UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FAMILY LITERACY: FIRST STEPS IN NAMIBIA

BY

IRMA SLABBERT

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of MASTER OF EDUCATION.

DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Edmonton, Alberta
Fall 1997

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

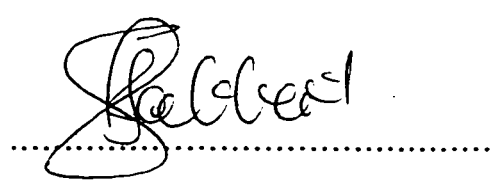
RELEASE FORM

NAME OF AUTHOR: IRMA SLABBERT

TITLE OF THESIS: FAMILY LITERACY: FIRST STEPS IN NAMIBIA

DEGREE: MASTER OF EDUCATION

YEAR THIS DEGREE GRANTED: 1997



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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled FAMILY LITERACY: FIRST STEPS IN NAMIBIA submitted by IRMA SLABBERT in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of EDUCATION.

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study was to examine how less literate women extend their own and their children's literacy development through the medium of shared book experiences. The sample for the study consisted of eight rural Namibian women of whom seven regularly attended fifteen family literacy workshop sessions. Sources of data collection consisted of individually conducted audiotaped semi-structured interviews, classroom discussions (also audiotaped) and notations written in the researcher's reflective journal. Data were analyzed and four prominent themes emerged: a) lived experience as text interpretation, b) adult literacy acquisition as a developmental process c) music as a support for literacy learning, and d) the reciprocal nature of collaborative learning. The study demonstrated that a Family Literacy program was a positive medium for directly influencing the literacy learning of eight rural women and indirectly supporting the literacy learning of their 40 children.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness to my supervisor, Dr. Ruth Hayden, to whom the area of family literacy is very close to the heart. She gave constructive advice and practical assistance, was always patient and generously made time available for discussion of my work.

A special word of appreciation goes to my committee members, Drs. Roberta McKay and Larry Beauchamp.

Dr. Pat Rowell is the Director of the Namibia Preservice Teacher Education Project. Thank you for your eminent leadership in managing the affairs of the Namibian students.

A special thanks to the women who participated in my study. Thank you - you made a venture into the unknown a very rewarding experience. You also facilitated my experience of the life world of fellow Namibians, a privilege which I had to a large extent denied myself for more than three decades.

I am grateful to the principal and staff members of the school where I conducted my study. Their hospitality and encouragement made the heat more bearable for someone who had just arrived from a considerably cooler climate. A special word of thanks to Peet and Renathe Fourie who allowed me to stay with them for three months.

Financial assistance from CIDA and the Rotary Club in Windhoek made this study possible. I extend a special word of thanks to Mr. Hugh Mortimer who acted as my contact person with the Rotary Club.

Mr. Justin Ellis from the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture: Directorate of Adult Basic Education - thank you for your interest in my work while I was in Namibia.

Two students, in particular, provided invaluable support while I was writing my thesis at the University of Alberta. Mubita Villem Chaka - thank you for your input on my questions about certain cultural customs. Ruth Sumner - your encouragement during the homerun stretch was uplifting.

Hannelie Roostee and Alida van Tonder kept matters organized on the home front. Your friendship reflects a spirit of true care.

I am thankful for my mother's regular letters of support during the past two years and four months. Distance does not matter when you have pen and paper at hand.

Finally, I wish to thank my friend, Keith McDonald, for his active interest, understanding and generous support in completing this study.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

An unexpected scholarship from CIDA afforded me the financial resources to pursue graduate studies at the University of Alberta in Canada. An overriding ambition guided my choice regarding courses and specialty area during the past two years. I wanted to carry out research that would be of use in the development of my adopted home country, Namibia. The area of literacy presented itself as an obvious choice as illiteracy rates, particularly for the rural population in Namibia, are high (Lind, 1996).

I started an exciting educational journey in the area of Language Arts. Halliday, Britton, Harste and others became more than just names to me as I discovered and explored their theories. I wrote papers on language and literacy issues and discussed theoretical concepts in class and over coffee with graduate student peers. I learned a great deal about the diagnosis and remediation of learners' literacy difficulties. I explored research methodologies. Each day I found so much to read - journals, theses, books. There never seemed to be enough time in each day to learn all I wanted to learn. As my journey progressed, I was reminded so often of the quote by Goodman (1996), a succinct reflection of my own literacy experiences in school:

> We made literacy something separate and apart from language and its use. We made it a set of abstract skills to be mastered sequentially ... and then sought to help those who couldn't find their way to meaning with a dose of remedial skill instruction" (p. 370).

My views regarding literacy were changing radically.

As I was attempting to define my research question, I was invited to attend a series of workshops, labeled the BOOKS program, at an inner-city location in Edmonton, Alberta. Through this program, I discovered the notion of family literacy. The proponents of family literacy see literacy as "a range of activities which meet the needs of family members as they go about their daily lives" (Hayden & Wahl, in press, p. 1).

The BOOKS program (Books Offer Our Kids Success), recognizes the social problems that come with poverty. Childcare, for example, is provided where possible to make it easier for parents to attend. Individuals who need transport can make use of funded public transport for the duration of a project. Most important, however, is that participants are not seen as deficient when they have a marginal education. Rather, their difficulties are viewed as likely outcomes of poverty. The rich and varied experiences which a person can accumulate from having to live life under adverse circumstances, are regarded as strengths to be valued and built upon during the literacy learning situation. During a BOOKS program, parents are exposed to children's literature and encouraged to take books home to involve their children in shared book experiences. Such events are believed to improve indirectly the literacy abilities of the participating adult.

During my first encounter with BOOKS, I attended the program as a participant observer. Initially, the snacks that were served with each meeting, seemed out of place at a family literacy meeting. However, I soon became aware that many of the women who came to the program were hungry. No wonder it was reasonable to provide food for them!

