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An Ethnographic Case Study of the Literacy Events and Literacy Practices of One Family with a Child with a Learning Disability

by

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the case of one Canadian family with a child with a learning disability to better understand ways in which social and cultural interactions enable multiple literacies to be constructed and to exist within many settings. It considers how three contextual factors, self-motivation, expectations, and medical conditions, affect the child's literacy. Using an ethnographic case study methodology, this study explores and analyzes the family's literacy events (observable episodes in which literacy has a role) and literacy practices (what people do with literacy). Key findings include identifying ten sociotextual domains of literacy the family employs; the most prevalent are school-based, entertainment, and social cohesion. These ten domains show how the family works together to build literacy for many purposes, such as individual, social, or interpersonal. This study also presents data suggesting parental influence, specialized support, and home/school relationship may affect the construction of literacy for children with learning disabilities.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Historical educational research typically presents the development of literacy as the task of the school. In recent decades, however, sociocultural theory, family literacy theory, and literacy development research suggests that much of children's literacy construction begins outside of school and well before the onset of formal schooling. This thesis seeks to impart a view of literacy constructed within the home of one urban Canadian family through analysis of their literacy events, which are observable episodes in which literacy has a role, and literacy practices, which are what people do with literacy. Specifically, the research question I explored through this study is what literacy events and literacy practices are occurring in one Canadian home with an elementary school-aged child with a learning disability.

Key findings of my research include the identification of ten sociotextual domains of literacy that the family employs. For the purpose of this study, I have adopted Victoria Purcell-Gates' (2007) definition of sociotextual domains, which is "*social textual activities that reflect social relationships, roles, purposes, aims, goals, and social expectations"* (p. 20). Spending time with the participating family offered me insights into their literate lives, such as how they use technology-based literacy for both entertainment and for work and how they use literacy in many contexts for bonding and social cohesion. The detailed exploration of literacy within these ten domains challenges traditional views of

literacy. Additionally, I discovered three recurring topics specifically related to their son's learning disability: self-motivation, expectations, and medical conditions. These three notable topics seemed to permeate many of the literacy events and practices occurring within the family's home.

In addition to the specific findings from this research, this study also deepens insights into theories presented by researchers such as David Barton, James Paul Gee, Mary Hamilton, Allan Luke, Victoria Purcell-Gates, Denny Taylor, Brian Street, and others who generally hypothesize that literacy is socially and culturally constructed and who value the contribution of vernacular, or out-of-school, literacies to one's overall literacy development. This study contributes to the growing repertoire of literacy research supporting the theory of literacy being locally specific and multiple as well as answers the call for additional qualitative research about children with learning disabilities. Implications of this study suggest that failure to acknowledge children with learning disabilities' multiple literate strengths may jeopardize their schooling by limiting the development of those literacies, which in turn may affect how they view themselves as literate individuals.

During the early stages of my research, my three-year-old son quite thoughtfully asked, "Mommy, you are my teacher, right?" My response included "Yes, of course I am" and a discussion about all the things he and his siblings have learned at home, including how to be a good person, to make good choices, and even to read and write. Given my interest in family literacy and my learning

about the sociocultural perspective on literacy construction, his question resided in my thoughts and actions as I carried out my graduate studies thesis research.

Literacy use, construction, and development are topics often discussed in schools, government initiatives, scholarly research, and even the media. Although we are experiencing a general shift in literacy research towards exploring and understanding how literacy is multiple, socially and culturally constructed, and how it is used by various people, there remains a call for additional research to support these perspectives particularly of those individuals underrepresented in qualitative research such as children with learning disabilities.

Overview of Chapter Organization

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 presents an introduction to the topic, research question, and significance of this study. It also includes the operational definitions used throughout the research and discussion. Chapter 2 includes a review of literature and the theoretical background in which I have interpreted the research. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology and Chapter 4 is a synthesis of the research findings. Chapter 5 presents key findings, implications, limitations, and reflections on the study.

Historical Construction of Literacy

To further scholastic development and understanding of how children learn we need to research, study, develop, and test new theories and ideas. My examination of historical research of the past hundred years reveals how current definitions and beliefs of literacy strongly influenced the perception of families and the roles they should or should not take in their children's literacy

development. To some extent the perception of parents as individuals capable of teaching and supporting literacy growth has improved drastically; however, it seems there continues to be an unwritten feeling that deficiencies in literacy development in some young children is the fault of the parents and the lack of literacy activities and practices occurring in the home. We lack in research describing the role parents do take in supporting the construction of their children's literacy, particularly in homes with children identified as having special learning needs. The current influx of research, books, and manuals supporting a positive home-school relationship suggests today's educators, families, and researchers are beginning to value and support literacy within the home; however, this perception of the family as a supportive and involved participant in children's literacy development has not always existed. Historically, in response to the changing understandings of learning and development, educators, researchers, and policy makers often have had differing opinions on how parents and caregivers should participate in children's literacy learning.

In the beginning of the 20th century, John Dewey (1929) described how education is the process of responding to the demands of social situations through social interactions and through participation within society. Dewey suggested children's instincts give the starting point for all education; in order to interpret those instincts in terms of the expectations of formal school, children need to have knowledge of social conditions and civilization. In fact, children learn a large extent of the knowledge of social life they need outside of school and usually through some form of social interaction. Dewey believed that because the

cognitive and the social sides of the child are organically related education cannot be a compromise of the two or a superimposition of one upon the other. That is, we should not view the cognitive and social aspects of development independently of one another. Dewey's beliefs were seminal to current theories of sociocultural development of literacy and language. This thesis will use sociocultural theory, perceptions of literacy as multiple, and learning disability research to explore literacy events and practices in one home with a child with a learning disability. As it situates my study, I hope to present an understanding of how families are viewed through education systems and research through connections to relevant literature from the past and present. The following description of the historical construction of literacy seeks to provide an awareness of deep-seated belief systems held and influenced by political, social, and research based ideologies over time.

Before formal schooling was available, or in geographical areas where sending children to school was impossible, all education happened within the family home or in the local community. Children learned to take care of land and animals, raise other children, build and maintain a home, hunt or grow food, and if the parents were literate, to read and write. Families, community members, and religious organizations were originally the primary educators. Literacies were constructed in primal and societal ways very different from the methods that would later be expected of formal education. It was not until the beginning of the 1800s that District Grammar Schools and Township Common schools were established across Canada (Hodgins, 1894). As schools became more accessible

and available, the appearance of an outlined curriculum and a specially trained educator signalled a shift in the perceptions of education and learning. At this time, the possession of a set of skills or abilities, such as the capacity to write one's name, determined if a person was literate.

In the early nineteenth century with the increased availability of school, the current beliefs of the family as primary educators seemed to shift; researchers began to describe teachers as the primary and sometimes sole educators. At the time, the widespread belief declared by many researchers and educators was that interference at home could be detrimental to the child's literacy learning especially if the parents were uneducated (Sturtevant and Linek, 1995). The general opinion during this time was that children needed to attend school to learn.

In the late 1800s to mid 1900s, research continued to insinuate that forcing children to read before they were ready could result in irreparable harm to their learning. It was generally assumed that parents lacked the knowledge to help their children learn to read because reading was perceived as a technical skill. Teachers relied on readiness testing to determine literacy ability and skill level (Sturtevant and Linek, 1995). There was little acknowledgement of the literacy events and practices occurring in homes and communities. The literature of this era reflects how some education representatives made obvious distinctions between what should be taught at school and what should be taught at home. Power relationships and social institutions shaped literacy practices, which may have caused some literacies to become more dominant, visible, and influential than

others (Barton and Hamilton, 1998). For example, prior to the turn of the century, schools taught only the dominant, Anglo curriculum and there was little to no recognition of other culturally specific programs of study or relevant knowledges. In addition, acculturation of mainstream morals, attitudes, behaviours, and values occurred through literacy and language learning despite the convergence of multi-ethnic and multicultural groups within the schools (Willis, 1997). Groups considered non-mainstream were encouraged to abandon their languages, cultures, and ways of knowing, both at home and at school.

Following World War II, interest in parental involvement began to change in educational domains. As more women entered the field of teaching, a new perspective on the home-school relationship emerged. Discussions of parental involvement in children's learning began to appear in literacy textbooks, research, and school district programs, which influenced government funding for parenting programs. Although this was a time of discovering and thinking about how parents fit into the education system, the overall belief described in educational writing was that parents need to improve their parenting skills and conform to the disciplinary methods used in schools. For example, Witty (1949) recommended that parents could foster their children's mental growth and vocabulary by providing an abundance of reading material at home; however, he also suggested that parents need to improve their parenting and exhibit greater patience with their children.

In 1951, the Canadian Education Association's Education Week slogan was "Education is Everyone's Business". The press and public applauded the

slogan; Canadian teachers rejected it and protested. Teachers claimed the slogan represented an infringement on their professional role in education (Stamp, 1975). In the 1950s, it was typical that teachers closed classroom doors to parents and the public because school authorities considered education to be the sole responsibility of only their professional employees. Many barriers including physical ones, kept parents away from the happenings of the school. Parents had restricted access to the school and needed to request permission to enter the classrooms (Stamp, 1975). Teachers were perceived as the experts and although efforts were made at a political level to promote a collaborative learning environment, educators generally sustained the attitude that education was the business of the teaching professionals. Curriculum at the time was designed to be quite prescriptive and standardized. Teachers relied heavily on textbooks and basal readers and, unlike today, parents had little access to the curriculum resources used in the schools.

As acculturation continued into the 1950s and 1960s in North America, researchers and educators began to show more interest in the group of children not succeeding with the curriculum used at the time. Many researchers still believed textbooks and testing determined development and readiness and parents were still encouraged to let the school do the teaching. Therefore, when educators identified students who had difficulty in literacy development, they placed blame on parents instead of examining the curriculum or their own teaching methods to find answers. For example, a prominent American educator of the time, Donald Durrell (1956), suggested that sometimes parents allow their children to develop

negative attitudes towards education and that often poor attention in school results from poor home conditions. Durrell's comment, "It is now clear that differences in success in beginning reading depend upon a variety of pre-reading abilities that the child acquires through specific experiences at home… A bright child who lacks certain of these abilities will not learn to read; a dull child who has them will make progress" (p. 41) openly blamed the failure of the child on the parents' lack of early literacy teaching.

Focus on the dissonant relationship between home and school continued as a dominant theme in literacy research for many years. Some research specifically accused mothers of giving inadequate cognitive stimulation, creating disorderly and chaotic home environments, offering restrictive and punitive demands, and devaluing the education of their children, particularly when their children had low achievement or poor acculturation in school (Lightfoot, 1978). This blaming led to years of believing deficiencies in school and learning came from influences outside of school.

The conviction by some researchers that children came to school with deficiencies from their early home life and that parental interference negatively affects children's literacy development persisted into the 1970s. This deficit mindset remained as new research began to find blame in other areas as well, such as culture, poverty, and dialect differences. Harris (1970), for example, wrote that children, even with normal intelligence, who came from "homes of low cultural level", do not have normal opportunities to improve their English language development. Harris stated, "If they are dull – and many of them are – they are

doubly handicapped in their school work" (p. 33). Dechant (1970) reiterated those notions, as he believed less privileged children have lower IQs, proficiency in language, and interest in school, in addition to "a cultural horizon that rarely extends beyond city alleys". Smith and Dechant (1961) stated that the differences in intelligence between children from upper-class versus lower-class homes was not surprising given the lack of stimulation in lower-class homes. They also suggested reading problems result from dialect and language differences as incorrect pronunciation learned at home hinders effective communication skills. These kinds of cultural deficit theories led to the common belief that children will only become literate if they learn through and adjust to the predominant culture and language taught at the school. Home literacy events and practices, especially those of minority or less privileged groups, were often not respected or even recognized in schools.

At this time in educational research literature, it was common to read descriptions of children, particularly of minority or low-income groups, identified as "culturally deprived", "culturally deficient", or even "linguistically deficient". Cummins (2000) suggests that in North America, some theorists in the 1970s believed that one language impinged on the development of another, and we should eradicate all first languages other than English. Parents were discouraged from speaking to their children in their mother tongue, which may have negatively affected the vernacular language development of their children.

In 1978, Sara Lawrence Lightfoot conducted a review of current literature by searching for documentation of home-school relationships. She discovered the

dismal fact that even though home-school interactions are central in the lives of parents, teachers, and children, social science literature essentially ignored the topic. She claims researchers failed to see continuities and discontinuities between home and school and what affect that has on children. Lawrence Lightfoot's (1978) study concluded that researchers only consider the significance of home-school contact when examining deficits, deviance, or origins of pathology. At the time, many reference books for educators described how to manage parents and reduce their disruption of school activities (Stamp, 1975) opposed to how to build a positive relationship for the benefit of the child. Generally, educators considered parents a hindrance not a resource.

In the 1980s and 1990s, researchers were still examining parenting, culture, and low socioeconomic status as indicators for failure in reading; however, results of most studies could only present weak or insignificant correlations. It appears the inability to link parenting, culture, or income to reading ability led to a shift in thinking from looking at factors that may cause a child to fail to looking at factors that may cause a child to succeed. Focus moved to other areas such as exploring positive relationships between IQ, language development, and successes in the home environment (Purcell-Gates, 2000). A new perspective on the relationship of socioeconomic status (SES) and academic achievement emerged as some investigators began to seek the specific home literacy practices and events within SES groups to explain differences in literacy development. Research pointed to particular practices, such as storybook reading, as specific indices of literacy success (Purcell-Gates, 2000). In 1978 Lightfoot

wrote, “There is recent, convincing evidence that redistribution of power and shared responsibility between families and schools in poor, minority communities has a powerful effect on teachers, parents, and children… Not only did the reading scores of children soar to new heights, but the essence of education was transformed by the presence of families within the schools” (p. 101).

Ethnographers, such as Shirley Brice Heath (1983) and Denny Taylor (1983), delved into the lives of families to observe and understand the literacy events and practices taking place in homes. Their research supported the belief that home literacy practices are significant in early literacy development and it provided awareness of diversities and purposes of home literacy. Researchers believed that children surrounded by the printed word and living in homes abundant in books possessed pre-reading attributes long before they started school (Goodman, 1985). As the home context became a focus in early literacy research, documenting the role of crucial home literacy activities specific to cognitive and linguistic development grew in importance in both public and research domains. As family literacy lunged into the public eye in the 1980s and 1990s, programming, funding, and further research increased. Some responses to the interest in emergent and family literacy included the development of government-funded programs like Even Start and Head Start.

Currently, in the beginning of the twenty-first century, research, programming, and government and healthcare initiatives convey popular belief in the importance of parental involvement, family literacy research, and family literacy programming. In 2000, Purcell-Gates refers to family literacy as a

relatively new construct as a focus in research. She writes, “Suddenly, the ordinary has become extraordinary and special, and the subject of family literacy has become a topic of national attention and concern” (p. 853). Generally, family literacy and sociocultural research has renewed appreciation and recognition of literacy and language learning taking place within the family and suggests a place for family and school collaboration.

New research on family literacy is constantly emerging and evolving. We are coming to understand the remarkable literacy events and practices occurring within homes not only to prepare children for literacy development but also to become successful members of society. There is an abundance of research supporting the value of parental involvement, engagement, and skill. This suggests we need to continue to examine literacy events, practices, and customs taking place in the homes of many people in order to improve the valuation of practices and events of individuals’ literacies. How people use literacy can also help improve literacy instruction in schools to provide children with more realistic and practical methods of developing their literacies.

The child-centered curriculum Dewey (1929) proposed nearly 100 years ago was in response to societal changes caused by the industrial revolution and an increase in worldwide communication and distribution. As we move through another even greater change in global communication and distribution through the digital revolution, the premise of Dewey’s theory still resonates in current education literature. Like Dewey’s belief that the starting point for education was the experiences of the child and his or her response to the demands of social

situations, generally accepted theories of literacy development today, such as sociocultural theory, also suggest learning and development are socially constructed and begin early in childhood development.

Although over time some researchers have held parents responsible when children display lack of expected literacy growth, it has been even more difficult for some families with children with a disability. Institutionalization, isolation, and segregation occurred for some children with learning disabilities, and usually these children did not have equal opportunities at or for school. Children with learning disabilities often have different needs than children in mainstream education programs and understanding their learning from all aspects of their lives is important. Parents who have children with special needs typically invest a great deal of time and emotion in their children. Parents' experiences with their children can predate and exceed those of professionals (Gargiulo, 2009). It has only been about thirty years since qualitative researchers began placing greater emphasis on uncovering the literacy events happening in the home to justify the importance of home literacy activities. Researchers have studied the family literacy events and practices of many different groups of participants or types of families; however, family literacy research on families with a child with a learning disability is very uncommon.

