot of areas, was caught up in the social ferment which characterized the times. I was inspired to enter teaching by such writers as John Holt, Herbert Kohl, Robert Coles, Jonathan Kozol, Sylvia Ashton-Warner, and the work in child-centered, experience-based instruction which was taking place in the British primary schools in the 1970's. Rogers (1970) writes of the British primary schools:

One finds on entering many primary schools today that for most of the day a number of different activities will be going on concurrently in each classroom or group of rooms. One group of children may be painting, another doing craft work; some may be reading for pleasure, some doing research on a particular interest from books; other children may be writing, some may be cooking, others using clay, some may be doing mathematics, and some working on a scientific problem. Children are getting their own materials and equipment as required and putting them back. The teacher cannot be seen at once, for there is no longer a "front" of the class and he/she may be somewhere in the room, sitting by a child discussing his work and giving it further impetus. One is struck by the initiative of the

children, by their participation, and involvement, by their sense of responsibility and self-discipline (p. 3).

I had volunteered in a similar school in Claremont, CA, during my years in college in the early 1970's, based upon individualized instruction and children learning at their own rate. I was very excited at the possibility of participating in such a program. However, I found when I began studying for my teaching credential at San Francisco State University, that our instruction contained little of the original ideas which I had been excited about. Our classes focused on creating units, managing a basal reading program, and how to work in groups within the classroom.

Of the writers who originally inspired me, one has had a profound effect and I have continually and with great success, used the ideas of Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1963) from her book, *Teacher*, written on her experiences during 24 years of teaching Maori children to read in New Zealand's infant schools. Ashton-Warner used the language-experience approach to teach the Maoris in rural New Zealand based on the children's language and activities. Among the principles guiding Ashton-Warner's work was that first-hand experience makes a deeper impression upon a person than vicarious experience. When Ashton-Warner began her teaching career with five-year-old Maori children in rural New Zealand, she found that she was having difficulty reaching them with the established teaching techniques in New Zealand at the time.

She started her method of compiling key vocabulary, where she took words which children gave her from their experiences. Words turned to sentences, sentences became

stories. Maori children learned to read these stories which came from their own experiences with great success. According to Ashton-Warner (1963):

The method of teaching any subject in a Maori infant room may be seen as a plank in a bridge from one culture to other and to the extent that this bridge is strengthened, may a Maori in later life succeed (p. 28).

I have used the language experience approach with a great deal of success with my own children, with ESL students, and with first graders during my seven years in bilingual classes. After we had taken a field trip, completed a cooking project, or after having read a story to the group, I would write down group experience stories on a large piece of paper with the children all around me. Children could choral read these stories back to me or else read them individually. Students' mastery of both words and sentences using this method is remarkable. If a teacher has time, individual experience stories can be written down from the student's own experiences and key vocabulary written in a word book.

I think that the work that Ashton-Warner did using the language experience approach teaching Maori children to read has a lot of parallels to the challenges facing teachers in California's multicultural, multiethnic society. When words come from students' experiences, from themselves, it helps bridge the gap between a student's home experiences and the educational establishment. When a teacher allows the student's experiences and perspectives to inform education, the teacher is following Auerbach's (1989) model of allowing family members to contribute to children's literacy development.

I see parallels between the work which Ashton-Warner did with Maoris in New Zealand and Robert's classroom in *Literacy con carino: a story of migrant children's success* (Hayes, Bahruth, & Kessler, 1991). In his bilingual Spanish fifth grade class in south Texas, Robert Bahruth used writing journals to connect with his student's experiences, becoming informed of "their likes and dislikes, the books they were reading, the books they preferred to have read to them, and information of a personal, familiar nature" (p. 13). Robert used collaborative methods to enter into a dialogue with his students. He was able to take students who seemed doomed to fail and eventually drop out of school, and move them in productive directions. I think that Robert was doing with his students in south Texas what Auerbach (1989) is asking teachers to do in her article, Towards a social-contextual approach to family literacy.

My first teaching job was as a kindergarten and elementary French teacher at the Harker School in San Jose. In my two years teaching at Harker, I participated in the school's philosophy of teaching children to read individually. The combination of a high ratio of teachers to students and students with strong readiness skills made teaching reading to these students fairly easy.