Marlene, a participant from this particular group, fascinated me from the very first meeting. She was a divorced mother of four children who did not receive any child support from the children's jobless father. She could not find employment herself. Nevertheless, her primary concern in life was for the well-being of her children. Marlene's contagious, bubbly disposition left the group feeling at every meeting that something was lacking until she arrived. Sometimes she was late and the group had finished eating. The group would wait until Marlene poured her coffee - a vice which she claimed she needed in order to take on the day. Nobody indicated that she found Marlene's behaviour to be an imposition on her time. As the program progressed, Marlene evolved as the group's charismatic leader and I began to realize that it was an injustice to regard Marlene, or any of her peers, as literacy learners who "lacked" anything.

Jan was also a member of the group. She and her family lived in inner-city Edmonton. Her husband was laid off from his previous job but he retrained as a heavy duty mechanic because job prospects in this field seemed more promising. When I met Jan, he was still working as an apprentice and earning minimum wage. Jan suffered from a personality disorder which required her to be under constant medication. That was also the reason why she had left school before she completed grade 10. In addition, she feared strangers. Their marriage was the second one for both her and her husband.

From Jan's comments during meetings, I picked up the refrain again and again - sometimes cynical, sometimes resigned: "Us poor inner-city people." Yet it was she who had so many strikes against her who offered me a fresh interpretation to a book. I thought that I had exhausted the themes one could abstract from In My Backyard by J. de Vries. Jan interpreted the book from a fresh perspective - that a blended family (a boy, a frog, a dog and many toys) could live together happily under one roof, even if it had to be the roof of a dog house! Jan was the mother of a blended family which included five children. Jan was also the one to bring back a dog-eared The Runaway Bunny by Margaret W. Brown. The book deals with the devoted love of a mother. She apologized profusely, explaining that her children wanted to hear the story at least thirty times.

This BOOKS program was the start of my involvement with family literacy. I began to see the potential of the philosophy behind the concept. More and more, I came to resent the stigma attached to labels such as "illiterate" and "low socio-economic status."

I continued attending that program for six weeks. As I watched and learned, I realized that I had found a focus for my research. Questions came to mind for my research. How would such a program work in Namibia? Should I work with women in Windhoek? Might it be more worthwhile to take the initial steps in Family Literacy with rural Namibia women? How could I, with limited financial resources, collect sufficient children's books

to conduct such a program? However, I knew, like the women in the BOOKS program, where there is a will, there is a way.

As I searched for a theoretical framework that supports programs such as BOOKS and as I synthesized much of the learning from the courses I took, I realized that the work of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator, encapsulated the perspective I wanted to present in my own research.

The Freirean Perspective

Freire presented a theoretical model of *conscientization*. Within this concept, mankind is seen as beings who exist in and with the world. As conscious beings, mankind is able to transform the world through its actions. It is able to grasp and express the world's reality in its creative language (Freire, 1970a).

To Freire, critical consciousness is integrated with reality and therefore leads to change. It may be attained through dialogue, through a change in the context of education and through the use of thematic breakdown and codification (Freire, 1968). Reading cannot be explained as a random act of reading words only. It implies a previous reading of the world and a subsequent rereading of the world (Freire, 1985). In the Freirean educational model, reading "is not walking on the words; it's grasping the soul of them" (Freire, 1985, p. 19). As he noted:

> Learning to read and write ought to be an opportunity for men to know what speaking the world really means: a human act implying reflection and action. As such, it is a primordial human right and not the privilege of a few. Speaking the word is not a true act if it is not at the same time associated with the right of self-expression, or creating and re-creating, of deciding and choosing and ultimately participating in society's historical process (Freire, 1983, p. 12).

I decided that the theoretical framework for my study would be based on the Freirean model in that the experiences (the world) of participating adults would become the basis for their literacy explorations (the word).

To provide the reader with a feeling for the setting of the study, I shall describe Namibia and the Okavango region. It is not a factual account. Rather it is written from a perspective of someone who visited the country 17 years ago as a tourist. Experiencing this country where desert and ocean collide in a land of the unexpected, was the start of a "love affair" that resulted in me carrying a Namibian passport today.

Namibia

Geographically, Namibia is located in the south western part of Africa. It is a country about four times the size of Britain that has a population density of only 1.7 people per square kilometer.

The Namib Desert, the only other desert in Africa apart from the Sahara, stretches for 1,300 miles along its west coast. With an estimated age of approximately 55 million years, the Namib is one of the world's oldest and driest deserts (Bartlett, 1992). The tourist to Namibia usually has two "compulsory" stops on his itinerary. They are the Etosha National Park near Outjo, and Swakopmund, a coastal town which is also known as "Klein Berlin" (small Berlin) because of its large German speaking population.

One the way to Swakopmund, one has to travel the last approximately 120 kilometres from Usakos through the Namib. During a good rainy year, the desert is covered in a blanket of small, bright yellow flowers. However, should it be a dry year, it compensates by offering a spectacular sunset in a kaleidoscope of yellow, orange and purple. Halfway through the Namib, the "Spitzkoppen" mountains offer themselves freely to the artist who is sufficiently at peace with himself that s/he can endure the silence of the desert for long enough to capture these mountains on canvas. Upon arrival at the coast, the ever changing sand dunes could be that last beacon that calls for rejecting Namibia because of "the sweltering heat." However, they could also signal the start of a perpetual fascination with the country. In a world where man has become god in his own eyes, the

barren country of surprising contrasts humbles a soul and forces it on a journey in search of the higher Being from whom it originated.