Recent sociocultural theory and New Literacies Studies recognize and respect literacies from all contexts, including home, community, and school. We know literacy is occurring outside of school and research is beginning to support and equalize the value of out-of-school literacies with in-school literacies.

However, because it requires a change in thinking, we still have work to do. We need to move beyond the harsh deficiency perspectives and attitudes of the past that blame parents for the lack of literacy growth of their children, especially children with exceptional needs, to see the necessity and benefit of home literacies.

Rationale for this Study

This study responds to gaps I discovered in current qualitative research and examines the intersections of sociocultural theory, family literacy research, learning disability research, and New Literacy Studies through examination of literacy events and practices of one particular family. Specifically, the ongoing need described by Barton (1994), Barton and Hamilton (1998), Phillips, Hayden and Norris (2006), Purcell-Gates (2000, 2005, 2007), Purcell-Gates, L'Allier, and Smith, (1995), Street (2001, 2005), and Taylor (1983) expresses a requirement for additional research examining how children growing up in a variety of social settings interact with literacy and how literacy is socially and culturally constructed. In addition, Regan, Scruggs, and Mastropieri (2009) and Podhajski (1996) discuss the lack of qualitative family literacy research specific to families with children with learning disabilities. Purcell-Gates (2007), Barton (2007), and Street (2001) have also called for research to be carried out in multiple contexts and with varied communities to support the theory of literacy as multiple and contextual and to examine how literacy is actually used in many different settings.

Researchers, such as Phillips, Hayden & Norris (2006), Street (2005), and Taylor (1983) have recommended further study on how children interact with

educational influences in a variety of social settings and what effect that has on literacy development. Schools and medical professionals are identifying more children as having a learning disability now than in the past and we need knowledge and resources to support these children and their families in our schools. A government funded study entitled, *Putting a Canadian Face on Learning Disabilities (PACFOLD)* (Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, 2007) specifically advises further research on understanding the impact of learning disabilities on family life in hopes to generate additional funding to support children with learning disabilities in all settings.

Research Question

This research study seeks to answer the following question: What literacy events and literacy practices are occurring in one Canadian home with an elementary school aged child with a learning disability?

Operational Definitions

To frame my theoretical understanding, the way I conducted my research, and the way I interpreted the data I gathered, it is important to describe the operational definitions I used for this study. Operational definitions describe a concept or variable based on how it will be measured or described in a study and informs the researcher of specific behaviours or entities to observe during the study (Morgan and Morgan, 2009). The following is a list and description of the definitions I support for the purposes of this study.

Literacy refers to socially recognized ways of generating, communicating, and negotiating meaningful content through the medium of encoded texts within contexts of participation in discourses (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006).

Family Literacy is ways parents, children, and extended family members use literacy at home that build on families' strengths and connections in the context of the culture and communities in which they live and learn (Thomas, Shively, & Wilson, 2009).

A **Learning Disability** can be a number of lifelong disorders that may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding, use of verbal or nonverbal information, oral language, reading, written language, and/or mathematics and may include difficulties with organizational skills, social perception, social interaction, and perspective taking (Learning Disability Association of Canada, 2003).

Literacy Events are observable episodes where literacy has a role existing in a social context and can be regular, routine, or repeated as part of formal procedures and expectations of social institutions or structured by informal expectations and pressures of home or peer group (Barton, 1994, 2000; Heath, 1983)

Literacy Practices are general cultural ways of using written language which people draw upon in their lives and can include people's awareness of literacy, constructions of literacy, discourses of literacy, and how people talk about and make sense of literacy, which are all internal to the individual at the same time are social processes shaped by social rules. Literacy practices exist in the relations

between people, groups and communities as opposed to being just a set of properties residing in individuals (Barton, 2000).

New Literacy Studies refers to theoretical approaches arguing literacy is not just a set of uniform 'technical skills' to be imparted to those lacking them but rather there are multiple literacies in communities that are socially embedded (Street, 2001).

Chapter Summary

Home activities and experiences of the family may play a large role in understanding the literacy and language development of children with learning disabilities. Barriers and silencing over time have prevented parents from expressing their voices and opinions about their child's education. Until recently, it seems the overall attitude of parents by teaching professionals was that parents should not interfere with school-based activities (Dechant, 1970; Durrell, 1856; Smith and Dechant, 1961; Stamp, 1975; Sturtevant & Linek, 1995; Witty, 1949). Researchers believed parents were unknowledgeable and untrained. Removing children from homes and placing them in institutions occasionally occurred when children had special needs.

In conclusion, this study proposes to merge areas of research not commonly studied together, sociocultural theory, family literacy, and learning disabilities, by presenting a view of literacy activities from the family's perspective. Tapping into the valuable resources, knowledge, and insight families can provide through their demonstration and description of their literacy events

and practices, can have significant implications for understanding children's construction of literacy and use of vernacular literacies within their lives.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following constructs reflect current thinking in the areas of family literacy, learning disabilities, and sociocultural theory and give the reader an overview of the understanding in which I have based my research.

Family Literacy

Research describes family literacy in the following two contexts and perspectives: family literacy as an educational construct and family literacy as programming aimed at improving literacy. Theoretical literature describing family literacy as an educational construct explores the literacy experiences of the family whereas other family literacy research focuses on improving or changing the literacy experiences of the family members through program implementation. Although these two bodies of research tend to differ in their approach to the field, both are interested in facilitating children's literacy development through improved understanding and exploration of the factors influencing children's learning particularly those happening outside of the school environment.

Denny Taylor (1983) is known to have popularized the term, *family literacy,* through her book, *Family Literacy, Young Children Learning to Read and Write*. Taylor's book shares her understandings from a longitudinal ethnographic study she completed from 1977 to 1979, in which she explored six families' literacy events and subsequent functions of literacy. Throughout her study, Taylor (1983) investigated and described family literacy as an educational

construct. Key findings of her study include that the elicitation of parents' memories revealed that indirect processes of transmission are the main mode literacy styles and values are passed on to children. The parents' history with literacy appeared to be a constant factor affecting which rituals and routines the family adopted. Positive or negative parental memories resulted in either the conservation of a family literacy tradition or the change of past literacy patterns. For example, if the parent fondly remembered bedtime stories then he or she would try to carry out the ritual of bedtime stories with his or her own children. According to Taylor, unless it is in direct response to a school-related issue most transmission of literacy values occurs indirectly through the normal use of written language and literacy in daily life. Taylor (1983) also noted parents negotiated their present beliefs about literacy in light of the past and discussed their children's experiences within the context of their own experiences. One parent, for example, compared the pressure of reading tests on her child to the pressure she felt from reading aloud in front of her class as a child and judged the experiences of her child as upsetting. Taylor found that these recollections of the past became meaningful to the parents as they mediated the school experiences of their children and developed literacy practices and customs within their families.

Findings of Taylor's (1983) work also reflect the connection between the social organization of the family and the family's literacy activities. It was through the collection of literacy artefacts, such as scraps of paper with writing on them, family calendars, or magazines left beside the couch, that she discovered the close connection between the daily workings of the family and their literacy

events. Taylor describes literacy as a "filter through which the social organization of the everyday lives of the families is accomplished" (p. 26). Taylor suggests children's use of print is a way of mastering their environment and building new social connections and environmental relationships. Her data showed the children actively constructing functions of literacy at a young age through their interactions with both reading and writing events. Print, confined to the context of the situation, was a means of communication to self and others, entertainment, and establishing or maintaining social connections. Taylor concludes literacy evolves from an interpersonal process of functional utility to an intrapersonal process as well, as new social expectations to learn to read arise as children enter school. She suggests the functionality of the learning process does not change, merely an intrapersonal dimension is added as children take on more sophisticated literacy activities. Taylor's work and her exclusive attention paid to studying how and why literacy takes place within the family was a step in the direction towards viewing literacy as multiple and socially and culturally constructed.

Current beliefs of family literacy reflect that literacy develops in the context of shared social experiences, builds upon family strengths, and makes connections with the context of the community or culture in which the family lives. Current beliefs of family literacy also include recognizing there are many literacies taking place outside of the school setting that are just as valid as those taking place within the school are. For example, family literacy research would acknowledge playing family board games, such as Scrabble, as an important factor in the developing literacy of the family members because it is culture and

language specific to the family, builds upon the family's current abilities, and involves a shared social interaction. Thomas, Shively, and Wilson (2009), researchers for the Centre for Family Literacy Society of Alberta, state that family literacy is the ways family members use literacy naturally as part of their daily living and to build expertise in language development, reading, and writing within the family. Family literacy is also recognized or termed as, home literacy, vernacular literacy, out of school literacy, local literacy, or situated literacy (Barton, 1994; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000; Street, 2001, 2005; Taylor, 1986, 1983).

Learning Disabilities

Due to the variety of professionals involved, a continuing debate exists over how to define and describe learning disabilities. Beyond education, the areas of psychology, medicine, law, speech and language, and advocacy groups all possess a degree of involvement and each has its own theoretical understanding of the etiology, prevalence, assessment, and individual characteristics of learning disabilities (Gargiulo, 2009; Wolf Nelson, 2010). It is generally believed that in 1963 Samuel Kirk coined the term *learning disabilities* while meeting with parents and various professionals concerned with learning problems (Gargiulo, 2009; Danforth, 2009). Over time, many organizations commissioned Kirk to develop numerous definitions of learning disabilities. Kirk's definitions, although slightly altered each time as he continued research, were widely accepted. His definitions continue to influence or become the basis for the development of other

definitions of learning disabilities created by federal, psychological, medical, or school organizations.

Gargiulo (2009) described five common components found in most learning disabilities definitions. The first is that the person's intellectual functioning must fall within the normal range, typically measured by an intelligence quotient (IQ) test. The second component is that the child must demonstrate a significant gap or discrepancy between assumed potential and actual achievement. The third component is that the learning disability is not the result of other disabilities or extrinsic factors. The fourth component is that difficulties in learning are in one or more academic areas. Often the individual's difficulties fall into areas of school literacies and/or mathematics. The final common component of many learning disability definitions is the presumption of a central nervous system dysfunction. You may not exclusively find all of the above listed components in each definition, but they are typically those used most frequently.

There are many groups of people interested in learning disabilities for various purposes and there is lack of consensus in defining what learning disabilities are in scholarly research. The controversy surrounding how learning disabilities are diagnosed and defined is not the main task of presenting this material; I simply want to recognize that since the 1960s there has been an increase in the number of organizations and advocacy groups developed to support and understand children and adults with learning disabilities. In Canada, an organization named The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC)

plays a major role in defining and advancing understanding of learning disabilities. The LDAC (2003) definition influences provincial legislation governing special education eligibility used to substantiate coding for funding purposes in many Canadian education systems (see Appendix A) and for that reason, I want to highlight the LDAC definition as being influential to understanding the components with which Canadian students with a learning disability are defined.

Canadian schools or families are increasingly identifying many children as having a learning disability. Statistics Canada reports that among children aged 5 to 14 learning disabilities are the most often reported disability among males and the second most often reported disability among females (Statistics Canada, 2001). In Canada, research suggests that 1 in 10 Canadians have learning disabilities (Philpott & Cahill, 2008) and that the largest population of students accessing special education supports in school systems is children with learning disabilities (Lerner & Kline, 2006).

In 2007, a three-year study entitled *Putting a Canadian Face on Learning Disabilities* (PACFOLD) (Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, 2007) reported a dismal picture. The report describes Canadians with learning disabilities as less likely to achieve in school and achieve high levels of literacy, more likely to drop out of school, more likely to need aids, for example tutoring, but cannot afford them, less likely to succeed at work, and more likely to report lower overall mental health. Higher levels of stress, depression, anxiety, suicidal

ideation, and poor physical health also are typical of not only adults with learning disabilities but children as well.

My effort to describe learning disabilities is to set the context for examining and understanding a certain group of participants. Typically, there are learning and lifestyle differences between a person with a learning disability and a person without a learning disability. Generally, the learning disability has an impact on family and social experiences within the home.

Sociocultural Theory

Today, some of what we call *sociocultural theory* can be linked back to the work of the well-known Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934). Vygotsky (1978) studied the development of higher psychological processes, particularly the interaction between learning and development. He believed learning begins long before attendance in school and that any new learning encountered at school is an extension of a previous experience or a link to prior knowledge learned out of school. Vygotsky also believed social interaction plays a fundamental role in cognitive development and that cognition and social interaction are interrelated with culture and language. For example, he suggested we use tools from culture, such as language or writing, to mediate social contexts or to communicate and he believed that the internalization of these tools leads to higher level thinking.

A major contribution Vygotsky (1978) made to understanding cognitive development is his theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Simply put, the theory describes the level of attainable development. In addition to the

child's independent abilities, how he or she problem solves, interacts socially, and receives help from a more skilled individual, such as an adult or competent peer, determines this level. Influenced by social, cultural, and historical ways of thinking, the ZPD bridges the gap between what is already known and what has the potential to be known. Vygotsky's work continues to be influential in current thinking about how knowledge is socially constructed.

Although complex studies on how literacy is better understood as something constructed, such as sociocultural theory, as opposed to obtained, such as traditional or historical beliefs, there continues to be some support for the traditional viewpoint. Traditional beliefs about literacy have often included viewing literacy as a set of skills. A century ago, to be literate meant possessing the ability to write one's full names and read parts of the Bible. Only a few decades ago, to be literate meant possessing the ability to read a predetermined textual passage and answer various standardized questions. However, a revolutionary paradigm shift has been occurring in literacy education studies and theory over the past few decades. How we now describe and define literacy based on new research complicates and challenges those traditional beliefs (Street, 2003; Purcell-Gates, 2007). In scholarly research, studies on literacy may include terms such as multiple literacies, social literacies, new literacies, or 21st Century literacies. Despite differences in the title or label, each theory assumes the stance that there are many forms of literacy and that each form is culturally, socially, or contextually constructed.

Current sociocultural perspectives support the belief that literacy changes as culture and society changes. Consider the literacy abilities needed today to communicate successfully using technology. Even as recent as 10 years ago, we did not need or frequently use digital literacies such as email, texting, Facebook, or Twitter for correspondence. In current literature, there is a lot of attention paid to understanding digital literacies, including using computers for reading and writing. Some researchers believe that digitally based activities are developed in response to social needs or for social purposes, are specific to certain cultures or groups, and change through the process of learning. Larson (2009) believes we should think of digital literacies as a means of shaping worldviews and literacy practices. New studies on literacy that support a sociocultural perspective would suggest literacy is created and developed within the experiences of specific cultures or contexts and is determined by the social interactions of its members.

In current scholarly research, we are seeing a pragmatic change from the use of the term literacy as a singular entity to the term literacies as a pluralized concept. Post-modern movements reject an autonomous view of literacy, which has opened doors to and credibility for local and contextual studies recognizing multiple literacies. One of the first researchers to challenge popular thinking of literacy as singular was Brian Street (1984) through his book, *Literacy in Theory and Practice.* Street argued that the construction of literacy is embedded within an ideology. He suggested that we should consider literacy as an ideological construct, as opposed to a set of autonomous decontextualized skills that are transferable to multiple settings. Street proposed that literacy is always

constructed and enacted within social and political contexts and influenced by power relations. That is, he agued that within a group of people, the literacy practices used and how they are imparted depends on the nature of the social formation. Stemming from Street's work in the early 1980s was a shift in academic approaches from supporting literacy as a singular entity to recognizing multiple literacies. Research in this area was termed the New Literacy Studies (NLS) and through research, scholars began to clarify what could be included as literacy. In addition, scholars began to recognize different literacies happening among different groups of people. Therefore, considering the idea of different literacies and the fact that particular times, places, politics, power relations, or social values influence them encourages us to interpret those literacies within a sociocultural context. Doing so enables us to gain a deeper understanding of how literacy is constructed.

In scholarly writing, the recognition of literacy as varied and multiple generated an influx of research aimed at elaborating on Street's (1984) ideas and exploring their implications. In the late 1980s and 1990s, researchers descriptively documented vernacular literacies, commonly known as everyday literacies, local literacies, or out-of-school literacies, using ethnographic approaches. Foundational studies, such as Shirley Brice Heath's (1983) *Ways with Words*, Denny Taylor's (1983) *Family Literacy*, and David Barton and Mary Hamilton's (1998) *Local Literacies*, brought forth an extensive description of literacy events occurring in multiple contexts. Initially, researchers organized literacy events by type and function into categories, such as recreational types and uses (Heath,

1983; Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). At the time, in light of contemporary perspectives, this approach appeared applicable for describing literacy events. Other theories supporting functionality of language and literacy, such as Michael Halliday's (1973) *Explorations in the Functions of Language*, in which he suggests the formation of language is in response to the function of the language, were well known and supported in academic literature.