Next, I chose to fulfill my ambition of learning Spanish by moving to Madrid, Spain to study Spanish. While in Spain, I learned that I could teach English to Spaniards. I began working at a Spanish language institute, Escuela Equipo, teaching English to Spanish businessmen using the direct teaching method. I also taught English to private students who were children. Teaching English enabled me to stay in Spain for two years,

from 1976-78. I loved traveling in Spain and throughout Europe. I also found the subject of teaching English to be very stimulating. From Europe I was also able to take trips to Morocco, the Middle East, and a six-week trip to India.

I returned to California and taught as a bilingual Spanish teacher for seven years: in northern California in Salinas and in southern California in Vista. I enjoyed these experiences very much. During my years as a primary grade bilingual teacher, I taught Spanish reading. Sullivan programmed reading was used for students transitioning from Spanish to English reading in Salinas, and Distar was used for the same purpose in Vista, and Lippincott reading was used for those students dominant in English.

Lippincott is an entirely phonetic reading system in which children learn to spell words as they learn to read. Frequent dictations, small take-home books to read at home, and workbooks are a part of the program. I like the Lippincott reading program very much and I have had a lot of success moving children who came to first grade with few readiness skills to first grade proficiency and beyond. I think the only children who did not progress were children with a diagnosed learning disability.

In addition to the Lippincott basal reading, my language arts program contained the following elements: I read stories and poems aloud to students whenever possible, introducing a wide range of writers. I used the language experience method described above, whenever the opportunity presented itself. I also encouraged frequent student writing. I believe that speaking, listening, reading, and writing are interconnected and students must be given the opportunity to express themselves in writing. Journals are

wonderful for this purpose. I also encourage students to recite poems they have learned on an informal basis as a part of our reading circle. Children enjoy experiencing the rhythms of the language and are proud of themselves for having memorized something.

While living on the Monterey Peninsula in 1981, I married Dean Johnson, a Marine officer who was studying at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey. Becoming an officer's wife would mean moves to many locations. In the course of his career, we have lived in San Diego, CA; Iwakuni, Japan; Portland, Oregon; Newport, Rhode Island; Quantico, Virginia; a second time in San Diego; and Monterey, CA. Our favorite place was the year we spent living in a little Japanese house in Iwakuni. We traveled throughout Japan with our baby daughter. During these years, my two daughters, Ashley and Kristin (now ages 12 and 5) were born. Since their birth, I have been very involved with the education of my two daughters, including homeschooling my first daughter for two years.

In terms of homeschooling my daughter, we wrote a great many journals, particularly about the many trips we took. One of the benefits of homeschooling is that it allows families much more freedom to take enriching excursions. Since we were living in the Washington, D.C. area at the time, I made it a part of our schedule to go into Washington D.C. once a week and do some of the many activities available. For example, my daughter was very impressed seeing Sandra Day O'Connor while visiting the Supreme Court. We were frequent visitors to all the museums of the Smithsonian.

We would write about these experiences afterwards. Often I used the language experience approach when writing, generating key words.

I continued to read extensively to my daughter, as I had since birth. We wrote letters together to friends and relatives, played games and did art and nature projects. In terms of a reading program, one of the pleasures of hometeaching is that you can select all of your own materials. I wanted a phonetic reading program which had the elements of the Lippincott program, except a bit more difficult. I selected the Scribner's basal reading program, which we liked very much. We read those readers together and did their workbooks and phonics books. Literacy acquisition worked out well for my daughter. She is an avid reader, loves to read historical fiction and likes to write plays.

I taught English to foreigners at Portland Community college while living in Portland, Oregon for two years. In southern California, I studied for the Certificate of Teaching ESL at University of California, San Diego, which I received in 1995. Upon moving to the Monterey Peninsula, I enrolled in the master's in elementary education program at San Jose State University in 1996, with the goal of furthering my professional development in the teaching field.

I originally became interested in the area of preschool literacy, the focus of this study, because I had a preschool child at the time. I had also had a long interest in early childhood education and had studied for an early childhood education teaching credential. Working seven years as a first grade teacher caused me to be interested in literacy experiences prior to a child entering school. I was curious about the whole concept of

how parents from different ethnic and socioeconomic groups perceive that their preschool children acquire literacy. My experiences working with bilingual and ESL students, traveling throughout the world, and living in different countries have made me extremely interested in cultural differences, attitudes, and values.