Similar to its southern neighbour, South Africa, Namibia has a diverse population. The main indigenous language groups are Oshivambo, Nama/Damara, Rukwangali, Afrikaans and Otjiherero. Traces of the country's history as a German colony are still noticeable in the more urban centres such as Windhoek, Okahandja, Otjiwarongo and Swakopmund. The "Christuskirche," (a German Lutheran church) is indisputably the most photographed location in Windhoek. Customers are often addressed in German in shops in these towns; the architecture of many buildings shows a German influence and festivals such as "Karneval" and "Oktoberfest" are rated highly on the annual calendar of festivities. Whereas the transition to majority rule in South Africa was very stormy, the process went relatively smoothly in Namibia. In a country where drought spells can last for up to seven years, people reach out for another's hand across cultural and language barriers. It is as if they instinctively realize that survival will only be possible when people unite and support one another.

This friendly hand also reaches out to a stranger. Many tourists at a street café have been left flustered when a Namibian "invades" their private space by asking if s/he could share the table. Before the meal is over the tourists have revealed their country of origin, identity and purpose of the visit to Namibia. In addition, visitors have no choice but to become familiar with the trials and tribulations of the local person's life as they all sit around the cafe table.

Rundu, where this study was conducted, is the main centre of the Okavango region in the northern part of Namibia. A total population of 116,830 was counted for the Okavango region in 1991. A single tarred road winds through the business part of Rundu. The arterial roads, however, are sand and gravel roads which are normally in poor condition. Occasionally it can happen that a car has to stop for a herd of cattle crossing the

tarred road from maybe the gas station to the hospital. It should be mentioned that the cattle in the Okavango have extremely long horns because most of the local farmers lack the equipment to dehorn them. The long horns also provide a grip and facilitate handling of the animals. Should the motorist dare to blow his horn, he is rewarded with a disdainful look from a member of the herd that realizes just how much damage those horns could do to the body work of a car.

In an effort to stem the southward flow of people to bigger centres in search of better living conditions, the government has encouraged and offered incentives for small business enterprises in the more remote northern areas. Present facilities such as clothing shops, numerous liquor outlets and grocery stores, a tyre shop and two automated banking machines, were unknown in the Rundu which I left eleven years ago. However, they make life easier for a rural population who have to live on an income substantially less than that of their urban peers.

In the last few years, lodges have also mushroomed on the banks of the Okavango River. They attract the scores of tourists en route from Zimbabwe and the Caprivi region to Windhoek and South Africa. The most popular lodge offers no television or radio facilities in either the lounge or the overnight huts. Lanterns are the only source of light. However, a visitor is allowed distractions which can include the hairy presence of a tarantula on the dresser, the call of a fish eagle at daybreak or the unveiling of a star studded skydome at night.

I have fond memories of the two years when I taught at what was, at that stage, a senior secondary school for black students in Rundu. (Today there is no longer a qualification by skin colour in the education system, since the schools are open to all races). In the morning, the staff would get together for ten minutes to discuss organizational matters. In the meantime, the students would assemble for a prayer meeting and announcements in the quad. They would spontaneously start singing hymns in four

part harmony. Many a morning the staff would delay joining them so that they could first enjoy the singing for a while.

Literacy in Namibia

The following information provides an overview of literacy in Namibia:

Figures from the 1993/94 Namibia Household Income and Expenditure Survey indicated that illiteracy rates are much higher in older age groups than in younger ones (Lind, 1996). It is 20% among 15 - 24 year olds, progressing to 49% among people 45 - 54 and 77% among people 65 or older. The larger percentages for illiteracy among older age groups is the result of the unequal balances of educational resources under German and later South African rule. In 1976, for example, only two of every five black students of school age were enrolled in so-called "black schools." However, all but a small number of these students had dropped out by the end of the primary school year (SWAPO, 1987).

Illiteracy rates for adult men and women at present are very similar, but the regional differences are significant. In the Khomas region around the capital city Windhoek, female illiteracy is 16% and for males it is 22.2%. In the Okavango region with a total population of 116,830 according to 1991 Census figures, percentages reached 55.8 and 45.3 for illiterate females and males respectively (Lind, 1996).

On 5 September 1992, The National Literacy Program in Namibia, (NPLN), was launched. The NPLN's long-term goals are a) to improve the quality of life of all Namibians who were previously neglected and marginalized, and b) to achieve 80% literacy among adults by the year 2000 (Lind, 1996). The NLPN regards literacy as basic mother tongue literacy skills equaling four years of schooling.

Prospective learners can enroll for three stages within the NLPN. The reading materials are primer readers in 10 indigenous languages for stage 1 and readers in nine languages for stage 2. The content of the readers for stage 2 addresses health and hygiene,

home management and government issues. Basic English is introduced in stage 3. Basic Mathematics skills are covered throughout all three stages.

The following reasons have been cited as motivation for joining the NPLN classes: a) to learn to read and write letters, b) to learn mathematics, c) to be able to control money when buying and selling, d) to help children with school work, e) to learn English, which in turn would make traveling easier as well as facilitate activities such as the completion of forms and e) to further one's education. Most learners are strongly motivated to learn English, particularly those who already have basic literacy skills or limited elementary school background when they decide to join the NPLN classes (Lind, 1996).

The women who took part in my study were motivated by a desire to help their children with English. They felt helpless when they saw how their children struggled to speak and read English, a language over which they themselves had limited control.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how less literate women extend their own and their children's literacy development through the medium of shared book experiences within the framework of a Family Literacy program.

Definition of Family Literacy

For the purpose of this study, I have chosen to use the definition of family literacy as provided by Auerbach in Auerbach (1995b).

> *Family Literacy* may include, but is not limited to, direct parent-child interactions around literacy tasks such as parents reading with or listening to children and giving and receiving support for school homework. Family literacy can also include activities such as:
> - parents and other caregivers working independently on their own reading and writing;
> - parents using literacy to address family and community concerns such as immigration, employment or housing;
> - parents addressing child-rearing concerns such as substance abuse and discipline through family literacy classes;
> - parents supporting the development of their home language and culture to build the foundation for their children's academic achievement,
> - parents interacting with the school system, where the family literacy classroom becomes a place where parents can bring school-related issues

for discussion and respond to them, as well as build support networks for individual and group advocacy (pp. 24 - 25).