Initial analysis of vernacular literacy events in terms of their function was an important stepping-stone to understanding the breadth of literacies people use and construct in their lives. However, exploring the functionality of literacy through vernacular literacies raised questions as to the significance of this type of research for practical application and implementation of specific teaching strategies within schools. Collins and Blot (2003) suggest there are policy makers and other concerned individuals who still argue for a narrowly defined and disciplined literacy for economic and social benefits. Some argue vernacular literacies are failed attempts at the real thing and are inferior versions of the literacy society demands; however, new literacy studies within sociocultural theory recognize that factors such as power, economics, and societal values impact how literacy is constructed. Sociocultural theory, while it does not seek to contradict such claims, helps to explain that the inferiority belief of vernacular literacies is not actually an accurate depiction because literacy is constructed in response to societal demands.

In presenting a different perspective, Barton (1994) introduced the idea of viewing literacy practices, rather than simply literacy events, as a way to further

understand motivations and purposes of local literacies, in light of social practices. In 1994, Barton originally described literacy practices as the general cultural ways of drawing upon a literacy event to make use of literacy but has since elaborated on his view. Considering literacy as a part of social practice, Barton along with Hamilton (2000) extended his original definition of literacy practices by adding that literacy practices are also the general, cultural ways of utilizing written language people draw upon in their lives; in a sense, they are what people do with literacy. Barton and Hamilton (2000) contend that literacy practices are not always directly observable because they involve values, attitudes, feelings, and social relationships. Literacy practices also include people's awareness, construction, and discourse of literacy as well as how people make sense of literacy. Although Barton and Hamilton recognize literacy practices are internal to the individual, practices are also the social processes that connect people and include shared cognitions represented in ideologies and social identities shaped by social rules. Barton and Hamilton argue that rather than understanding literacy as a set of properties inherent within an individual we should understand the relationships between people, groups, and communities.

Literacy events are central to researching literacy practices because they are observable activities often linked to a written text or routine sequence of behaviour. Researching literacy practices involves looking at what people do with literacy events, what these events mean to them, and how they fit into people's lives. It is how events and texts fit into practices instead of viewing how practices reveal events. This method of viewing literacy practices as suggested by Barton

and Hamilton furthers understanding that there are different literacies and that generally literacies are a means to some ends, whether social, cultural, or personal.

Some researchers no longer consider the traditional view of literacy as an autonomous set of skills to be an appropriate model to understand the diversity of reading and writing among specific communities or groups of people. Thus, the shift to an ideological model of literacies advocates that we cannot teach literacy objectively with following social effects but that the ways in which people interact is already a social practice. Along with participants' predisposed ideas about literacy, social interaction is what affects the nature of the literacy learned (Purcell-Gates, 2007). An ideological perspective of literacies does not view the impact of literacy but views the ways people make use of literacies. An ideological perspective also rejects the construction of creating the association of a particular group with a particular literacy. Considering issues of power relations and assumptions about particular groups are also important in understanding what constitutes literacy, what literacy means to particular groups, and what social influences affect reading and writing (Street, 2001). From an autonomous view, a person may be deemed illiterate but from an ideological view, he or she might make considerable use of literacy practices in a specific context for specific purposes. Sociocultural theory and New Literacy Studies promote a change in thinking from the functions of literacy to how literacy is constructed and used for social purposes.

Direction for Current Study

My early initial intention for this study was to gather a list of literacy activities, such as those created by Heath (1983) and Taylor (1983, 1986); however, New Literacy Studies have influenced how I view the construction of vernacular literacy within specific contexts. Past studies, mostly ethnographic in nature, within the area of New Literacy Studies influenced me to analyze the data collected for this study by viewing literacy practices as central to the construction of literacy within the home. Studies and theory presented by Barton (1994), Barton and Hamilton (1998, 2000), Street (1984, 1995, 2001), and Purcell-Gates (2000, 2007) have been influential by encouraging me to view vernacular literacy through a social and cultural lens. I now see literacy events are not carried out because of a function of literacy but are carried out because the reason or purpose behind the literacy event is socially or culturally determined.

Chapter Summary

The theoretical work and constructs I chose to situate my understanding for this thesis include the following three major areas of research: family literacy, learning disabilities, and sociocultural theory. They are all seemingly evolving and changing as new understandings emerge but each have a history that was necessary for additional research to build upon. In combination, family literacy, learning disabilities research, and sociocultural theory are important topics in supporting this study but each have also individually played a large role in understanding the growth, development, and learning of many children both in

and out of school, as well as presently make significant contributions to many current theories in educational research.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design, Ethnographic Case Study

Although qualitative research in education is steadily increasing and gaining greater recognition, Bogdan and Knopp Biklen (2003) suggest there remains a gap in qualitative research focusing on children with learning disabilities. A large body of quantitative research exists for the purposes of identification of children with learning disabilities and to increase scientific and medical understanding of the disorder. In their study of overrepresentation of research in special education, Artiles, Cheney, and Waitoller (2010) found that slightly over 83% of special education research used solely quantitative methods. They also discovered learning disabilities are the most frequently studied area in disability research. In schools, funding, resources, and additional paraprofessional support often result from standardized procedures developed from quantitative research. Although the financial and technical elements of funding for children with disabilities currently rely on quantitative data, empirical research may not provide the same understanding of disabilities as qualitative research would provide. Qualitative or mixed methods research may offer a richer and more detailed description of individual cases or particular situations. Often the level of detail resulting from qualitative research does not result from quantitative data. Therefore, I have chosen a qualitative method to answer my research question.

Human behaviour and the way people construct and make sense of their lives is variable and locally specific (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). This qualitative study follows an ethnographic perspective, particularly a case study approach. A case study is a variation of ethnography in which the researcher provides an in depth exploration of a bounded system based on extensive data collection (Creswell, 2005). Case studies differ from traditional ethnography in that they may focus on events specific to one individual or small group of individuals opposed to studying a larger group. As well, case studies focus on the activities of the individual or small group, whereas in traditional ethnography, researchers attempt to identify shared patterns of behaviour and culture in a community (Creswell, 2005; Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, 2002).

For ethnographic case study research, the researcher is the most significant research tool and situates himself or herself in relation to the data collected. Researchers collect multiple forms of data for case studies, including interviews, observations, field notes, video or audio recordings, photographs, emails or letters, and other artefacts. Following data collection, the researcher examines data for emerging common themes. The case is located and described within a larger context and is specific to the time, location, and even physical setting. The specific data collection procedures used in this study are discussed later in this chapter in the section entitled *Data Collection*.

Street (2001) states research should make visible the complexity of local everyday community literacy practices and challenge dominant stereotypes and myopia. It is my contention that a case study is a suitable design to research the

literacy practices, events, and experiences of one family with a child with learning disabilities in their home and to interpret data within the context of the lives of the participants.

Identification of Research Sources

I acquired resources for the theoretical framework, supporting theory, and research methodology through multiple sources. I used key words in the University of Alberta library search engines to retrieve relevant books and articles; however, I also retrieved many journals and articles electronically through online databases. Databases I accessed regularly included ERIC, JSTOR, ProQuest, Academic Search Complete, and Google Scholar. I also accessed public information websites such as Statistics Canada, Alberta Education, and the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC). I have referenced only peer-reviewed journals, published books, or government websites or sources.

Recruitment of Participants

Following the tri-council and University of Alberta ethics approval for this study, I advertised to solicit participants by canvassing community networks, local and provincial organizations, and privately run tutoring agencies. I contacted the directors of education at two well-known tutoring organizations to ask for recommendations of families who may be interested in participating in my study. The organization's directors granted me permission to post advertisements requesting volunteers who fit the criteria within the public areas parents visit at each tutoring site. I also contacted the director of a nationally run learning disabilities association who provided me the opportunity to send a poster out in

their email distributed newsletter. The director noted that parents, teachers, and other concerned individuals who are part of their association are in receipt of the newsletter. All directors at each of the three centres were asked or volunteered to search their client files for a suitable family for the study. I also contacted each director for follow up via email and telephone conversations. In addition, I posted advertisements on website and internet support groups for families with children with disabilities. This seemed like a comprehensive way for me as the researcher to find possible participant families.

My formal advertising efforts resulted in only one family contacting me via email. My informal approach involved word-of-mouth efforts, which resulted in a larger number of potential participants.

Desired Research Location and Participants

The location I chose to research was within the family home. I limited the context and site to this area for a number of reasons. First, I wanted to explore literacy events and practices only within one context with limited participants because I wanted the data to be locally specific. Including other contexts, such as the community or school, would also involve the addition of other perspectives, relationships, and contributors. Second, there are routines, events, and interactions that only happen within a home. It can be an intimate or private zone where you must be invited to enter. Third, ethnographic case studies and their interpretation are context specific. People are affected by social rules and conventions that they may not follow while inside their home, as the home is often is considered a

natural, personal, and safe place. Therefore, for this study I am considering the interior of the home to be its own separate context.

The participants I hoped to include in this study were one family with an elementary-aged child with a learning disability. My criteria also specifically included that the child be attending public, private, or separate school and is in at least Grade 2. The reasoning for researching a child with a diagnosed learning disability who is above Grade 2 is that learning disabilities are typically not diagnosed until the child has completed Grade 1, as learning disabilities are not often apparent until the child reaches school and the demands of school increase. Thus, they are more easily detected within the school context. In addition, I required that a certified psychologist has diagnosed him or her with a learning disability because the criteria used for diagnosis and the reports provided will give me more information about his or her needs. I hoped to find a family who had more than one child living in the home at the time of the study who also attended public, private, or separate school because I wanted to explore the experiences of both a child with a diagnosed disability and a child without a diagnosed disability within the same home.

Participants Selected for Study

After reviewing the files I created on each potential family who volunteered for the study, the participants I chose best met my described criteria. They considered their family to be mother, father, son, daughter, and cat. They lived together in a house in an urban setting and both the children attended the community elementary school. Although I posted advertisements and consulted

networks associated with children with disabilities, it was through an experience of what one of the participants called a "moment of synchronicity" that I came to discover the family for this research study. All names used within this thesis are pseudonyms chosen by the research participants.

Discovering the Parkers

"I think that meeting you was one of those moments of synchronicity." Ann Parker

One cool February morning, I hopped on the train at the university to head downtown for the annual teachers' conference. It was not too busy that morning so I sat down across from a nice looking woman who smiled at me as I settled myself. I pulled out my conference book to peruse the day's session. I looked up as the voice across from me asked, "Are you doing some last minute deciding?" This is when I met Ann Parker. I realized we had the same destination and we began talking about the conference, the sessions we planned on attending, and a little about the stop to take to get closest to the conference venue.

As we exited the train station and walked the four necessary blocks, we began to share personal information such as employment assignments. I shared with her my teaching assignment and explained how my personal life, raising three small children and completing my master's degree, affected the amount of time I could spend in the classroom this year. After first talking about our children, Ann asked about my research. We were nearly at the conference at this point and so she quickly mentioned she had a son in Grade 6 who had recently been diagnosed with a learning disability. As she reached into her purse she said,

"I don't know if we would fit, but here is my card". I was a little surprised by her gesture but then quickly became excited. There was not any time left but to exchange pleasantries and for me to say how pleased I was to have met her as we went our separate ways.

Following the conference, I sent Ann an email to open formal communication, attaching with it the ethics and consent information. In reference to the help she provided me in manoeuvring my way downtown to the conference, I wrote to her, "thank you for leading me in the right direction". Little did I know at that point how helpful Ann and her family would become in leading me in the right direction as I carried out my data collection. She responded a few days later writing that she spoke with her husband Nick and children Patrick and Sarah and had read all the documents I included, as well as the advertisement I posted with the local chapter of a learning disabilities association in which she belonged. As I reviewed the files of potential participants for my research, it became clear that Ann's family would be a good fit.

Data Collection

Morgan and Morgan (2009) state all science and research begins with observation, and all observation comes down to seeing, hearing, or otherwise making contact with the world through our senses. They suggest that observation is not spontaneous and is distinguishable from casual observation in the degree to which planning and organization occurs. As the researcher, I am obligated to describe the qualitative manner in which I have collected data.

My procedures of data collection included the following methods: observation, interviews, collection of artefacts, and taking photographs. Prior to data collection commencement, I described my data collection intentions to the Parker family and ensured they felt comfortable with the methods I would be using. Apart from the need to verify I would not use photographs of any family members in my representation of the data, the family was in agreement with the data collection techniques. Data collection occurred weekly over a five-week period.

I frequently used observation as a data collection technique for this study. Initial observations included personal annotations of the context, the family members, and the visual environment. During each visit, I wrote fieldnotes on texts I noticed, literacy events occurring, including the participant structure of those events, and notes on the social purpose or function possibly served by those events. I also recorded observations digitally on a digital voice recorder and later transcribed them using my computer. I later expanded and recorded both verbal and written fieldnotes into an electronic chart.

Occasionally, I needed to adjust my process of recording observations based on the comfort level of the participant. For example, Patrick, the child with the learning disability, was very uncomfortable when I was writing extensively in his presence. Although at times I showed him or talked with him about what I was writing, I still felt my writing while in close proximity to him affected his actions and demeanour. Thus, I made my fieldnotes at times when he was in another room or directly after my visit using the digital voice recorder.

Another large part of my data collection included conversations and interviews with the Parkers. My data collection plan included at least one semi-structured interview with each of the family members as well as an oral history interview with the parents (Barton, 2007). I typically initiated interviews through a formal request to sit down and talk or through the occasional informal question I asked in response to certain visible texts. Interviews also occurred through the request of a family member to talk about a specific literacy event or practice. Often during my visits, the family would offer to sit with me and share their literacy stories and experiences. Some interviews were based on predetermined questions I came with but many were casual conversations resulting from my observation of a literacy event or literacy artefact. I also created a literacy profile of each family member but did so throughout many visits as I developed rapport with the family. Examples of interview questions and items for the literacy profile are included in Appendix E. Between visits, the family often retrieved examples of literacy they felt pertinent to the information I was seeking for the study.

The family was very forthcoming with information about the literacy and medical experiences in their lives, which made interviewing and conversation a valuable research method. I also discovered the parents were ready very quickly to engage in an interview or centered conversation; however, it took a few visits before the children felt comfortable enough with me to sit and talk about literacy. It was not until near the end of the data collection period that Patrick began to initiate conversation with me and share more freely. Sarah, the youngest child, regularly planned to show me artefacts in between visits and was keen to put on a

dance or music recital for me as well. I digitally recorded most interviews and some conversations and accompanied them by notes taken during or after visits.

Given the information Ann shared with me about Patrick's processing and tendency to answer questions without either understanding or attending to them, I made sure that both he and Sarah understood why I was there. They did listen to me read the consent form and they both signed it yet I still questioned if Patrick truly understood why I was in his home. During one visit, however, as I listened to his side of a telephone conversation with his grandmother, I was reassured of his comprehension of my study. Patrick and I were sitting at the table when he answered a telephone call. He returned with the phone to his seat next to me and I heard him respond to his grandmother's question about what he was doing that day. He precisely told her about the conversation we were just having about what he likes to read and write and he revealed to her that my presence in his home was for a university project about home literacy, specifically the literacy in their home. I felt that it was important that he knew about the research not just for ethical reasons but because it could potentially affect the validity of the data. Because Patrick has undergone many professional and scholastic assessments I wanted to ensure his responses and actions would be natural and not based on what he thought he would need to do or say to appease me. He was familiar with testing situations and I wanted to know he knew this was not testing of any type. His response to his grandmother clearly established he knew my objectives.

The collection of artefacts also played a role in the data collection. The largest, most extensive artefact I collected was the binder filled with Patrick's

academic and medical testing reports given to me by Ann and Nick. It also included notes made by Ann, Patrick's report cards and Individualized Program Plan, and paraprofessional communication forms. The binder became a valuable resource in understanding Patrick's past and present conditions, as well as how these forms and reports constructed a perspective of who he is at school. Most other artefacts I observed were photographed using high-pixel photography so that I did not need to remove the artefact from the home. The photographs were as good as if not better than a photocopy. Photographing the artefacts also allowed me to enter them into my organization chart previously mentioned and to reproduce easily them during data analysis.

I also used photographs to capture moments of literacy occurrences. Hamilton (2000) describes how using photographs during ethnographic data collection captures the literacy event but then can be used to infer the literacy practice. She suggests they also capture the interactions taking place around the text by offering visual cues to the literacy practice. Using Hamilton's suggested approach to visual representation I attempted to take as many photographs as I felt were appropriate and were within the comfort level of the Parkers.

To keep track of the data collection process I made records of each visit noting methodology, decision making procedures, new motivations or directions, and reflections of my experiences with the participants. I also noted revisions I made to interview questions and the reasons behind those changes. Often I made changes because the participant answered the question during a previous conversation or the question became irrelevant to the current discussion.