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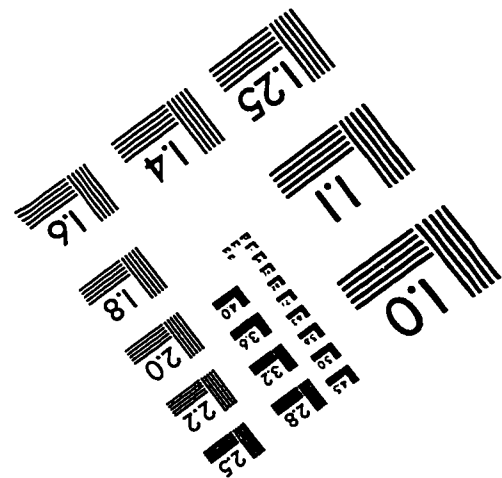
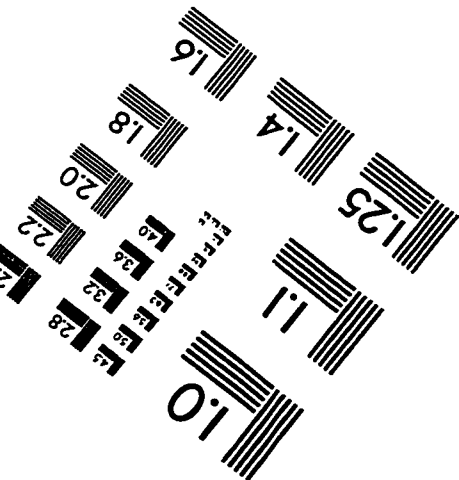
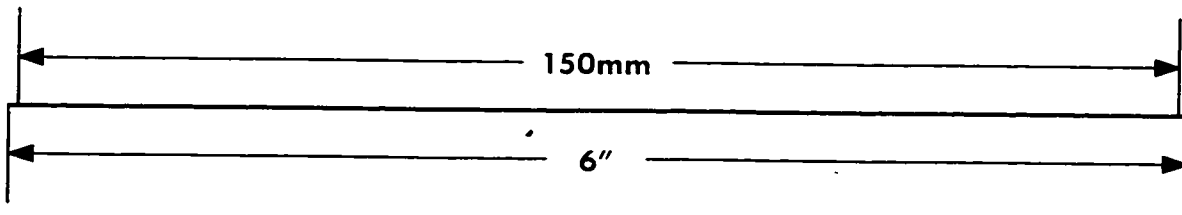
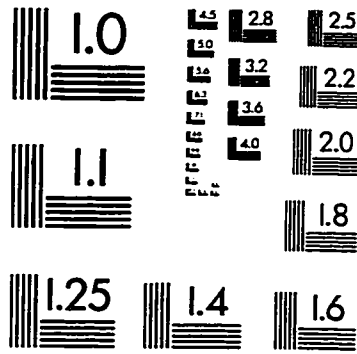
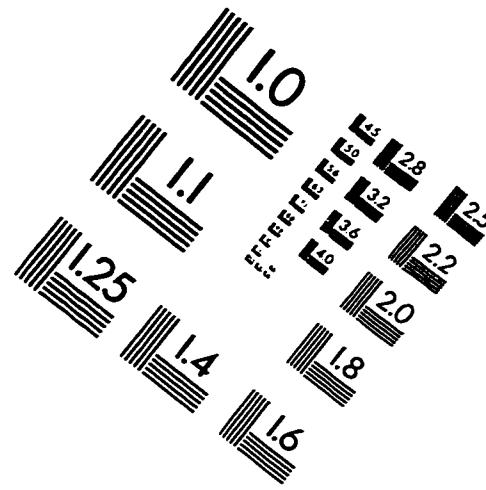
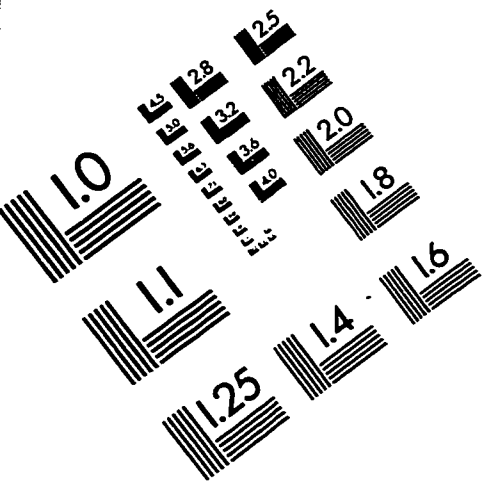
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