Significance of the Study

1. The Speaker of the National Assembly in Namibia, The Honourable Dr. M.P. Tjitendero, stressed at a literacy seminar in May 1991, that research on the literacy of women should be taken seriously (Lind, 1996). This project was the first of its kind in Namibia. As such it can provide scope to the forum for discussion on literacy.

2. Whereas most of the family literacy programs reported in the literature have focused on low SES urban populations, this study described the literacy development of poor, rural mothers in the Third World.

3. The implications from this study could lead to adaptations in the National Literacy Program in Namibia.

4. Literacy programs in Namibia at present only addresses the learning of adults. This project indirectly assisted the literacy development of 40 children of the participating mothers.

5. Most literacy programs in Third World contexts tend to address literacy issues from a skills and drill, "quick fix" perspective. This study, which was couched in a socio-cultural perspective, may be a novel approach for adult literacy learning within Third World countries.

Limitations of the Study

1. Since the study was limited to a small group of rural women, the conclusions can only be relevant to the population from which the sample was drawn. However, it is hoped that the information gained from this descriptive study will be used to develop and implement more in-depth family literacy programs within African contexts.

2. All oral responses were audiotaped, which might have heightened the anxiety levels of participants, thereby inhibiting their responses. Nonetheless, their

feedback helped to focus the program on the strengths, needs and goals of the participating women.

3. Due to time and budgetary constraints, transcripts of audiotapes could not be submitted to an outsider for an external audit regarding accuracy of translated meaning. Although I handed the transcripts of translated class discussions periodically to participants, valid checking was not possible because they were not very familiar with the language.

4. Since the questions of the post interview required the participating women to think retrospectively about the program, the data may demonstrate only what participants wanted to share, rather than represent a comprehensive view of their opinions.

Ethical Considerations

The guidelines, as prescribed by the University of Alberta with respect to ethical considerations, were adhered to - i.e. confidentiality, anonymity and right of withdrawal. With the exception of the labeling of the Rundu region in general, pseudonyms are used for all participants.

Overview of the Thesis

Chapter II presents a review of the literature relevant to the purpose of the study. Chapter III describes the methodology employed in the study. The sample, data collection and data analysis procedures are explained. The study's findings together with a discussion are presented in Chapter IV. Chapter V presents a general overview of the study and a review of its findings. It also provides recommendations for future research and implications for adult literacy instruction.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the literature pertaining to family literacy. It starts with an attempt to define the concept from two major perspectives - the deficit and socio-cultural - as seen by researchers in the field. This section is followed by an exploration of the rationale for using children's picture books in adult literacy training. Subsequently, a variety of programs which were modeled after either the deficit and the socio-cultural approaches to family literacy are presented. Evaluation of family literacy programs is also discussed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of two family literacy programs that were carried out in developing countries.

Defining Family Literacy

The area of Family Literacy is relatively new in the literature. For long it was assumed that there was a single *Literacy* to be learned. It is now recognized that there are multiple literacies that vary with culture and setting (Street, 1995, p. 12).

Family Literacy is subsumed under a more general term intergenerational literacy which refers to literacy across different generations (Mountainbird, 1991). The concept of intergenerational literacy could also be extended to cross-age literacy which means literacy sharing between any older and younger people (Mountainbird, 1991). Literacy is regarded as a legacy handed down from generation to generation. To increase levels of literacy, a family approach simultaneously addresses the literacy levels of parents and their children (National Center for Family Literacy, 1994) in an attempt to break the cycle of underachievement (Handel, 1992). One of the main reasons behind a family approach to literacy learning is the fact that "families are still seen to be the most important factor influencing the success of students largely through the patterns of language use which are established by them" (Furniss, 1993, p. 137).

A study of the literature reveals two prominent theoretical stances among the proponents of family literacy. Within one approach, family literacy is promoted for its educational as well as its economic potential for advancement of the individual (Morrow et al., 1993). Belzer (1993) refers to these educational and economic outcomes as breaking "the cycle of illiteracy" and breaking "the cycle of poverty" (p. 6). This approach could be referred to as a deficit view, as it does not take into account certain literacy events that might occur within families (Morrow et al., 1993). Auerbach (1989) maintains that narrowly defined, the deficit approach usually means performing school-like activities within the family setting. Successful literacy and language acquisition events are linked to the culture of schooling and to mainstream literacy practices. Street (1995) refers to the "cultural imperialism of the deficit model" (p. 13) to show that children whose home literacy experiences most closely resemble those of the school are the children who are more successful at school. Within the deficit approach, family literacy education is shaped by a "transmission of school practices" model (Auerbach, 1989, p. 168). Schools strongly emphasize how parents can learn from them but give little attention to how schools might learn from parents (Morrow & Paratore, 1993). The deficit perspective blames the family for literacy problems while ignoring social conditions such as overcrowded housing, parents' need to have two jobs and child care problems in which these problems might be embedded (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Auerbach, 1995b).

Another approach to family literacy has been referred to as the socio-cultural approach (Auerbach, 1989). The proponents of this view recognize literacy as "a social and cultural phenomenon that develops and is practiced in the context of social interactions for social purposes" (Elish-Piper, 1996/1997, p. 257). Auerbach (1989), Heath (1983) and Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines (1988) are amongst those researchers who support this view. The social context of family life enriches rather than impedes learning (Auerbach, 1989). Literacy is not an all-or-nothing state. Instead, it "occurs as family members go about their

daily lives" (Morrow & Paratore, 1993, p. 196). Literacy problems are seen as a consequence rather than a cause of poverty (Belzer, 1993, p. 7) and instead of having school practices and expectations dictating family literacy instruction, parental practices and concerns shape literacy education within this approach (Auerbach, 1995a).