I organized and stored fieldnotes, expanded fieldnotes, reflections, transcriptions, and additional data electronically on a personal computer and in paper format in a bound notebook. I initially sorted data by date of visit and then reorganized it thematically during data analysis. I diligently participated in backing up the electronic files on a regular basis and produced hard copies of information when applicable. Information was stored on a non-server, personal computer with password protection. Following the completion of data analysis, all electronic material was stored on a digital memory stick and then deleted from the computer. I will lock and store all paper data, artefacts, and the memory stick for five years, and then I will destroy it.

Researcher Positioning and Reflexivity

My goal was to create a trusting and honest relationship with the Parkers. Knowing that entering into the home of a family could create some challenges, as people generally perceive this environment as private, I ensured I was honest and clear with the family about their rights, privileges, and privacy. I reassured them that their identity would not be revealed to anyone at any stage of the research and they were comforted by the idea of replacing their real names with pseudonyms. There were times I shared personal information about my literacy experiences and answered the family's questions about my family or my opinions. It was often Ann who, after answering my questions, redirected the question back. I believe this was mostly to engage me in conversation as opposed to us participating in a question and answer type interview.

Throughout data collection, my observation and interaction roles in the Parkers' home changed as I developed rapport with them. I needed to make adaptations to the particular circumstance or requests of the family, particularly as result of Patrick's anxiety concerns. For example, I often choose to take a non-participant observation role with Patrick. I was cognizant of his reaction to my note taking or questions, especially when it seemed I was making him uncomfortable. Sarah's reaction to me was opposite to Patrick's in that she often encouraged me to become a participant in what she was doing. In my interactions with Ann and Nick, I was able to change my role from non-participant observer to participant observer with little perceived reaction from them. My changing role provided both objective views, that is direct information given by the family, and subjective views, that is my personal observations and interpretation, of the situations and allowed me to adapt to the current needs of the family. Generally, I chose to be a non-participant observer during circumstances in which the family members were interacting together with a text and an interruption would be disruptive to the experience. I chose to be a participant observer during other times such as when the family engaged in conversation with me, invited me to participate, brought certain events, practices, or artefacts to my attention, or when I needed to ask a clarifying question to get more information. My changing participant observer role allowed me to become more involved when it benefited the research.

Researcher reflexivity and openly discussing my role in the study affects and informs my interpretation and reporting of the data. Nightingale and Cromby

(1999) suggest reflexivity requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process and an acknowledgment of the impossibility of remaining outside of one's subject matter while conducting research. They also suggest reflexivity requires us to find the ways in which the researcher's involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs the research. I have considered the impact of my presence in the family's home, as well as how my personal beliefs and history affected what I observed and reported. I have positioned myself within the research and identified my point of view through choosing specific representations of existing research and through how I defined significant terms. Creswell (2005) suggests researchers can also position themselves in their research by talking about themselves, sharing their experiences, and mentioning how their interpretations shape their discussions about the site or group. I have identified to the reader of this thesis that I am a teacher, graduate student, and a mother who believes in commendation for sociocultural vernacular experiences in the construction of multiple literacies.

Analysis for Emerging Themes

I analysed the data using a procedure outlined by Purcell-Gates (2007) and her colleagues in their Cultural Practices of Literacy Study (CPLS). Purcell-Gates designed the CPLS on the premise that we still need to learn more about literacy as multiple and social by examining many case studies of literacy in practice within social contexts. Each researcher involved in her study who contributed a case study to the CPLS was expected to follow common data collection and

analysis procedures. The CPLS researchers developed and used the term *sociotextual domain* to analyse and describe their data.

Following the methods described by Barton and Hamilton (1998) and Barton, Hamilton, and Ivaniĉ (2000) for coding of data into social domains, Purcell-Gates (2007) discovered the construct of social domain to be too complex. Following their studies, this was also previously reported by Barton and Hamilton (1998) and Barton, Hamilton, and Ivaniĉ (2000) as challenges in their work. The CPLS team then took on a different approach to coding, in which they focused on textual practices and textual genres. They developed the term *sociotextual domain*, which means *"social textual activities that reflect social relationships, roles, purposes, aims, goals, and social expectations"* (Purcell-Gates, 2007, p. 20). Purcell-Gates suggests a sociotextual domain can include but is not defined by physical settings. A sociotextual domain references activities conducted within, and in response to, activities of that setting and that reflect purposes and practices sanctioned there. For example, referring to school literacy does not mean literacy happening at a school but means literacy activities, such as practicing spelling words, that reflect a purpose outlined by the school. The location of the activity, such as practicing spelling words at home, becomes less important in understanding how literacy is constructed compared to the location or context in which the activity was sanctioned and the purpose for carrying out the activity. Sociotextual domains are fluid, multiple, and overlapping and there are no mutually exclusive categories.

Using the idea of sociotextual domains, I carried out various stages of data analysis. The first stage in data analysis involved reading all data many times to get a sense of the texts and social activities in which the Parkers engaged. My first few examinations of the data suggested about 35 categories of social activity involving texts. I wrote these categories into a list and numbered each in the order I wrote them down. Rereading through the data several more times, I added four additional categories I felt were not yet represented. I then went through each literacy event and wrote beside it the number of the categories of sociotextual activities fulfilled by the text used in the literacy event. Similar to the experiences of the CPLS team I acknowledged that often a literacy event was part of more than one sociotextual activity.

Instead of leaving my data separated into 39 sociotextual activity categories, I then examined each sociotextual activity for commonalities that could be combined to represent an encompassing sociotextual domain. I was then able to categorize the activities into 10 sociotextual domains. The 10 domains are school-based, medical-based, entertainment – digital technology, entertainment – relaxation and pleasure, social cohesion and interaction, work and finance, daily routines and personal care, interpersonal communication, bureaucracy, and memory and record keeping. After I sorted the sociotextual activities into sociotextual domains, I then sorted the data in terms of prevalence in the Parker family. I discuss the sociotextual domains in order of most prevalent to least in Chapter 4, Research Findings. As I examined the literacy events sorted into sociotextual activities within a domain, it became apparent that what I was

viewing as a sociotextual activity could also be viewed in terms of relating to a literacy practice according to Barton and Hamilton's (1998, 2000) definitions. I then was able to describe the literacy events relating to a literacy practice within a sociotextual domain. The sociotextual domains and related literacy practices are listed in Appendix F.

Transcription and Presentation of Data

I have attempted to present all transcriptions of data in this thesis as precisely as possible by using punctuation to represent intonations, inflections, and voice wherever possible. If necessary, I added annotations to the transcriptions to more accurately describe the experience. If I derived the data from a written text, it appears exactly as it looked during data collection.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the process of choosing and rationalizing the selected research methodology, how I recruited and selected participants, as well as the data collection techniques I used. Using an ethnographic case study approach, it was important that I exercise reflexivity and understand how who I am and how my beliefs, culture, and history fit into the data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the results. Purcell-Gates' (2007) notion of sociotextual domains influenced my analysis procedures and I described the processes I carried out in my stages of data interpretation and presentation.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction to the Parker Family Members

I have written the following introductions to the family members to provide a backdrop for understanding them through my eyes and to give a context in which to interpret the findings of the data collection.

Patrick Parker

Before any visits occurred, Ann wrote to me through email correspondence about her son Patrick. She wrote he was in Grade 6 at what she emphasized as a "normal" school. Next Ann briefly brought up some of Patrick's health concerns. He is currently coded under provincial and school district guidelines as "Medically Fragile" due to liver disease but also has just recently undergone assessments that indicate he has a learning disability. Statistics Canada (2001) reported that up to 72% of Canadian children aged 5 to 14 with disabilities actually have more than one recognized disability; therefore, I did not consider his medical concerns to be uncharacteristic of child with special needs. In Patrick's circumstance, the funding allotted for him at school changed back and forth between learning and medical needs throughout his schooling.

When he was two years old, Ann and Nick realized Patrick was developing at a different rate than his peers. They pursued testing through his paediatrician and then enrolled Patrick in early education classes aimed at providing him with basic academic and motor skills. Patrick participated in the

early education program from age two but concurrently he began to suffer from severe medical problems. Patrick visited many doctors and specialists who determined he had very rare autoimmune hepatitis. He endured countless blood tests, doctor visits, hospital stays, and painful episodes.

During one of my visits, Patrick confirmed with his mom that he has been admitted to the hospital over 70 times. As the family recounted Patrick's medical history to me as we stood around the kitchen peninsula, Ann must have noticed how I was overwhelmed with all the information. She went to the hall closet and pulled out a four-inch, white binder. She shared that she has kept all his medical reports, academic reports, and her own notes and questions in this binder, which dated back to when Ann and Nick first recognized Patrick had both developmental and medical needs. Ann also described to me a notebook she kept of mainly medical information, such as temperature she had taken when he was sick or what and how much medication she administered. Ann takes this book with her to appointments to record what the doctors say and so she can accurately present the medical happenings from home. Ann mentioned the book also plays a role in aiding discussion between her and Nick to help determine exactly what they heard from the doctor. She told me there have been situations in the past where she heard one thing and Nick heard something quite different.

When I first met Patrick he was days from celebrating his twelfth birthday. He sat at the family table, not reading but flipping through a board book from a set of children's books written by Kevin Henkes. He greeted me politely and returned to his book. After conversations began between me and the other family

members, Patrick started to add his comments. He told me how he had just returned from the eye doctor and that he no longer needed to wear glasses.

Patrick also has difficulties that are not medical or academic such as bedwetting. After numerous visits to doctors it was determined Patrick's bedwetting was not due to medical reasons and could be overcome. Ann and Nick visited two counsellors who helped them determine methods to aid Patrick, such as using an alarm that rings when the bed is wet and to use a chart to record how the night went. If Patrick kept his bed dry, he would record it on his chart posted on the refrigerator and then later be rewarded with two dollars for each dry night. If Patrick's bed is wet, he is responsible for cleaning it and bringing his linens to the washing machine. Patrick's nights are usually interrupted by a trip to the bathroom or a wet bed.

Patrick has a number of formal diagnoses from a variety of medical and psychological professionals. His diagnoses include autoimmune hepatitis, primary scherlosing cholangitis, inflammatory disease of the bile duct, generalized anxiety disorder, significant impairments in social communication, interpersonal relationships, and executive functioning, and a learning disability. He also visits a speech and language pathologist through the school board, a private literacy centre, a psychiatrist for his anxiety, a podiatrist, an optometrist, two gastrologists, and a paediatrician. He also gets blood work done on a regular basis sometimes as often as every second day.

As I came to know Patrick through information presented to me by his parents and sister and from his own interactions with me, I realized how different

his life was from the other 12-year-old boys I know. Although he loves video games, the computer, and swimming like many children his age, he has to experience pain, frustration, and confusion that many other children may never encounter.

Patrick is a loving and respectful individual who showed me many sociotextual domains of literacy in which he is competent. He showed me the level of support and effort required to raise a child with specific needs. He showed me his strengths and his passions. I saw disconnect between the Patrick at home and the Patrick described in his academic reports by his current teacher at school. In reference to his classroom teacher, Ann said to me one day, "She just doesn't get him". It was not until I completed my visits in the home and reread the Individualized Program Plan that I really understood what she meant.

Ann Parker

Ann holds many roles in her family. She is mother, wife, nurse, advocate, teacher, and record keeper. Her professional and educational history includes a Bachelor of Arts degree majoring in Psychology, being co-owner in a successful family business, and a Bachelor of Education after-degree, which she earned two years ago. She chooses to substitute teach when available and no longer has time for the family business. Ann spends a lot of time corresponding with medical and school professionals and sits on the committee for the after school care program at her children's school.

Ann grew up with a younger brother in a Polish-speaking family. She considers her first language to be Polish as that was the first language she learned

to speak. She still considers herself bilingual. Ann described how she learned to speak English by playing with other children in the neighbourhood and then later at school. She shared with me that her life growing up was good but her family life drastically changed when her father and grandfather were killed in a tragic car accident when she was eighteen years old. She had just enrolled in university at the insistence of her parents and followed through with attendance but she described the year as a "write off". When she completed university, she returned to the family business and continued to work there and care for her family until Patrick's diagnosis of chronic liver problems. At that point, she said she needed to be at home to take care of him. When she discussed her later return to school for her after-degree she said the experience was different and fun because it was her choice to go back to university. She noted that she would not force her children to go to post secondary school. "You want them to have that burn to learn," she said, "you put money into their RESPs and you hope but I don't think I would ever make them go. It needs to be their choice… [long pause]… but I worry for Patrick and I wonder how well he will function in society."

In describing her own early memories of literacy Ann said, "I remember learning to read, you know, I do remember that moment". Ann then explained how there were some books around but most were in Polish and inaccessible because she could not read Polish above a Grade 1 level. She occasionally witnessed her parents reading but said, "They were not big book readers". Interestingly, her mother is now a published author. Ann talked about how she

liked books and how she often visited the local library. She described herself as "a big reader".

Art and creative expression are a large part of Ann's life. When she described her beliefs about literacy, she stressed that she believed communicating through art and pictures was also a part of literacy, in addition to reading, writing, spelling and story telling. Around her home were pieces of art she completed as well as many supplies and books pertaining to art. During one particular interview with Ann, I observed her doodling while we were talking. I asked her about it and she said it helped her to relax. There were also times when Ann and Sarah would work on projects beside or with each other.

Nick Parker

The day I met Nick for the first time he was wiping his hands on a kitchen towel as he entered the dining room where I was seated with Ann, Patrick, and Sarah. He explained he was preparing to make bread as he often did. We shook hands and he joined us around the table.

Nick is a computer software programmer with regular work hours who takes public transit to work Monday to Friday. He has a Bachelor of Science degree for which he received the silver medal for his academic standing. Ten years later, he returned to university for a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree. As he recounted his academic history he told me how he and each member of his family, including his mother, father, and six siblings, attended the same university. He retrieved an on-line article and emailed it to me to read later. He was humble though, as he shared his accomplishments. Nick's interest in

computers is reflected in his choice of employment and in how he spends personal time. He also has a personal phone where he can create files, browse the internet, and send emails. He also purchased a similar device for Patrick less the phone option. I observed Nick using the computer to send email, work on the family taxes, and show me a website he uses for leisure activities. Nick also used the computer to help Sarah with typing posters for her science fair project.

Nick plays the piano, enjoys baking bread, and takes an active role in caring for their children. He participates in preparing meals, preparing Patrick's medications, and carrying out other household tasks.

Nick recounted many memories of traditions growing up in his family. He shared that he bakes bread for Holy Thursday, a custom carried out because of a tradition his parents started over forty years ago. He talked about his family's Holy Thursday meal consisting of bread, wine, grape juice, cheese, and fruit. "There are just some things you do because your parents are around," he commented. Nick also mentioned a special meatless Christmas Eve meal they share with his side of the family and how when he was a child, the "New Year's baby" filled stockings on New Year's Eve instead of at Christmas because of the number of children in the house and the plenitude of gifts under the Christmas tree. Although the Parkers carry on some traditions from Nick's childhood, he said he leaves the holidays to Ann because of her experience in the tableware and decorating business.

When talking about his memories of reading Nick shared, "I don't remember specifically being encouraged to read but there were lots of books in

the house, mostly children's books, the Dick and Jane variety, because both my parents were teachers". Nick reminisced about a specific science book he remembers and a mathematics coffee table book he read a lot. "I have been looking for one like it," he commented, "because I think the kids will really like it but I can't seem to find anything. I also remember the first novel I read in elementary, grade four or five, it was a science fiction novel and it was called *The Star Beast*. I read it from cover to cover because we were out camping and it was raining. I had bought it at the corner store because I liked the cover". Nick said he did not recall bedtime stories but he did remember reading recipes and cooking with his mother who was a home economics teacher. He also talked about enjoying typing on the typewriter and how Patrick, at one point also had an interest in "pecking away at one". When talking about writing Nick said, "My brother liked to do cartoons and we would make up stories; they were quite funny. I never had a strong writing background and that was always the hardest thing for me at school, writing essays and things, and I don't think it is because I am incapable of writing. I write a lot now for work. I also wrote a lot in my MBA but by then I figured it out. Before there was way too much focus on grammar and I don't think I was taught well because my essays didn't always make sense and I wasn't taught to build an essay." Most of Nick's current writing is work related, such as technical computer documents. "I am a bit picky about writing," he shared, "because I don't want people to be distracted by poor writing and I am correcting them [people at work] and making them do better".

Nick also participates in putting Patrick to bed. He mentioned Patrick used to want a story but now he just wants to talk. When Nick would read to Patrick, he had difficulty finding a book that would not scare his son. He said Patrick "gets easily freaked out if there is a skeleton in there or scary animal or dragons or dinosaurs which are 90% of kids books unless they are really girl oriented." He also said Patrick had trouble maintaining interest in longer chapter books and many of the choices available for his age group were too scary for him. Nick also mentioned, "I like reading a lot so I encourage the kids, like if Patrick says he's bored, I say read something". Nick considers himself a reader who chooses to read technical books for work, historical novels, and a variety of work related newsletters that come across his email.

Sarah Parker

Sarah is six years old in Grade 1 at the same elementary school as Patrick. When I first met her, she was shy for the first ten minutes. Following that initial experience, she willingly shared with me many things about herself. Sarah is outgoing and very talented in fine arts. Her interests currently lie in art, music, dance, and baton twirling. Each visit she presented me with a new music recital or dance routine. Sarah has much artistic strength and often showed me pictures of fairies she drew. Her art was carefully exhibited on the refrigerator, on a long piece of string hung in the living room, or precisely chosen for permanent display in her memory book. It was also randomly strewn around the house, left on the table, or on her bedroom floor and then collected by Ann or Nick and placed into one of many large cardboard boxes of Sarah's artwork. Sarah showed me a blue

ribbon she won for her work and beamed with pride each time she had a new fairy for me to view. Some of her interest in fairies seems to stem from her interest in the book series *Rainbow Magic*, which consists of chapter books above her independent reading level. She said she loves to listen to the books as her parents read them aloud or just to flip through the pictures. All of Sarah's newly acquired books she showed me throughout my data collection belonged to the *Rainbow Magic* book series.

According to her report card, Sarah's grades are considered average, however, she also suffers from anxiety and Ann believes this affects Sarah's academic potential. Ann also noted she might not have recognized Sarah's anxiety problems if it were not for her previous experiences with Patrick's anxiety. Sarah visited a counsellor and now proudly displays a sign in her room that boasts Sarah is "very, very brave and will try new things." Sarah reported she likes to read but she does not believe she is a good writer. "Well I don't really read that much," she commented, "but everyday I get home reading." Sarah demonstrated age appropriate competence on the computer and, although she could read little of the text, managed her way through pulling up and explaining the Tumblebooks (on-line storybooks) website she enjoys.

Ann described Sarah as a perfectionist who gets passionate about the things she enjoys. For example, Ann said when Sarah became interested in baton twirling she practiced all the time, always talked about it, and watched videos about it on the Internet. Ann suspects some of Sarah's troubles with writing come from her perfectionist personality because she does not want to do it if she cannot

do it perfectly. She also uses a lot of negative self-talk when she feels she may be unsuccessful.

Sarah shared with me that at school she sometimes plays with friends but mostly plays with Patrick at recess. Ann believes Sarah is not aware of Patrick's differences, although, Ann did share a recent conversation she had with Sarah in the car. Sarah said to Ann, "Patrick is different, isn't he?" Ann commented to me that she did not know how to respond because she was not sure about the context in which Sarah was asking the question so responded by saying, "Yes, he's different. Is there anything in particular?" Sarah's response was, "No, I just wanted to make sure."

Sociotextual Domains

As previously described in the discussion of my analysis procedures, the following 10 sociotextual domains, presented in order of most to least prevalent, were ascertained based on sociotextual activities in which the Parker family engaged. Each domain comprises dynamic and fluid categories of sociotextual activities that overlap other domains. The literacy events, or sociotextual activities, are just a snapshot representing a specific time and place and should not imply that if they were to occur again that they would be coded within the same domains. Literacy events are observable and therefore are described more accurately and easily than literacy practices. From the literacy events, information gained through interviews and conversations, and through member checking with the family I was able to infer literacy practices, keeping in mind that the literacy practices should be interpreted within the sociotextual domain in which they

occurred. Following is a description of examples of both literacy events and literacy practices for each sociotextual domain.

School-based Sociotextual Domain

The school-based sociotextual domain describes social activities involving text conducted in response to an activity of schooling whereby the school sanctions its purposes and practices. Within the school-based sociotextual domain, three general literacy practices emerged: carrying out or practicing a school-like activity, using text to communicate between home and school, and using text for home-school accountability.

School-based literacy events are observable episodes carried out at home that are typical of events that would occur at school, are a practice of school-like events, or carried out because of expectations of school. Throughout my visits, there was relatively fewer school-like literacy events carried out as practice or for doing homework than activities completed for reasons of communication with the school. Although the family shared and showed me the types of text-based activities the children engage in at home that are practice or homework, I seldom observed these events. One example of a school-based literacy event for practice or homework was when Patrick occasionally worked on an art activity that was overdue and that he was not interested in completing. Ann indicated it continued to come home in Patrick's backpack and there was no communication from the teacher suggesting if it should be completed.

When I asked both Patrick and his mother about the reading program Patrick uses at school, Ann noted the teacher expects Patrick to make his own

literature choices but he must choose from a variety of genres. He is not working with a levelled or individualized book system. Ann also noted that often Patrick will do his homework, for example a book report, on the computer and they will email it to the teacher. Ann mentioned to me that she needs to extensively be involved in helping Patrick complete his assignments, especially the monthly book report.

During one visit as we were looking through Patrick's backpack, he showed me his science workbook. Most of the work was completed and there was evidence of some scribing by an adult for a few assignments. Patrick, however, did not know why he brought the science book home or why he needed help for some worksheets. The book was there but he did not engage in any work with it and simply put it back in his backpack. I did not observe Patrick working on any writing or reading for school. Whether it is for pleasure or school Patrick said he does not "really read". "My dad said I need to read more," Patrick told me, "and I am trying to read more." There was evidence in the home of an abundance of both fiction and non-fiction literature available for both children and adults.

Sarah engaged in school-like activities for practice more so than Patrick did. Sarah practices reading daily using a levelled home reading program in which she brings books home from school at an independent reading level. The expectations of the teacher for Sarah's home reading and writing appeared clearer than those set by Patrick's teacher. There is an accountability form for the parents to sign after they have listened to Sarah read. I asked Sarah why she chose the books she did for that particular day and she commented they looked funny and

they were at her level. She read her books to Nick and he participated in helping her to identify the words she struggled with and then signed her form.

Sarah also participated in a school science fair by developing a project with her dad. The science fair is optional within the school and this was Sarah's second year of participation. Along with Nick, she planned the project, took pictures during the experiment, and then wrote about it using the computer. They then presented the information on a display board. Sarah also participated in practicing weekly spelling words. Ann wrote Sarah's spelling words on a piece of paper and posted them on the refrigerator. Sarah also engaged in spelling practice using an index card technique created by Ann in which Sarah needed to expand the spellings words into sentences. Ann helps her by writing the list and preparing the index cards each week. Ann mentioned spelling is a challenge for Sarah, and they take the extra time to work on spelling or find the best way to practice challenging words.

There are many labels around the house, especially on the children's toys. Ann said she labelled the children's belongings because of information she learned while Patrick was at an early education program. The intent was to increase Patrick's word recognition but also to teach organizational skills. Although she does not participate in labelling anymore, the labels are still present and other members of the family have mimicked the labelling process. For example, Sarah wrote "Cat zone" on a box designated for the cat. Patrick also used the toy box with labels on it in his room to keep his toys organized, even though the label no longer matched what was inside. "I keep the Pokemon cards

in the train box," Patrick told me. Ann also designated and labelled boxes for the children's backpacks and schoolwork that they still use regularly. Other writing or labels include both children's names spelled out in blocks or stickers in their rooms and framed pages from Dr. Seuss books on their walls.

Ann engaged in a school-based activity where she took an idea to create a doodle art project using positive and negative space from a math lesson she recently taught about mirrored images. She commented, "I'm either going to doodle or crochet or do something while I am talking," as she worked on a similar activity to her school lesson during a planned interview. She later revealed doodling helps her relax when she is nervous, suggesting this school-based text activity could also be coded in the relaxation or pleasure sociotextual domain.

There were many books visible around the house, some left open or left on the stairs for return to the children's rooms. There was a bookshelf of books and games in the living room as well as a bookcase full of books in each child's bedroom. There were also a number of adult books within the parents' room. In the kitchen, another bookshelf housed cookbooks, phonebooks, and some medical books. I noted art books and teaching books near the dining table in the dining room. It appeared that the Parkers had read some books between my data collection visits because books would be in different places, left open, or strewn on the floor or bedside table. I did observe both parents occasionally using cookbooks throughout various visits.

Communication between home and school and home-school accountability comprised the largest of the observed literacy events in the school-

based sociotextual domain. Each child had a daily agenda he or she brought back and forth which served as a communication book between parents, children, and teachers. Both agenda books contained information about if the children would be attending after school care that day, what the homework was if any, and if the child needed to leave school to attend an appointment. Ann mentioned she would also email the teacher if necessary or under time constraints.

Especially in Patrick's situation given the numerous appointments he attends, the agenda became the main medium for communication. Aside from writing school activities or events, Patrick also used his agenda to record personal memos. For example, on his birthday he wrote "My b-day" and on a weekend day he wrote "New nitedo electronic comeing out". Patrick told me if there is something he needs to record for school he uses his agenda and for anything else he uses the big family calendar. In addition to communication, the family and teacher used the agendas as accountability for homework because after reading it each party needed to sign a particular space on that day's page.

Both Patrick and Sarah brought home evidence of learning packages that contained examples of their work since the beginning of the year. This was most likely done to communicate the child's learning through text-based examples but also as an accountability measure to demonstrate if the child is meeting expectations. Sarah's reading log for her home reading program is also an example of communication and accountability because it is a place to write about what she is reading but also a way for parents to acknowledge they have completed the activity. Home reading, agendas, spelling words, science fairs, and

other literacy events in the school-based sociotextual domain were initiated by the school and were only carried out because of the expectations set out by the school.

Entertainment – Relaxation and Pleasure Sociotextual Domain

The entertainment – relaxation and pleasure sociotextual domain includes social activities involving text for the purposes of relaxation or pleasure. Within the entertainment for relaxation and pleasure sociotextual domain, four literacy practices emerged: using text for pleasure or to relax, for religious reasons, for personal writing, shopping, or decoration, and because of passions or interests.

Literacy events carried out for pleasure or relaxation were the most common among this entertainment sociotextual domain. Many literacy events were also associated with more than one literacy practice, for example for pleasure and decoration. These literacy events and practices in the entertainment sociotextual domain also overlapped many other sociotextual domains. For example, one of the first times I met Nick he was looking up a bread recipe in a cookbook. The literacy event of reading a cookbook stemmed from the literacy practice of reading for religious purposes, to bake bread for his Holy Thursday tradition, but also from the literacy practice to read for pleasure because the pleasurable activity of baking results.

Each member of the family engaged in reading for relaxation or pleasure. Ann shared with me the titles of the books she recently read and she said she tries to read at least half an hour before she goes to sleep each night. Her most recently read books include books surrounding Julia Child's life and cookbooks, as well as

Gabaldon's Outlander series. Nick also reads for pleasure or relaxation. Although he mostly reads contemporary paper books, he also downloads books to his personal phone and internet device to read them.

Patrick does not often engage independently in book reading for school but does occasionally engage in reading other texts, including fiction, non-fiction, and digital texts for pleasure or relaxation. He seems most often to choose reading material that has a mathematical, statistical, or logical association. He commented he enjoys reading maps and schedules and is very familiar with the city transit routes because of reading his collection of maps. Patrick also noted he likes reading Pokemon cards and has a large collection that he shares with Sarah. He also has a collection of book series, such as *Diary of a Wimpy Kid, Geronimo Stilton,* and *Thea Stilton*, as well as three cookbooks he has collected but he said he does not read them anymore. Patrick shared that he does enjoy reading Garfield comic books and I noted many available in the home. As well, at times the Garfield books appeared to have been read or looked at because they were in different places in the house, including Patrick's room. Patrick also has a very large collection of Monopoly board games that he enjoys playing alone or with his family.

On one occasion, I did observe Patrick flipping through a newly purchased non-fiction book about the Olympic Games. When I asked where the book came from he stated he just bought it at the bookstore that day and he chose it because he liked the pictures. In my opinion, it seemed the book was above his reading level but he did attempt to read to me some of the picture captions and parts of the

text. He easily became frustrated while reading and I needed to withdraw quickly from the situation as I sensed he would have stopped enjoying his new book and maybe even become emotional, either angry or crying. Throughout my data collection, there were occasions when Patrick quickly became emotional and did start to cry. For example, one day he was showing me a mostly incomplete writing workbook. It was just something he pulled out of his backpack to share a piece of his writing. Ann was looking through the booklet with us, this being the first time she had seen it, and we began to question him about the purpose of the activity and the times he was expected to work on it. At first, he was forthcoming with his responses but then quickly came to tears and started to walk away. Ann described his emotional reaction as typical and that it may have been a result of his perfectionist outlook combined with his anxiety. She said when Patrick cannot do something to the standards he sets for himself he will not try or will want to be so meticulous he will never complete what he started.

Sarah engaged in reading for pleasure. Her favourite book series is *Rainbow Magic* fairy books and she asks her parents to read them to her each night before bed. She also enjoys drawing fairies and she purchased a fairy post card book in which she used to write a postcard for her mom. Sarah also participated in writing "I LOVE MOM" on the window with window markers and participated in labelling and making signs. She made a sign for her room that said "ONLY GiRLS AllOWeD OtherWiSe You Will hAve to Be my DAD OR PATRICK" which she made to keep her male cousins who were visiting out of her room.

The other literacy events carried out for purposes of personal writing, shopping, passions, interests, and decoration were mainly used by Ann. Ann engaged in writing shopping lists, notes for appointments, decorating for holidays, for example putting a wooden display of the word SPRING on the front steps, and doing artwork.

Entertainment – Digital Technology Sociotextual Domain

The entertainment – digital technology sociotextual domain includes social activities involving text for the purpose of entertainment by means of media or technology. In this sociotextual domain, two literacy practices emerged: using text for entertainment with media and for entertainment with technology. The computer, video games, and I-Phones were a large part of using text-based activities for entertainment. Nick's field of work is within the computer industry yet he mentioned he spends at least eight additional hours a week on the computer solely for entertainment purposes. Both Nick and Ann use email to communicate with friends and family. In addition, Nick also uses the computer and his I-Phone to read the local newspapers, do his banking, and play on-line games. They also used the computer to download pictures and to copy documents. Ann mentioned that a while ago Nick would bring his I-phone to the table to look up information on the Internet to supplement dinner conversations and she felt she had to stop or limit those occurrences because she felt they were disruptive.

Both Sarah and Patrick also used the computer and video games for entertainment. Sarah used the computer to read and listen to Tumblebooks, which are online storybooks read aloud, and to play on websites such as Barbie. Sarah

was familiar with the sites her parents allowed her to visit and limited herself to those. Patrick used the computer to view the Garfield website, Mini-Clips, and You Tube. He also used his personal I-Touch to surf the internet, play Monopoly, and create documents.

Both Sarah and Patrick also participated in video game play. After Patrick purchased a new video game device, a Nintendo DS, he gave his old one to Sarah and they were able to play games with or against each other. According to the family's policy, each child is limited to thirty minutes a day of computer and video game time and one of the parents would put on a timer to signal when the time was over. The children also participated in watching television and again were limited to thirty minutes a day regulated by a timer. Ann shared this information about television time in their household: "Four years ago I went away for a week to Poland. At that time, Nick told the kids the TV was broken and this continued when I got back. They suffered withdrawal but did well. Then we sat down with them and told them the TV was working and there were new rules. TV is allowed when ill with half an hour on and half an hour off. If they are ready before having to leave for school, they can watch until 8:15. Friday night is pizza and movie night. Sometimes Patrick will do schoolwork for TV time but this does not always work as a motivator. In general, it is half an hour of computer and half an hour of Nintendo a day."

Social Cohesion and Interaction Sociotextual Domain

The social cohesion and interaction sociotextual domain involves social activities involving text whose purpose is to promote social cohesion, social

interaction, or to testify to social solidarity. Within the social cohesion and interaction sociotextual domain, eight literacy practices emerged: using text to further or confirm social cohesion, for interpersonal communication within the Parker family, as a form of community involvement, for religion or to uphold family traditions, for social purposes or social interaction, to advocate for the Parker children, by children while acting within adult roles, and when bonding with each other.

The social cohesion and interaction sociotextual domain contained literacy events most likely coded to other domains as well. For example, reading the cookbook to bake bread for a religious holiday was also coded under the entertainment domain but also could be coded as social cohesion or bonding. As Nick flipped through the cookbook, he tried to coax Sarah to join him in looking for the recipe. Just as the science fair project was coded school-based it could also be coded as social interaction or bonding because Nick and Sarah worked on it together.

The family often used texts and literacy events to bring them closer together. After Sarah was born, Ann purchased two books entitled *The Mommy Journal* to record the memorable comments or activities the children did when they were younger. As Ann read each child's book, there was obvious bonding occurring between mother and children. Sarah sat on Ann's lap and Patrick leaned in to his mom to listen and share memories. A similar experience occurred when the family was looking through family photographs and reading the captions written by Ann. The event of looking at the photo album brought the family closer

together and provided a moment for the parents to share some of their history with their children.