Auerbach (1995b) effectively points out that the boundary between the deficit model and the socio-contextual model exists only in theory. "Most programs ... fall somewhere along a continuum between a prescriptive, interventionist model and a participatory, empowering one" (Auerbach, 1995b, p. 26). Socio-cultural studies acknowledge as well that there might be "patterns of maternal teaching behaviour that will better prepare the children for adapting to a given educational system and occupational niche" (Nickse, 1990, p. 43). The term *deficit model* is sometimes used in a derogatory way by those who prefer the socio-cultural model to show what they find unacceptable in the other perspective (Harrison, 1995). Instead, Harrison suggests, family literacy should be viewed as "augmenting what is already there rather than as filling a vacuum" (p. 227). The study presented in this document is grounded within a socio-cultural approach to literacy learning.

Framework for Family Literacy Programs

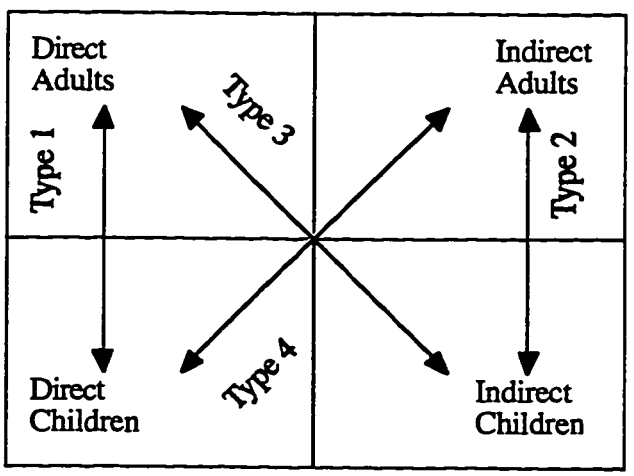

Figure 1. Typology of Family Literacy Programs (Nickse, 1990, p. 59).

Nickse (1990) suggests that family literacy programs may be classified and examined across two critical dimensions, that is, type of program intervention (direct or indirect) and type of participation (adults alone, children alone or adults and children together). According to her, the primary participants receive direct services and the secondary participants benefit indirectly. By calling participants "adults" instead of "parents," the typology could be applied to a wide spectrum of programs and it can include those that work with extended families and with unrelated adults and children (Nickse, 1990). The current study accepted a Type 3 typology, that is, instruction was focused directly to parents, and indirectly to children.

The Deficit Model

In this section, four family literacy programs shaped by the deficit approach are presented.

The first study under discussion addresses the work carried out in 1993 when the Centre for Literacy in Philadelphia targeted three public schools in the Philadelphia School District for a Family Literacy Demonstration Project. The program was based on kindergarten and first grade curricula because it was felt that such a program would be relevant to learners' goals and provide information which learners could apply immediately with their children. Instruction in this Family Literacy Demonstration Project was designed to take place in two phases: parents alone would attend for a period of six months and subsequently parents and children would receive instruction together for a period of five weeks in summer. During the first phase, kindergarten and first grade themes would be presented on an adult level. The second phase would include activities based on themes from the kindergarten and first grade curricula to enable parents to support their children's learning.

A kindergarten theme such as classification of shapes was reciprocated on the adult level by doing classification of news items. Understanding sequencing, a first grade

theme, was done on adult level as sequencing of events in writing. Since many participants were parents and caregivers for children of a variety of ages, instruction had to be related to curricula from other grades as well. For example, the use of decimal numbers, a theme for older children, had as its adult version the figuring out of a monthly budget.

Some of the topics suggested by teachers for the summer program included handwriting, number facts, use of capital letters in proper nouns, how to begin a sentence, reading for meaning, problem solving, developing a love of reading and maths concepts taught through real experiences with measuring, cooking and using money. A three part curriculum resource, Parents, Children and Learning, was developed for parents as well as children. These activities were to be completed during summer camp. Computer technology was also included. Parents wrote books for their children, expressed their own thoughts through word processing procedures and also learned skills such as budgeting on the computer.

A review of this Family Literacy Demonstration Project shows that it approached the literacy training of parents as merely a matter of transmitting school literacy practices (Auerbach, 1989). Program organizers noted that at a particular school they had to compete for participants with another program that offered a stipend. This incident offered an excellent opportunity to inquire into parents' reasons for making a choice as to which program they would attend. Researchers such as Morrow & Paratore (1993) have suggested that there is a strong link between poverty and illiteracy. The question remains unanswered as to whether the stipend money in this specific case might have been utilized to fulfill more basic needs. Nickse (1990) contends that expanded services such as childcare are conducive to a higher retention rate in family literacy programs. At one of the schools, childcare was provided while at another school participants could not attend because of problems in this regard.

A second study, modeled on the deficit approach, was a Book-Reading Intervention Program which P.A. Edwards conducted in 1994 at a school with a predominantly white faculty and a predominantly black parent and student population. As an African-American researcher, she wanted to "acquaint African-American parents with the most frequently requested parent-involvement activity, namely 'read to your child' " (Edwards, 1994, p. 180). The project team consisted of a university leader and primary teachers.

The university leader taught teachers about multiple literacy environments and African-American children's learning styles. She told teachers that they would show parents how to read with children in a series of videotapes in which teachers would model reading strategies. The university leader also collaborated with teachers on developing parent-training materials which included four videotapes on book-reading strategies. The teachers enrolled in a course on parent involvement/family literacy taught by the university leader. They collaborated with the university leader in producing the videotapes. In a typical tape, the teacher announced what skill(s) she was going to model, she gave a description of the skill(s) to be modeled, and then she modeled the skill(s) using a children's book.