Ann belongs to a learning disability association and accesses information over an internet list serve. She receives an email newsletter from the organization and she said she hopes to attend some of the parent nights they advertise. Choosing to belong to the association and reading the newsletters suggests the literacy practices of social interaction and community involvement. It may also be for purposes of advocacy for her children, particularly Patrick.

I selected literacy events carried out for tradition purposes as part of the social cohesion sociotextual domain because they involve literacy practices aimed at passing on tradition and bringing family closer together. The Parker family engaged in a number of literacy events for the reason of tradition. For example, Ann shared they prepare various meals around family traditions, decorate for holidays, have family gatherings, and try to incorporate Ann's, Nick's, and their own traditions into the planning. When asked about traditions they experienced in the past having to do with literacy, both Ann and Nick had difficulty recalling any particular events; however, there was evidence of birthday cards sent to Patrick from his extended family, which I would consider a literacy practice carried out for purposes of tradition or bonding.

Sarah's avid love for art has produced a large quantity of artwork. Typically, it gets stored in a cardboard box but occasionally Nick and Sarah sit down together and choose the best work or their favourite piece of art for the month. They put the monthly favourite into a scrapbook and it can become a

bonding and social interaction moment to talk about the art and look back at all the other favourites.

Medical-based Sociotextual Domain

The medical-based sociotextual domain includes social activities involving text constructed or used in response to a medical need or purpose sanctioned by the parent or a medical professional. Within the medical-based sociotextual domain four literacy practices emerged: using text to carry out medical requirements, to advocate for Patrick's medical needs, for financial reasons due to medical requirements, and for personal or public writing.

Many medical-based literacy events and practices occur in the Parker family because of Patrick's medical needs. The parents, especially Ann, have participated in writing and reading about Patrick's needs. For example, Ann's notebooks of each child's symptoms, temperature, and medication information recorded when he or she is sick that she takes to and from doctors' appointments are an example of both personal and public writing. Included in the notebooks are Ann's personal notations about questions she has or of her interpretation of the experience, as well as records of the advice or questions of the doctor; however, the information is also written to share with healthcare professionals. Ann also has a large binder in which she stores all of Patrick's assessments and letters pertaining to school. Copies of his report cards, Individualized Program Plans, and diagnostic reports are also chronologically stored in the binder. Throughout the binder, there are additional notes or remarks made by Ann on separate sheets or directly on the reports.

Patrick takes daily medications and recently has learned to take them independently. He is able to read the label on the bottle to determine if he is taking the correct medication, although, Nick usually pre-measures the liquid medicines because they are very expensive. In addition, I noted during one visit Patrick carried a brown envelope in his backpack containing speech and language pathologist activities and practice sheets. It was his eight-week turn in the speech therapy rotation within the school system. During the eight weeks, he carries study sheets for himself and his parents, practice activities and worksheets, and a communication form between the parents and therapist.

Medical literacy events described in the medical-based sociotextual domain also overlap other sociotextual domains. For example, Nick's research on how Patrick's medical expenses fit into the family's tax return (also financial sociotextual domain), Patrick's chart for recording his bedwetting (also record keeping sociotextual domain), writing Patrick's medical appointments on the calendar and in his agenda (also memory keeping sociotextual domain), and Ann looking for medical information on-line (also using digital technology sociotextual domain).

Memory and Record Keeping Sociotextual Domain

The family's memory and record keeping sociotextual domain includes social activities involving text used in response to or for purposes of record keeping or memory. Within the memory and record keeping sociotextual domain, three literacy practices emerged: using text to record information for memory, to keep records, and for interpersonal communication within the Parker family.

Memory and record keeping literacy events were valued in the Parker home. Ann recalled learning about the importance of using a calendar from Patrick's early education teachers and since has tried to teach both him and Sarah about using a calendar. In their home, the Parker's use a number of ways to record information. During my first visit to the family's home, Ann introduced me to the oversized family calendar that hangs on a cupboard door in the kitchen. This is where the family records events they will attend, appointments, and special events. In talking about recording appointments, Patrick mentioned he also uses it to check and record upcoming activities and special occasions.

As previously mentioned each child had a school agenda used to record homework, whether they should come home or go to the afterschool care, and highlight when Patrick has appointments occurring during the school day. Nick used his I-Pod phone to record his events or personal reminders in addition to using the family calendar.

Ann often engaged in writing lists, such as grocery lists, lists of topics to discuss with Nick, lists of Patrick's particular needs, charts for allowance or recording bedwetting, and regularly used the calendar. Ann also participated in creating photo albums and writing in her Mommy Journals. Sarah's art memory book, list of spelling words, and list of home reading books would also fit into the memory and record keeping sociotextual domain.

Interpersonal Communication Sociotextual Domain

The interpersonal communication and sociotextual domain includes social activities involving text conducted to facilitate communication with family

members. Within the interpersonal communication sociotextual domain, three literacy practices emerged: using text for personal writing, to carry out passions, and for bonding.

Literacy events included Sarah writing "I LOVE MOM" on the window and a fairy postcard to Ann, Patrick's birthday cards displayed on the kitchen table, stencilled message above the kitchen window that says "May our house be warm and our friends be many," Ann's list of topics she wrote to discuss with Nick, and the photo albums. The main area for textual interpersonal communication is the family refrigerator door. This is where many of the charts and lists are posted, as well as artwork, inspirational messages, and school calendars. Ann and Nick also both regularly use email. Nick's email goes directly to his phone and I observed him frequently checking it. Ann seemed to use her email often as well, as she would respond to my emails within hours of receiving them.

Daily Routines and Personal Care Sociotextual Domain

The daily routines and personal care sociotextual domain includes social activities involving text conducted to carry out daily repeated or purposeful activities or for reasons of personal care and health. Within the daily routines and personal care sociotextual domain, three literacy practices emerged: using texts to perform daily routines, for personal care, and to provide food or nutrition.

Literacy events included using cookbooks for baking and cooking, lists of Patrick's daily activities posted on the refrigerator, labelling toy bins, labelling hat and mitten boxes at the back door, Patrick's bedwetting chart, emergency phone

numbers taped to the bookcase in the kitchen, and expression emoticons posted on the fridge paired with a list of emotion words for Patrick to reference.

Nick and Ann often use timers as part of their daily routines to help the children regulate their screen time. For example, one parent would set the timer on the television for thirty minutes so that it automatically turns off when the time is up. They also use timers for computer and videogame time. Ann recalled she read somewhere that the children do not blame the parent when the timer ends as they would if the parent went up and turned off the television herself. Ann said the timers help to prevent Patrick from having meltdowns because he understands how they work and why they are used. Nick commented that Sarah and Patrick are learning to regulate the timers themselves.

Ann talked about how she and Nick want to incorporate more chores into their routines. They have tried using a money allowance and use a chart taped to the refrigerator to mark when and if certain chores have been completed.

Work and Finance Sociotextual Domain

The work and finance sociotextual domain includes social activities involving text conducted for purposes of work or family finance. Within the work and finance sociotextual domain, three literacy practices emerged: using text to manage the Parker family finances, using text that would be used at work or for purposes of work, and using text to learn through public writing.

Mostly Nick carried out literacy events for work or finances. He paid family bills on-line, used email for work, did the family taxes, and read the newspapers on-line. Patrick participated in a finance literacy event when he

created an electronic chart to keep track of the gift cards he received for his birthday.

Bureaucracy Sociotextual Domain

The bureaucracy sociotextual domain includes social activities involving text used for official or enforced purposes. Within the bureaucracy sociotextual domain, three literacy practices emerged: using text for social purposes, to advocate for Patrick and Sarah, and for bureaucratic interests.

Literacy events falling into the bureaucracy sociotextual domain include filling out consent forms for academic and psychological testing, completing and revising applications for funding from a government agency, contributing to Patrick's Individualized Program Plan, and signing the children's report cards.

Recurring Notable Topics

In addition to the 10 sociotextual domains discussed above, three additional recurring topics emerged through discussions with Ann and Nick. The parents raised these topics in differing contexts and the topics seemed to penetrate each domain. Although the following topics do not necessarily reflect specific sociotextual activities, they made an impact on what, how, when, and why the family members carried out certain activities, and they warrant further discussion.

The Relationship between Home and School and Differences in Expectations

It was not surprising the relationship between home and school entered many discussions involving literacy events and practices, as some of what I heard from Ann and Nick reverberated concerns I have previously heard from other parents of children with a learning disability. My research of the history of the

home-school relationship as outlined in Chapter 1 of this thesis reveals general disconnects between home and school perceptions of the child that have been occurring over the last 100 years. Ann mentioned she knows Patrick's "range" and she does not believe the teacher's expectations are realistic of Patrick's abilities. She gave the example of a homework activity sent home in which Patrick was expected to write three paragraphs. Ann asked Patrick to write three sentences and Patrick began to argue that his teacher told him he needed three paragraphs. Ann told me the outcome usually resulted in her sending an email to the teacher to tell what both she and Patrick agreed was reasonable. This was mainly to reassure Patrick that he would not get in trouble at school. Ann said, "I've had to make some compromises on my own with homework whereas I don't think other teachers would have even done that to me. This teacher gave me an awareness that he wouldn't do well integrated into junior high because if this teacher can't get him, how can I expect a number of teachers to."

Ann also felt the teacher was overly concerned with the looming provincial achievement tests and she was trying to force information into the students. Psychological and academic reporting, as well as comments from Ann, clearly indicates Patrick's difficulties with both short and long-term memory and Ann questioned the appropriateness of the memorization techniques implemented by the teacher. For example, the teacher required Patrick to memorize the planets because they would be on the provincial test. Ann did not believe this was a reasonable task to ask of Patrick, as memorization is very difficult and frustrating for him. Ann also talked about how she is more vocal this year than previous

years with Patrick's teacher because the teacher often sends work home that he could not do at school. "I think if he can't do it there," Ann commented, "how do you expect me to get it done at home. The ability is not there or the time either."

My research of the home-school relationship and the perception of parents by educators, in addition to the insight I gained from this study, suggests there has been a long history of negative and deficit attitudes towards parents and their capacity to support their children's literacy growth. Conversely, current sociocultural and vernacular literacy research suggests and recognizes the beneficial and significant literacies learned outside of school. Although deficit standpoints linger, talking about and focusing on what a child can do in all aspects, places, and times in his or her life can help parents and teachers to collaboratively "focus on what matters most in literacy learning: evolving readers and their desire to rethink their place in the world" (Klassen Endrizzi, 2008, p. 211).

Self-Motivation

Often Ann or Nick expressed concerns that Patrick was not motivated to carry out activities that might fit into the school-based sociotextual domain or to choose text-based activities for relaxation or pleasure. They both discussed feeling that this affected Patrick's literacy growth. Ann described she and Nick visited two different counsellors for help with Patrick's motivation. The first counsellor asked them to describe what motivates Patrick. The only thing the Parkers could think of was money. Ann described to me how Patrick has always been fascinated with money but that Nick did not like the idea because he said, "it

was too much like paying your child to do it or not to do it". The second counsellor approached Patrick's motivation in the same way and Ann said he told them to use money if that is what really motivates him. They used the idea to help Patrick keep his bed dry and created a chart for paying him for each successful night. Both parents agree that this system seems to be working.

At school, however, Ann suggested Patrick is still quite unmotivated and the teacher has been unsuccessful in motivating him especially to independently engage in tasks or group work. Ann mentioned though, when something is important to Patrick, he will work at it despite having challenges with short-term memory. She described that Patrick enjoys technology and worked a very long time to learn the short cut keys on the computer keyboard and has retained the information. He occasionally offers short cut suggestions to his mom while she is working at the computer. Besides the short cut key example, however, both Ann and Nick had difficulty describing Patrick being intrinsically motivated for other tasks. A phrase I often heard from Ann or Nick was similar to, "he used to like that but not anymore" or "he used to read that but not anymore". Patrick's limited self-motivation seems to be an area of concern both at home and school.

The Impact of Medical Conditions

Spending time with the Parker family truly demonstrated how Patrick's medical conditions, both physical and cognitive, permeated many areas of the Parker's lives beyond those specifically related to medical needs. They attend numerous visits to medical, academic, and psychological professionals and use that knowledge to create routines for Patrick or to learn new strategies to help him

both academically and medically. Limited academic support through the school system has compelled the Parkers to seek tutoring through an intense and very expensive private organization. Ann's career has also been affected by Patrick's needs, as she had to stop working with her family business when Patrick was a toddler to stay home with him and have more time to attend to his needs. Just recently is she able to return to work but only on a substitute teacher basis so she has to flexibility to take Patrick to his various appointments. Even Sarah's social skills and happenings at school are affected because she plays with Patrick each recess or he plays with her and her friends.

McCoy (2007) believes the type of disability is a factor that forms experiences and is integral to the development of the individual's body of knowledge, or schemata. He states language and learning disabilities often include delayed expressive and/or receptive communication, which result in less engagement in social interaction. The limited social interaction impoverishes the schemata, which is an important source for acquiring incidental knowledge, or literacies in multiple sociotextual domains, gained informally from life experiences. In Patrick's case, both his medical and academic needs have influenced many decisions made by the Parker family. Although the other members of the family are not directly affected by Patrick's conditions, each family member's life has been changed, modified, or inspired by who Patrick is and how he needs to live his life.

Chapter Summary

The research findings of this study include a background of each family member's experiences with literacy, any pertinent medical or psychological conditions, and attitudes or thoughts towards some text-based activities. The findings also include detailed descriptions of the Parkers' text-based activities and how those activities fit into my understanding of the sociotextual domains of their family life. The analysis of the Parker's sociotextual activities can be compared to the findings of Purcell-Gates (2007) in that the activities seemed to be fluid, dynamic, and changing among sociotextual domains and they changed depending on the participants involved.

I also discovered three recurring and quite significant topics that did not fit in with the analysis of sociotextual activities but warranted further reflection. Each topic affected many social interactions and decisions made within the Parker household. I believe the topics of the home-school relationship and the differing opinions between the family and the teacher, Patrick's self-motivation, and the impact of medical conditions on the family, played a role in how literacy was construed and constructed by the Parkers.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Discussion of Key Findings

The previous chapter described the literacy events and practices of the Parker family. The purpose of Chapter 5 is to discuss in detail the findings, implications, and limitations of this research. This chapter concludes with a discussion of reflections and potential future directions suggested by this study. There are five key findings from this study:

1. Ten sociotextual domains, that is, *"social textual activities that reflect social relationships, roles, purposes, aims, goals, and social expectations"* (Purcell-Gates, 2007, p. 20) were identified as significant in the construction of literacy within the Parker family.
2. Three notable recurring topics, not specific to any particular sociotextual domain, were identified as playing a role in the construction of literacy.
3. Parental influence can affect the construction of literacy within the family.
4. Specialized support was necessary for the construction of literacy for the child with a learning disability.
5. Deficit theories continue to exist, which may affect literacy development, support of school-based literacies at home or out-of-school literacies at school, and consequently the home-school relationship.

The Parker family engaged in numerous text-based activities reflecting a number of social relationships, roles, purposes, aims, goals, and social expectations. Through analysis, I identified ten sociotextual domains in which I could categorize the Parkers' literacy events and practices. Referring back to my detailed description of sociotextual domains given in Chapter 3, I want to reiterate that the word *domain*, in the term *sociotextual domain*, does not necessarily reference a location or setting but refers to text-based activities that would be performed within, and mostly likely in response to, activities that may be performed there. Sociotextual domains also reflect the purposes and practices sanctioned by the setting or through participation in that activity.

The sociotextual domain most observed was the school-based sociotextual domain. Interestingly, the most frequently observed literacy events and practices were for purposes of communication and accountability. The nature of communication and the accountability expected of the parents for completing homework reflected the social relationship between the parents and school. Teachers prescribed homework and shared daily announcements and parents shared critical information, such as out-of-school appointments and attendance at the after school care program. Confirmation that both parties read the communication forms was required on most documents. Home-school accountability seemed vital to maintaining a relationship between the classroom teacher and the parents. Examples of both formal and informal communication are the daily agenda book, quick notes written on paper, standard documents, such as

Sarah's home reading log and the speech and language pathologist communication form, and email.

In Chapter 4, the sociotextual domains are described in order of most to least frequently observed. Further examination of the domains also revealed that the domains are listed in an order that also shows that not only more of those events occurred but also that each event occurred more often. For example, activities such as bedtime stories typically occurred on a daily or regular basis. Many researchers (Phillips, Hayden & Norris, 2006; Street, 2005, and Taylor, 1983) called for additional research examining how children growing up in a variety of settings, in this case a home with a child with a learning disability, interact with educational influences and the subsequent effect on literacy development. Noting that the school-based sociotextual domain was most prevalent may suggest that educational influences play a large role in what activities and practices are carried out in the Parker family. It may also reflect this family's attitude towards the importance of school.