The Book-Reading Intervention Program was completed in three phases: coaching, peer modeling and the parent-child interaction phase. The coaching phase consisted of the university leader modeling book reading behaviours and she introduced the videotapes where teachers modeled specific book-reading strategies. During the peer modeling phase, parents focused on modeling particular book-reading strategies for the group and practicing targeted strategies with one another. Twice during this phase, the university leader ran critique sessions prior to the meetings to allow parents to voice their feelings about the program. Some parents had concerns about the effectiveness of the videotapes. During the final parent-child interaction phase, parents brought their own children to the sessions. The university leader offered suggestions to the mothers regarding their choice of books. She

evaluated parent-child book-reading interactions and she provided feedback on parent-child book-reading interactions.

Edwards contends that her study proved that if nonmainstream parents were shown how to share books with their children, they could guide their children's participation in book-reading interactions. The researcher also felt that teachers should heed parents' advice even if they appear not to be highly educated. Nonmainstream parents could effectively critique and offer insightful information to classroom teachers on developing teaching materials. Parents' critique of the videotapes used in this Book-Reading Program led to a revision of the book-reading materials used in later programs.

There is an interesting dichotomy in Edwards' account of the program. On the one hand, she mentioned that African-American parents had to "learn to share books with their children" (p. 181) and reading strategies on the videotapes had to be modeled "so that a parent who lacked training could understand" (p. 185 - my underlining). These statements seem to imply that the parent came "empty" to the sessions and that they brought none of their own experience to bear on the reading event. On the other hand, however, she acknowledged in the conclusion that nonmainstream parents could offer valuable advice on the effectiveness of teaching materials.

The third study under review involved the ethnographic work of Delgado-Gaitan (1987) as she attempted to combine parents' ESL learning with techniques to help them prepare their children for literacy in school. The study was conducted among Mexican immigrant families in La Perla, California. The project consisted of four classes at various levels. The classes were designed to teach English as a second language as well as Spanish and English reading skills. Parents were also trained in techniques to help their children prepare for literacy in school. All of the adults in the study came from very poor families where day-to-day survival was barely possible. The commonality that the group shared was their immigrant status and their optimism that, regardless of circumstances, life would

improve when they developed better literacy skills in English. Parents valued schooling and that motivated them to develop their own literacy, so that they could, in turn, assist their children with English.

Most of the parents participated in both the ESL and the reading classes. Both classes dealt with topics such as a dialogue between two people going to the store or sitting at a table for dinner. Project organizers maintained that such topics were of cultural relevance and enabled students to compare and contrast their experiences in their native culture with that of the United States. Students also had to master such basic skills as past, present, and future tenses in regular and irregular verbs.

Parents were asked to bring elementary school age children to class three times during the year, on designated dates. During these classes, the entire class was given a lesson which the children completed with their parents' assistance while the teacher supervised the process. One of the activities cited required the students to look at an advertisement. They then had to compile a list of adjectives and write their own advertisement to sell the product. Parents were told to use the dictionary as a resource for spelling and they were not to give their child any answers. Since participants had previously expressed a desire to maintain their children's oral proficiency in Spanish for the sake of family cohesion and because the children's English competency was often more advanced than that of their parents, project organizers decided to have the parents tutor the children in Spanish although the tasks were in English.

In the project which has just been described, parents and children alike were provided with the English skills which they supposedly lacked to cope as immigrants in a new country. Mechanical and linguistic structures were stressed. Organizers did not promote English literacy at the cost of native language and literacy because parents were taught Spanish reading skills and they were allowed to tutor the children in Spanish. Auerbach (1995b) suggests that "a model that rests on the assumption of unilateral parent-

to-child literacy assistance, with a neutral transfer of skills" (p. 17) misses out on the dynamic distribution and sharing of language and literacy practices in immigrant families. Such a model may also exacerbate stressful interactions between immigrant parents and their offspring who are trying to adapt to mainstream schooling in a new country.

Delgado-Gaitan (1987) described one student's success in mastering interrogatives and contends that "without this skill, people are limited in their ability to exploit their environment" (p. 27). However, no attempt was made to improve participants' communicative competence in English or discuss issues which could stimulate political consciousness. Such events could have acted as an extremely meaningful basis for the literacy explorations of an immigrant in a foreign country.

The fourth program which supported a deficiency view was conducted in an urban metropolitan area. Neuman (1995a) evaluated this family literacy program which was aimed at strengthening the literacy skills of teenage mothers, as well as enhancing their daily language and literacy interactions with children. Most of the mothers were African American averaging 19 years of age and they were all on public assistance. They were already in a literacy program which provided daycare for their young children. In this program, mothers received two and one half hours of literacy instruction three days a week, followed by a parent education class and an occasional home visit.

The literacy classes were transformed into a family literacy program. The daycare center was changed to include literacy-related play centers. A library area with low-lying bookshelves was included. Mothers were to spend one hour a day in the center for 12 sessions. They were coached by project staff in how to read to their children, how to help them accomplish goal-directed activities and how to play with their children.

Once mothers were comfortable in the center, a four-part intervention program was started to enhance their participation with children. Aspects of the intervention process included encouraging mothers to orient a child who is ready to do an activity and to

encourage him or her to focus on a particular topic of interest. Behaviours such as labeling objects and elaborating on actions or objects to make them more understandable to the child, were also encouraged. Mothers were also expected to help their children make connections between the present and other experiences as well as explain cause-and-effect relationships. Behaviours such as allowing a child to take control of a task, encouraging turn taking, and providing elaborated feedback to cause strategic thinking, were also modeled.

When the intervention part was underway, each mother was involved in a three-part instructional cycle. Firstly, each mother was provided with individualized instruction on a particular aspect of the intervention process. In the second phase, mothers were encouraged to engage in the educational activities of the center. They were encouraged to interact with two to three toddlers at a time so that they could discover how children become increasingly independent as they interacted with their peers. Ceiling video monitors videotaped the sessions. Lastly, mothers reflected on their own interactions by viewing parts of the videotape with project leaders in a small room. Project leaders discussed with them aspects such as what they might have done differently and what types of activities children seemed to respond to best.

Initially mothers' interactions with their children while they were reading a story book appeared to reflect a mentor-apprentice relationship, with the caregiver evoking the child's attention and reflecting on specific aspects of the story to convey meaning. The child's role was primarily that of a responder to the adult's comments and questions. Later the children were noted to increasingly become the leader and the adult assumed the role of interactor and responder to their children's questions. Mothers perceived reading stories as an opportunity to invent playful interactions with their children. Before the project, parents as well as staff believed that the children, toddlers and preschoolers, lacked the skills necessary to be able to listen to stories. Due to the intervention nature of this project,

mothers started guiding their children's participation in reading. The study contends that through guided participation, mothers were establishing a foundation for children to take on increasing involvement with and responsibility for their own learning through storybook reading.

Neuman (1995a) concluded her review by contending that the focus of family literacy was on the transmission of parents' newly developed skills to the child. In this study, mothers faced obstacles of poverty, poor education and poor self-esteem. The program attempted to break down these barriers by encouraging parents to become valuable teachers by increasing their own literacy skills and knowledge as well as teaching them to respond to their children's learning needs.

In the program described by Neuman, mothers seemed to be regarded as instructors rather than as parents. They had to orient a child who was ready to do an activity; they had to explain cause-and-effect relationships; they were required to encourage turn taking in carrying out a task and they had to provide feedback to cause strategic thinking. Nickse (1990) draws attention to the fact that techniques such as relating the story to the child's experience during reading could help foster positive attitudes about towards literacy. However, techniques which are poorly carried out, could turn children off completely. The mothers were perceived as not having brought any strengths with them into the program. Instead, they had to be taught how to read to their children, how to help their children accomplish goal-directed activities and how to play with their children. Project leaders believed that the children lacked skills to listen to stories. Making meaning was subordinated to acquiring skills (Auerbach, 1995a).

The four family literacy programs discussed above show how family literacy programs shaped by the deficit approach were implemented. In all four cases, programs were organized around needs, problems and practices that educators identified (Auerbach, 1989). Paratore (1995) warns that this practice might not be effective, since "the types of

literacy activities that parents and caregivers choose to practice are largely dictated by the circumstances within their lives" (p. 48). The family literacy practitioners were concerned about top-down delivery and the imparting of mainstream school-like literacy skills and practices (Street, 1995) which had to be rehearsed by participants while being supervised by teachers. However, none of the studies referred to parents' goals, beliefs and meanings about literacy, or to their images of literacy or to what is involved in being a literate person (Gadsden, 1995). Neuman's study with African-American teenage mothers tended to invoke an image of "deficit mothering" (Nickse, 1990, p. 52) because the mothers had to be taught how to read to their children, how to help their children master certain activities and how to play with their children. Behaviours to be mastered were, by implication, those of the "white middle class mother" (Nickse, 1990, p. 51). The study reviewed by Delgado-Gaitan mentioned that all participating adults "came from very poor families where day-to-day survival was barely possible" (Delgado-Gaitan, 1987, p. 16). Neuman mentioned that teenage mothers participating in her study were often faced with obstacles of "poverty, poor education, and poor self-esteem" (Neuman, 1995a, p. 113). Studies have found that literacy problems might be embedded in social conditions such as poverty (Auerbach, 1995; Morrow & Paratore, 1993), but the program reviews by Delgado-Gaitan and Neuman do not mention if the reality of material deprivation was considered or addressed in their program planning and execution.

The Socio-Cultural Model

In this section, a study about the diversity of literacy experiences within families' lives is discussed initially. Subsequently, three family reading programs which support a socio-cultural approach are summarized and analyzed.

Purcell-Gates, L'Allier & Smith (1995) reported on the diversity of literacy among low-SES inner-city families. The report on the literacy activities of four families were drawn from a large-scale descriptive ethnography involving twenty families and 24 children

between the ages of 4 and 6. Researchers visited homes as participant observers to record all naturally occurring uses of print. Observation periods ranged from 2 to 3 months and families were told that research interest was focused on ways in which young children learn in the home-family context during years preceding formal schooling. Literacy events were examined for frequencies and types of activities such as daily living routines, entertainment and religion in which literacy events were embedded and storybook reading.

The two families that were classified as low-literacy families engaged in one literacy event for every 3 hours observed. These families predominantly used literacy for entertainment and to accomplish daily living routines. A few literacy events used for interpersonal communication were also noted. The two other families were classified as high-literacy families because they were involved in 2.5 literacy events every hour. Examples of these events included writing of essays by children upon the request of a parent, entertainment activities, writing of names and headings on drawings and reading of newspapers and books.

Nine types of print-embedded family activities were identified. They included daily living routines, entertainment, school-related activity, interpersonal communication, literacy for the sake of teaching or learning literacy, storybook reading, religion, participating in information networks and work. Within the high-literacy families, print mediated all of the nine family activities except work. For the low-literacy families, print was only relevant to four of the family activity types. Neither of the low-literacy families engaged in literacy events regarding school and storybook reading. The majority of the high-literacy families practiced literacy events in the literacy-learning category, which included events such as reading and writing of words and the writing of essays upon the request of a parent. Storybook reading was very prominent. High-literacy families also practiced literacy for entertainment purposes. This category included activities such as the reading of

newspapers and books, the making of drawings and afterwards writings names and captions on them.