The activities included in the less prevalent domains occurred less often. For example, the least frequently observed sociotextual domain was the bureaucracy sociotextual domain. Only occasionally did I observe a family member, mainly a parent, perform a literacy event or practice for bureaucratic purposes such as filling out forms for funding or signing a legal document. This may be because these types of activities are not required daily and are for very specific purposes.

The thorough examination and detailed description of the Parker's literacy events and practices within sociotextual domains challenges traditional beliefs

about literacy. The results of this study, as well as the 10 identified sociotextual domains, complement current research supporting the sociocultural perspective on literacy development, New Literacy Studies, and family literacy theory and program development. The Parkers have demonstrated through their vast use of text within their home that we should no longer consider literacy to be an acquired set of skills. Through their social interactions, their choices of literacy activities based on social or cultural purposes, and their awareness of social expectations, the Parkers constructed and used many literacies within their family.

The second key finding of this study is the recognition of three topics that recurred throughout data collection and analysis. The first topic, the home-school relationship and differences in expectations, seemed to arise each time Ann talked about the teacher, the school, or Patrick's Individualized Program Plan (IPP). It was clear that the parents and the teachers held quite different expectations of Patrick's school-based abilities. At times, Ann felt the teacher's expectations were too high for Patrick, and Ann readjusted the expectation, such as a homework activity, to meet her expectations of Patrick. At other times, Ann felt the teacher was not asking enough of Patrick, but this was on rare occasion. These differences in expectations affected Ann's relationship with the teacher. Ann felt comfortable adjusting expectations for Patrick's schoolwork at home, but seemed to have difficulty confronting the teacher about larger issues, such as the IPP goals set for Patrick. Although Ann appeared uncomfortable with what was written on Patrick's IPP, it was not until the Spring that she was able to articulate this to his teacher. Ann also felt that at parent-teacher conferences the teacher presented only

the work that she completed at home with Patrick. Differences in expectations between the parents and the teacher also made homework time confusing for Patrick. It seemed at times he was unsure if he should allow his mother to change the homework assignment and requested on occasion that she send the teacher an email to confirm if the change was acceptable.

In her book, *Becoming Teammates: Teachers and Families as Literacy Partners,* Charlene Klassen Endrizzi (2008) discussed that the biggest advocates for children's literacy success were the parents. Parents often sought help from many avenues beyond the school, especially when the child struggled with reading. In reflection of forging a partnership with parents through her literacy project, Klassen Endrizzi noted the teacher's focus was literacy development but the parents' focus was advocacy for their children. These different perspectives affirm the need for dialogue between families and teachers. In Klassen Endrizzi's study of a family literacy group, the experiences of the parents, conversations, sharing of stories, and dialogue, with not only the teacher but also other parents, evolved their stance of advocates of their own children to general advocates of literacy. Parents came to critically analyze literacy from new perspectives and to share alternatives and suggestions with other parents. Nickola Wolf Nelson (2010) recently wrote, "Each person's world view may appear to him or her to be the only normal way to function. In fact, it is difficult to step outside and see one's world view as others see it, which may not be normal at all" (p. 83). Sometimes to clarify or see another person's perspective we need to have an either spoken or written conversation.

The second topic, self-motivation, also occurred frequently in discussion with Patrick's parents, especially Ann. Both Ann and Nick described changes in Patrick's self-motivation over time and had difficulty describing what currently motivates him. Patrick's lack of self-motivation was most apparent in the school-based, entertainment for relaxation and pleasure, and daily routines and personal care sociotextual domains. Patrick had difficulty describing what motivates him or even describing his favourite text-based activities, such as reading a particular book.

Lerner and Kline (2006) suggest children with learning disabilities may appear to be unmotivated, but their lack of motivation may actually result from chronic academic failure. Like Patrick, and what his parents describe as perfectionism, many children with learning disabilities view their achievement as futile and do not want to try if they think they are going to fail anyway. Lerner and Kline suggest two ways to help children with learning disabilities improve their motivation. The first is to look at factors to which they attribute their success. Children with learning disabilities tend to attribute their success to outside factors, such as luck or the teacher, and blame their failure on their lack of ability, the difficulty of the task, or something random. Lerner and Kline suggest we should guide children with learning disabilities to build internal attribution through statements outlining the specific contribution the children made to their success to bring awareness to their capabilities and strengths. The second method to improving motivation as recommended by Lerner and Kline is cognitive

behaviour modification, which includes teaching children to talk to themselves, give themselves instructions, and reward themselves verbally for success.

A child's motivation can affect his construction of literacy. If he lacks motivation particularly for literacy-based activities, he will not choose to engage independently in them. If he is forced to do something in which he is not personally motivated, how he engages with the task and what he brings to the task, such as prior knowledge, social and cultural beliefs, and attitudes, will be limited.

The third topic, the impact of medical conditions, seems to permeate all of the identified sociotextual domains and appears to affect many literacy related decisions made within the family. Although it seems the family members were not always cognizant of the impact of Patrick's medical conditions, I could decipher through their comments and actions how medical conditions influenced happenings within the home. One example is how Ann began using a family calendar as a practical place to help Patrick begin to identify letters, numbers, and familiar pictures and to help him develop a sense of routine and record keeping. Although Patrick can now recognize all the names and numbers on the calendar, the family continues to use a shared calendar. Another example is Ann's development of a system to organize all of Patrick's academic and medial reports. She needed to find a way to keep track of his ongoing symptoms, which she did in her medical notebooks, and keep track of the paperwork involved with testing and reporting, which she did in her large, white binder. Patrick's needs also affected areas such as the family's finances and expenses, time required for appointments

and paperwork, extracurricular activities and tutoring, routines such as bedtime stories, and social relationships with other families and children. Patrick missed considerable amounts of school because of hospital stays, and his needs drastically affected Ann's career life and her role in her family's business. This study highlighted how substantial the impact of medical conditions is on the literate lives of a family and also how medical conditions can affect many facets of family life.

The third key finding of this study is the sense of how parental influence affected the construction of literacy within the family. The parents' personal histories with literacy affected the continuation or discontinuation of certain family traditions, their beliefs about post-secondary education for their children, the books they hope their children will read, and the extracurricular activities in which they enrol their children. Particularly in the Parker home, parental influence also affected how long or how frequently a child was engaged with a text. For example, the Parkers often used timers to regulate screen time, such as computer time, television watching, or video game playing. The parents also regulated the websites the children were allowed to visit and purchased the digital devices, such as the Nintendo DS and I-Pod Touch that the children were allowed to use. The parents, their past literacy experiences and their current beliefs of literacy, played a large role in their children's construction and use of literacy within the home.

The fourth key finding of this study is that specialized support was necessary for the construction of literacy for Patrick due to his learning disability.

Although his formal diagnosis of learning disability is quite recent, Ann and Nick both noted they had concerns about Patrick's cognitive development from a very early age. In terms of Patrick's literacy development over time, he required the support of a pre-kindergarten early education program, multiple speech and language pathologists, and specialized private tutoring programs. Patrick only received support at school for brief periods because at times the standardized testing he received did not warrant additional funding. This meant no additional assistance at school apart from volunteer study buddies. Consistently though, Ann and Nick enrolled Patrick in out-of-school programs to support his literacy development and tried to apply strategies learned at those programs to home literacy activities. Although Patrick now is coded in his school district as having a learning disability, Ann and Nick have recognized that Patrick requires more specialized attention than he would receive in a regular classroom on an IPP. As he transitions to junior high school, Patrick's parents have enrolled him in a segregated school for children with learning disabilities. It was clear from this study that this child with learning disabilities required extra support, both at home and school. The school was not always able to meet his needs in the ways expected by the family and therefore the family needed to seek alternative help. Seeking assistance beyond school resources for children with learning challenges is quite common (Klassen Endrizzi, 2008) and there are multiple programs, which are often very expensive, developed to support families and provide additional tutoring and help.

The fifth key finding of this study is that it seems deficit theories continue to exist. Deficit mindsets may affect literacy development, support of school-based literacies at home or out-of-school literacies at school, and consequently the home-school relationship. Although the use of deficit theories is less frequent in scholarly research than they were in the mid to late 1900s, deficit theories still linger. Currently, parental income and level of parental education are considered factors in the success of children in school; this reflects deficiency attitudes of the past. Books such as *How to Handle Hard-to-Handle Parents* by Maryln Appelbaum (2009) still present the teacher as the expert who has to "handle" parents, as opposed to the teacher as a teammate in a collaborative relationship with parents to help improve children's learning. Teachers who have difficulty seeing the value in home literacy practices and seeing the parent or child as an expert on vernacular literacies may not promote the development of children's multiple literacies at school.

Implications

Through this case study, I hoped to answer the question what literacy events and literacy practices are occurring in one Canadian home with an elementary school aged child with a learning disability. The research study presents numerous text-based activities in many sociotextual domains and helps to clarify understanding of literacy events and literacy practices. Heath (1983), Barton (1994, 2000), and Barton and Hamilton (2000) provided concise definitions of literacy events, which generally speaking, are observable episodes in which literacy plays a role. The simplicity of the definition of literacy events

helped to identify such events; however, identifying literacy practices required a complex process. Hamilton's (2000) discussion of using photographs to explore literacy as social practice presented me with a means to explore closely the literacy practice in some situations. Using photographs to document literacy events was a valuable data collection tool that captured fleeting scenarios in which I could use later to infer many non-visible constituents of the literacy practice. Such constituents include the hidden participants, the domain of practice (setting but also social purpose), the structured routines, rules, and pathways that facilitate and regulate actions, and all other resources brought to the literacy practice such as values, skills, knowledge, feelings and ways of thinking (Hamilton, 2000). Because I was not privy to what the participants were thinking or feeling at the time of the literacy events, my inferences of their literacy practices often needed to be corroborated through member checking with the family. Through my research, I found literacy practices are not just carrying out a text-based activity or making use of literacy, but are the social or cultural circumstance in which they are occurring that nurtures, develops, and sustains the construction of literacy.

This research study reveals the importance of social, cultural, and family literacy in enabling multiple literacies to be constructed and to exist within multiple settings. James Paul Gee (2008) suggests that a way of reading a certain type of text is acquired when one is embedded as a member of a social practice and learns in a "native-like" way, through not only reading certain texts but talking about the text, holding certain values and attitudes about the text, and

socially interacting with the texts in specific ways. The sociotextual activities carried out by the Parker family demonstrate how each member has acquired new and multiple literacies by interacting with texts and other family members in numerous social contexts. This suggests there may be a necessity for recognizing the interactions with text beyond school, especially in other social settings like the home.

Often the Parker's interactions with text involved another family member, which also highlighted a need for socialization into a literacy practice of learning how to read a certain text in a certain way by someone who has had previous experience with the text (Gee, 2008). In my observations of the Parker's interactions with text at various times, I observed each member acting as the expert with the text. For example, on one occasion I observed Patrick acting as the expert with Garfield comics. He was recounting his favourite cartoon to me, while his family listened and waited patiently for the punch line. When Patrick was finished, his sister and parents began to ask Patrick to remind them of other familiar Garfield jokes. Reading a comic book or cartoon strip requires certain abilities and the Parkers recognized Patrick as the expert within their family. Patrick's retelling of the comic or joke from a Garfield book could be analysed using many sociotextual domains, such as entertainment, social interaction, or even bonding, but it can also be viewed from the perspective that Patrick was the most familiar with Garfield comics within the family and thus considered the expert. The social interaction that followed Patrick's joke, that is, the request from his family for more jokes, highlighted as Gee suggested that reading or

understanding certain texts can be developed through talking about the text, holding values about the text, and socially interacting over the text. The example of the Garfield joke also emphasizes the need to be socialized into a literacy practice of engaging with a text by someone with previous experience with it.

In addition to the relationship between socialization and developing literacy, Gee (2008) also suggests that a literacy event or practice can never be replicated because after we engage in the activity we now have experience with it to connect to and learn from for future experiences. Even during the limited time I spent with the Parker family, I observed growth and change in their literacy development. For example, I observed change in the children's digital literacy while playing video games. My first observation was of Sarah leaning over Patrick's shoulder just watching. The next observation on another day was of Sarah helping Patrick to read the clue or hint manual for the game. A subsequent observation was of both children playing on their own devices but playing with each other on the screen (the game devices were connected and both children were controlling their own character but saw the same screen on their own device, with the ability for their characters to interact with each other). In their interactions, I observed one participant acting as the more experienced, in this case Patrick. As well, I observed the sociotextual purpose of the practice of playing video games crossing many sociotextual domain borders, such as social cohesion, bonding, entertainment, and social interaction. This experience reflects Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development theory. Specifically how Sarah learned to play the video game through social interactions with the more

experienced Patrick demonstrates scaffolding occurring between the siblings, which helped Sarah to move from beginner/observer to full participant.

The notion that literacy events and practices are fluid, multiple, and can be represented in more than one sociotextual domain (Purcell-Gates, 2007) speaks to the complexity of how literacy is created and regulated by social experiences and must be interpreted within the time, place, and circumstance they occurred. The Parker's sociotextual activities could often be represented as part of many sociotextual domains, which suggests it may not be possible, or necessary, to delineate any activity into only one particular category. The analysis of my research demonstrates the construction of literacy involves several influences, which reveal social relationships, purposes or goals, or social expectations. Looking at the data through a sociotextual domain perspective reflects literacy as social and multiple. The overlapping of domains demonstrates that literacy practices occur for varied purposes and may change or be different at other times, places, or with different contributors. Embedded within the literacy events and practices carried out by the Parker's, it can be recognized and inferred that discourse, interaction, thoughts, values and beliefs became a part of the literacy constructed and used in their home. Literacy is both emotional and reflective; literacy practices that promote social cohesion or bonding or involve interactions with other people reinforce that literacy is much more than a set of skills. Literacy includes feelings, thoughts, social and cultural expectations and becomes a part of how one's individual literacy is constructed.

The findings of this study also present implications and considerations that may affect program development. The texts Patrick chose at home for purposes other than homework were very different from what he would be expected to read at school. This could be due to the challenges with literacy he experiences at school as perhaps he is associating a certain type a text with uncomfortable feelings and avoids them when given a choice. His parents' description of his reduced interest in traditional books and stories may suggest Patrick's use and potential enjoyment of traditional texts has been limited outside of school and may be affecting his school-based literacy development. In developing a literacy plan for Patrick, having knowledge of what texts he does choose independently could help Patrick begin to experience success with texts at school in which he already feels comfortable and secure using.

Overall this study contributes to developing the theory that literacy is multiple and socially and culturally constructed for all, including children with learning disabilities. Through a detailed description, it also brings to light the realities faced by one family, the Parkers, whose lives and literacies are directly affected by the cognitive and medical challenges faced by their son as he negotiates the demands of interacting with text in multiple sociotextual domains. Patrick Parker's needs pervade and influence many literacy and text-related decisions made within the household. His family recognizes the routines of daily living are and always will be different. This could suggest that we need to recognize medical issues might also impact school routines and practices.

Knowing this may benefit programs developed for Patrick and for other children with special needs.

Scholarly research presents a reasonable understanding of learning disabilities and how they affect schooling but exploring the ways children with learning disabilities actually use literacy in their lives, as I have done with Patrick, can impact literacy programs and instruction at school. This study revealed how many factors, such as motivation, expectations, medical conditions, parental influence, and even the support received at school affected what text-based activities Patrick engaged with and used in his daily life. Children with learning disabilities are different in their functioning and processing of information than their same age peers (Wolf Nelson, 2010) so perhaps we also need to approach their literacy development in different ways.

The ethnographic case study approach I used for this study provides a new way to look at the Parker's home literacy practices, as they constitute Patrick's literate realities. Having additional knowledge of literacies in different contexts can help teachers to look at individual situations in contextualized ways. Street (2001) reminds us we cannot assume that one approach to learning will work in another context until we have studied that context and we cannot simply impose apparently effective methods and expect to see the same results everywhere. Viewing individual cases obliges us to suspend judgement on such methods until we better understand the context in which they are being applied (Street, 2001). For children with learning disabilities, such as Patrick, we need to consider the

areas in which success is experienced, whether in or out-of-school and build upon those.

Ribbins (2008) suggests there are too many well-intentioned but ill-prepared and unsupported teachers in mainstream schools struggling and failing to meet the needs of students with special needs. He also suggests the problems are compounded by pressures to integrate students with special needs into mainstream settings. The Parker family noted Patrick did not receive needed educational assistant time at his current school and are now enrolling him in a segregated site for children with learning disabilities. Collaboration between home and school could ease the pressures of programming for students with learning disabilities, especially with current movements to full inclusion. In 2001, Street wrote, "such grounded accounts of local responses to apparently liberal programs remind us that people's perspectives on literacy may be very different from those of program designers and western educators. I hope we will be able to listen to such views and learn how to design more culturally sensitive programs than those which culturally dominate the agenda, based on grounded accounts of which literacies people need" (p 15). This study points to a need to improve communication to resolve differences in expectations and reduce the residue of deficit mindsets, as well as to be able to work together to increase the construction of literacy for all children, including children with special needs.

Looking to literacy strengths in other contexts, such as the home, can help teachers to build upon many literacy strengths of the child held in other sociotextual domains outside of school-based domains. Discovering literacies

cross borders of many sociotextual domains may suggest that isolating the school-based domain may not be in the best interest of supporting the overall literacy development of children. Understanding and applying this idea requires a shift in thinking to recognize literacy as socially, culturally, and contextually constructed.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is the restricted generalization of the results. Although never intended, generalizations cannot be made based on the data collected because the participant sample was very small. Results from this study need to be interpreted within the context in which they occurred. Sociocultural theory suggests literacy construction is locally and contextually constructed and thus should only be interpreted within those limits. This study demonstrates that literacy practices are dynamic and fluid among various sociotextual domains and, most importantly that any literacy event should be viewed specific to the time, place, and participants.

This study occurred over a five-week period, which could be considered a limitation. Because the family adjusted well to my presence and was very forthcoming with their personal information, I did not feel the timeline drastically affected rapport development or limited the amount of data collected before I felt I reached data saturation. However, more time with the family at various times during the day may have yielded a greater list of sociotextual activities, literacy events, and literacy practices.

Challenges with Studying Families within their Homes

Challenges with my chosen research methodology, an ethnographic case study, mainly involved finding and establishing participants and gaining access to their home. Choosing the research site within a family home helped me to localize and situate the study within the chosen context; however, choosing only one site and clearly defined participants also raised issues. Because the study involved only the group within the home, I clearly needed to define the constituents of the family. In my planning for the study, I decided the family should determine their definition of their family. Whom the participants of the study considered part of the family did not raise major concerns, except when a suggested data collection visit coincided with a visit from the grandparents. A family member raised the question whether the grandparents would be considered family, then proceeded to answer it herself by deciding that adding the grandparents, who did not live in the home, might complicate the study. I agreed with her reasoning and thus the grandparents were not directly involved.

I discovered considering the home as a private space also presented challenges as I searched for participants. Even people I held acquaintance with declined participation in the study for reasons of privacy. Although I assured confidentiality and ethical behaviour, I still needed an invitation into their private space. After choosing the family for the study, recognizing they may consider their home a private place became an important acknowledgment as I developed rapport to increase the Parker's comfort with my presence.

I also recognize that studying within the home with consent and university support is different from teachers requesting more information about their students' home experiences. There may be resistance from families to have educators examining their private lives. Pitt (2000) suggests that some people view institutional interference or intervention as the exertion of power of experts to reach in and wield control over daily lives. This implies that we need to take caution when and how we examine literacy practices of families and to be cognizant of the families' perspective. For reasons of power relations they may resist interference in their family happenings or provide an inaccurate portrait of their literacy practices. I do not feel the Parker family resisted my presence, nor intentionally misled me about their family literacy. I certainly felt the necessity, nonetheless, to establish rapport and confirm my intentions of the study with the parents and children.

Research Reflections and Suggestions for Further Research

Researching a group of people, such as children with learning disabilities, in an exclusionary manner might suggest this research contributes to the perpetuation of the discrimination of children with different learning needs than the mainstream school population. Possibly, but the reality is they do have different needs at school that seep into other dimensions of their lives, or vice versa. Their needs affect their literacies, especially the school-based literacy expected of them within the confines of that environment and its inherent expectations.

I hope knowledge gained from researching multiple contexts, cultures, or communities of people will improve understanding of the complexity of literacy development and add to the support of multiple literacies and theories of socially constructed knowledge. I am brought back to my initial motivations for researching this particular group of people such as lingering deficit theories, disregard for sociotextual domains beyond those related to schools, and a belief that learning at home is illegitimate compared to learning at school. Purcell-Gates (2007) suggests each learner brings a set of literacies to school. Understanding those literacies is critical for designing school literacy practices in response to each individual set. Many researchers called for additional research in new contexts with intention to influence policy and programming, yet in Canada, for students with special needs, we have a blank slate opportunity available. In Alberta, each special needs student is not only offered but also provincially mandated to have an individualized program plan. This collaboratively created individualized program plan could be one starting place for mediating vernacular and school-based literacies for children with learning disabilities.

Reflecting back on my initial discussion at the beginning of this thesis on expectations of parental involvement and the perceptions of parents over time, I feel these concerns still need to be addressed when considering the negotiation of home and school literacies. For many years, some parents were told to leave the teaching and learning to the teachers but parents have and will always play a large role in how and what their children learn. From the day their children were born parents have been learning about, with, and from their children everyday. Parents

know a lot about their children's capabilities and strengths and have knowledge teachers cannot gain in the short time they spend with them at school. Students with special needs in particular have often already been involved with a variety of professionals and other concerned individuals to help understand their needs. That information, along with the children's experiences with learning and literacy at home, can help teachers to create a learning plan that meets children with learning disabilities' specialized needs and promotes ways of learning in which the children will experience success.

Sometimes parents may feel they are not more knowledgeable than the teacher is or they have experienced a relationship where they were told so and they withdraw from supporting school-based literacy. We need to find a way to share the knowledge that literacy construction, development, and use occurs in many environments and within many sociotextual domains. Research claims people with learning disabilities will not be as successful at work, make as much money, or be as mentally or physically healthy as their peers without learning disabilities. That raises the question for me as to what we are missing in the thirteen years of education they receive in our education systems. Why are children with learning disabilities leaving formal school so unprepared for life? I have heard people claim that learning disabilities are only evident and recognizable in school and that the child functions successfully at home. Then there must be a lot teachers and researchers can learn from these families to improve the social, academic, and emotional well-being of children with learning disabilities at school. If both teachers and families recognize family literacy as

legitimate, then maybe program development and implementation for children with learning disabilities will change. Awareness and sharing of knowledge through a continuous collaborative relationship may be central to initiating those changes.

This study can be a starting point for examining how we develop programs for children with learning disabilities. Future studies could examine how to use strengths from both vernacular and school literacies to implement programming to meet their specialized needs. The impact of medical conditions played a large role in the construction of literacy within this particular family's home; therefore this may suggest that researching how to accommodate for the impact of medical conditions on literacy development would be useful in supporting the literacy of children with special needs. In addition, to support sociocultural and multiple literacies theory, we still need continued research of different groups of people in varied contexts and on how they use literacies in their lives.

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APPENDIX A

National Definition of Learning Disabilities by the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada

National Definition of a Learning Disability, Adopted by the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada January 30, 2002: "Learning Disabilities" refer to a number of disorders which may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding or use of verbal or nonverbal information. These disorders affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning. As such, learning disabilities are distinct from global intellectual deficiency.

Learning disabilities result from impairments in one or more processes related to perceiving, thinking, remembering, or learning. These include, but are not limited to: language processing; phonological processing; visual spatial processing; processing speed; memory and attention; and executive functions (e.g. planning and decision making).

Learning disabilities range in severity and may interfere with the acquisition and use of one or more of the following:

- Oral language (e.g. listening, speaking, understanding);
- Reading (e.g. decoding, phonetic knowledge, word recognition, comprehension)
- Written language (e.g. spelling and written expression); and
- Mathematics (e.g. computation, problem solving).

Learning disabilities may also involve difficulties with organizational skills, social perception, social interaction and perspective taking.

Learning disabilities are lifelong. They way in which they are expressed may vary over an individual's lifetime, depending on the interaction demands of the environment and the individual's strength and needs. Learning disabilities are suggested by unexpected academic underachievement or achievement which is maintained only by unusually high levels of effort and support.

Learning disabilities are also due to genetic and/or neurobiological factors or injury that alters brain functioning in a manner which affects one or more processes related to learning. These disorders are not due primarily to hearing and/or vision problems, socio-economic factors, cultural or linguistic differences, lack of motivation or ineffective teaching, although these factors may further complicate the challenges faced by individuals with learning disabilities. Learning disabilities may co-exist with various conditions including attentional, behavioural and emotional disorders, sensory impairments or other medical conditions.

For success, individuals with learning disabilities require early identification and timely specialized assessments and interventions involving home, school, community and workplace settings. The interventions need to be appropriate for each individual's learning disability subtype and, at a minimum, include the provision of:

- Specific skill instruction;
- Accommodations;

- Compensatory strategies; and
- Self-advocacy skills

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Letter

Dear Families,

My name is Jackie Filipek and I am a Master's student at the University of Alberta, in the Elementary Education, Language and Literacy program. I am preparing for the data collection portion of my thesis research.

I am seeking a family to participate in a research study. The study is designed to discover and record the literacy events and practices in homes with children with learning disabilities. For this research, my focus is on children with learning disabilities in the elementary school age range.

I would like to come to your home and observe, record, and maybe ask some questions about the reading, writing, and other language based events occurring in your family. I hope to make about six visits to your home at various times throughout the day. I understand family life can get very busy and I am able to accommodate to your schedule. My intention is to be unobtrusive.

As the identification of children with learning disabilities increases, it is important to understand all aspects of their lives so, as educators and researchers, we can fully understand how to meet their needs during their school years.

Currently, there has been little descriptive data collected on children with learning disabilities in the home setting. To create a better picture of children's learning needs and accomplishments, we need to see their lives from perspectives other than just educational perspectives.

Although your identity will be kept confidential, this study may be an opportunity for you to share the successes and challenges your family experiences in the areas of literacy, reading and writing. Please contact me for further information or if you would like to participate.

Sincerely,

Jackie Filipek

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Education, Extension, Augustana, Campus Saint Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta.

APPENDIX C

Research Study Information Letter

Dear Participant:

My name is Jacqueline Filipek and I am a Master's Thesis student at the University of Alberta, in the area of Language and Literacy. My undergraduate degree is in Elementary Special Education. The purpose of this letter is to invite your participation in a research study intending to explore the literacy events and practices occurring in a home with a child with a diagnosed learning disability. The specific purposes of the study include:

- To fulfill my thesis requirement for my Master's degree.
- To fill a gap in qualitative family literacy research focusing on children with learning disabilities.
- To meet a need for additional research examining how children growing up in a variety of social settings interact with educational influences.

All research will be conducted by me and will be collected in a number of different ways. I will be observing your family and taking field notes to record my observations, doing casual interviews with all the members of the family living in your home, and collecting examples of literacy. I may ask to take photographs or photocopies of those examples and to audio record the interviews. My intention is take note of and observe the literacy, reading and writing in your home, not to

make any judgments. My study is a collection and record of literacy and that is what the information I collect will be used for.

I understand family life can be busy and I will try my best to accommodate your schedule and lifestyle. I am planning for approximately 10-12 hours in your home, over a six-week period. I would like to vary my times in your home, such as morning time before school, lunch or afternoon, after school, dinnertime, and evening or bedtime. I understand that you may or may not have time to talk or interview with me at certain times and I will adjust my data collection technique accordingly; I do not want to interfere with the daily happenings of your family.

If you participate in this study, all family members will be asked to sign a consent form and will be assured complete confidentiality and anonymity. All information that could potentially identify you will be removed and replaced with a pseudonym. The information I collect will be locked and stored for five years and then destroyed. You may request copies of transcripts from the interviews, audio recordings, or copies of reports or papers emerging from this research by contacting me at any time.

You can withdraw from the research project at any time without penalty, and any data collected to that point will be withdrawn from the study. You are not obligated to participate.

I am looking forward to presenting literacy research from the often unheard voices of the family and to have an opportunity to see literacy from a new perspective.

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Education, Extension, Augustana, Campus Saint Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. Questions concerning ethical concerns may be directed to the EEASJ REB Chair. If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Filipek

APPENDIX D

Consent to Participate Letters (Adult, Parent, Child)

Adult Research Consent Form

I, _____ (print name), hereby consent to participating in the research study on literacy in homes with children with learning disabilities. Jacqueline Filipek will potentially ask to interview, observe, and/or audiotape me in my home.

I understand that I may also be asked to share some of my literacy activities or examples of literacy with Jacqueline Filipek. I understand that:

- I am not obligated to participate in the research study.
- I may withdraw from the research at any time without penalty.
- All information gathered will be treated confidentially.
- Any information that identifies me will be destroyed within five years of the completion of the research study.
- I will not be identifiable in any documents resulting from this research.
- I can obtain a copy of research findings by contacting Jacqueline Filipek.

I also understand that the results of this research will be used in Jacqueline Filipek's Thesis paper, presentations, and written articles for other educators. All such uses are in compliance with the standards of the Education, Extension, Augustana, Campus Saint Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta.

Signature: _____

Date signed: _____, 2010

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Education, Extension, Augustana, Campus Saint Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding this form or for more information, please contact Jacqueline Filipek or her supervisor, Dr. Heather Blair, Department of Elementary Education, 533 Education South.

Parental Consent Form

I, _____, hereby give consent for

(print name of parent/legal guardian)

_____ to be interviewed, observed, and/or

(print name of child)

audiotaped in my home by Jacqueline Filipek.

Your child might also be asked to share some of his/her literacy activities or examples of literacy with Jacqueline Filipek. I understand that:

- My child is not obligated to participate in the research study.
- My child may withdraw from the research at any time without penalty.
- All information gathered will be treated confidentially.
- Any information that identifies my child will be destroyed within five years of the completion of the research study.

- My child will not be identifiable in any documents resulting from this research.

I also understand that the results of this research will be used in Jacqueline Filipek's Thesis paper, presentations, and/or written articles for other educators. All such uses are in compliance with the standards of the Education, Extension, Augustana, Campus Saint Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta.

_____

(signature of parent/legal guardian)

Date signed: _____, 2010

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Education, Extension, Augustana, Campus Saint Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding this form or for more information, please contact Jacqueline Filipek or her supervisor, Dr. Heather Blair, Department of Elementary Education, 533 Education South.

Child Research Consent Form

Dear _____,

While I am visiting your house, I would like to be able to talk to you about your reading and writing activities that you do at home. I might also ask you to show me some reading and writing examples you have. For some, I might ask you if I can take a picture of them or borrow them to take a photocopy. If you would like to be a part of this, please write your name on the line at the bottom of the page.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Filipek

I agree to take part in this study.

Name: _____

Date: _____, 2010

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Education, Extension, Augustana, Campus Saint Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding this form or for more information, please contact Jacqueline Filipek or her supervisor, Dr. Heather Blair, Department of Elementary Education, 533 Education South.

APPENDIX E

Sample Interview Questions/Inquiries

Inquiries:

Participants: Age, grade, gender, socio-economic status, proficiency with the language, culture, ethnicity, friends

School: Academic standings/grades, individualized program plan, teacher/paraprofessionals working with student, learning preferences/styles, teacher's style, school/district goals

Home: Members of family, parents SES, traditions, roles, rules, examples of literacy

Community: Extracurricular events offered, community involvement, examples of literacy

Questions:

- What are examples of literacy in your home?
- What reading or writing activities take place in your home?
- What do you do to support your children's literacy growth?
- Are there differences in your literacy approaches between your children?
- Has knowing your child has a learning disability changed how you interact with literacy? In what ways? How did you feel before?
- What do you do at home to help with your children's literacy development?
- Whose responsibility is it to teach a child with a learning disability? What is your role?

- Who or what are your supports when you need help with your child with a learning disability and his or her literacy development?
- Do you have a family history of learning disabilities?
- What are your experiences with reading and writing as a child and as an adult? What are your beliefs about literacy?
- Do you belong to any program? What are your experiences with the program?
- Can you share any literacy artefacts that demonstrate how your child as a literate person? (writing, book reports, school newsletters)

APPENDIX F

Sociotextual Domains Followed by Literacy Practices within Each Domain

1. School-based: School literacy, Home/school communication, Home/school accountability
2. Entertainment – Relaxation and Pleasure: Pleasure/Relaxation, Religion, Personal Writing, Shopping, Passions, Interest, Decoration
3. Entertainment – Digital Technology: Media, Technology
4. Social Cohesion and Interaction: Social Cohesion, Interpersonal Communication, Community Information and News, Religion, Social Purposes, Social Interaction, Advocacy, Within Adult Roles, Interest, Bonding, Tradition
5. Medical-based: Medical purposes, Advocacy, Finances, Personal writing, Public writing
6. Memory and Record Keeping: Memory, Record Keeping, Interpersonal Communication
7. Interpersonal Communication: Interpersonal Communication, Social Interaction, Personal Writing, Passions, Bonding
8. Daily Routines and Personal Care: Daily Routines, Personal Care, Interest, Nutrition and Food
9. Work and Finance: Advocacy, Finance, Work, Public Writing
10. Bureaucracy: Social Purposes, Advocacy, Bureaucracy