Auerbach (1995) suggests that "socio-economic conditions ... are problematic obstacles that stand in the way of literacy development" while those who hold the deficiency perspective maintain that "language minority children come from literacy-impoverished home environments where literacy is neither valued nor developed" (p. 75). Purcell-Gates, L'Allier & Smith (1995), maintain that socio-economic status is not the "operative factor for emergent literacy opportunities" (p. 577). Handel (1995) agrees when she notes "... parents in poverty ... engage in literacy practices ..." (p. 19). These researchers' findings are in accordance with studies by Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines (1988) and Heath (1983) who found that non-mainstream families engage in literacy practices that are meaningful but different to those of mainstream families. The Purcell-Gates, L'Allier & Smith study urges the family literacy practitioner not to interpret studies such as those by Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines and Heath to mean that all children from low-SES families have had ample and varied exposure to print when they enter school. Instead, a more neutral stance that low-SES families engage in literacy practices of a varied range is more desirable. Elish-Piper (1996/1997) agrees.

The first family literacy program under discussion that supports a socio-cultural approach to learning, involves the work of Susan G. Doneson (1991) who taught a class entitled "Children and Books" to a group of pregnant and parenting high school students. Her objectives were a) to coach reluctant readers to start reading, b) to familiarize the students with the wide selection of books and magazines available to them as resource guides on parenting and child development and c) to introduce students to children's books appropriate to various ages and developmental stages.

The course delivered some unexpected surprises regarding the third objective. Most of the students had not been read to as children and consequently the teacher had no

common body of knowledge to refer to as a frame of reference. The teacher started by introducing students to books designed for very young children with bright pictures and little or no print. Anno's Counting Book by Mitsumasa Anno was mentioned as an example. Some students were skeptical about reading to children who were too young to speak and they even labeled the idea as "weird." However, another student's one-year-old son said his first word, "ball" when his mother read to him from a cardboard book filled with pictures of familiar objects. From then on, it was no problem to interest students in reading to their children.

The teacher introduced books in class without the students' children being present. Mothers wove elaborate stories around these wordless picture books. Their stories included tales of abandonment, rape, domestic violence, religious experiences and death. Long discussions ensued after each "reading" and most stories were told in the third person. It soon became clear that many of these students were able to talk for the first time about unpleasant events in their lives through the main characters of the texts they read.

A book such as Flash the Dash by Don Freeman allowed the women to talk about men in their lives. Flash was a lazy male dachshund that became more responsible just in time for the arrival of his puppies. The class felt that Flash's reformation was unrealistic and discussed at length why his mate had put up with his laziness for so long. Many of the women were confronted with an option of adoption when they became pregnant. A book like Are You My Mother? by P.D. Eastman allowed them to discuss issues of identity and questions concerning adoption. Leo the Late Bloomer by Robert Kraus sparked memories of being retained twice in elementary school in one student while other students talked about feeling incompetent at school. Franklin in the Dark by Paulette Bourgeois, helped one student to acknowledge and conquer her fear of basements. How to deal with anger aroused lively discussion when students read The Temper Tantrum Book by Edna Mitchell

Preston. Some students had been taught that it was "wrong" to feel anger and others were afraid of anger.

The students' own vocabulary improved as a result of exploring children's literature. A book such as Richard Scarry's Best Word Book Ever was helpful in that it had graphic representation of each word. Richard Scarry's What Do People Do All Day aided some students in understanding procedures such as delivering mail or baking bread for the first time.

Doneson (1991) felt that, as a result of this course, most students believed in the value of reading to their children and they understood the potential impact of books on their own and their children's lives. A strong group cohesion developed in the class and after 18 weeks, the teacher was led to believe that students saw themselves as people with more similarities than differences. They also believed in themselves as competent parents.

Paulo Freire (1968) contends in Pedagogy of the Oppressed that literacy is meaningful to students when it relates to daily realities and when it helps students to act on them. Auerbach (1995) concurs when she states: "As participants' concerns become central to their own learning and literacy becomes a means for challenging oppressive conditions in their lives, literacy will become more socially significant for families" (p. 24). Doneson's (1991) study vividly illustrates how social realities such as adoption, fear, anger and abandonment were brought into the literacy curriculum of an open-ended nature and how it encouraged students to act on them.

One of the major studies in the field of family literacy from a socio-cultural perspective is the one carried out by Handel & Goldsmith (1994). This study examined how a Family Reading model was implemented through a Parent Readers Program in an urban technical college with participants who had all completed high school but were enrolled in remedial reading classes at college. Within this model, it was accepted that adults scaffolded feelings as well as cognitions for their children. Family Reading

endeavoured to link those two domains and identified children's literature as the bridge between the two. The Family Reading workshop series integrated the practice of reading strategies into demonstrations and discussions of children's books. The emphasis was always on constructing meaning and encouraging participants to do the same with their children.

Workshops followed a sequence of participants reporting on reading at home, where parents could voice highlights or questions about the home reading experience. This component helped adults to become resources for one another. Afterwards, a new book representing a particular genre of children's literature was introduced. A new reading strategy was demonstrated while using the new book. Parents would then practice it in pairs to familiarize themselves with the content of the new book and to prepare themselves for reading sessions at home. During group discussion of the new text, a facilitator tried to elicit ideas rather than prompt for the "right" answer. Participants could then take the new book home. If time permitted it, adult print matter was read as well. This last section was included to extend adult literacy and to reinforce the idea of an adult as a reading role model.

Handel & Goldsmith (1994) described the achievements of Margaret, an African-American participant, who attended twelve workshops over a period of two years. During the first interview, Margaret credited the workshop with aiding her own literacy development since she became more willing to persevere with reading longer text. Margaret insisted that by reading just a simple story to her child, she was building her own vocabulary as well. Her child learned to have feelings for people in the story. While in the process of reading, she discovered the basics of story structure such as recognizing that although a story might be sad initially, it had a happy ending. Margaret was also proud that her daughter could "read" to her by looking at a page and by making up her own story. Margaret's confidence in herself as a reader prompted her to read stories to children at her

daughter's daycare. During 1992, three years after she had initially enrolled in the family reading workshops, Margaret was involved in her daughter's elementary school. She visited and consulted with her daughter's teachers and she monitored and valued her daughter's achievements.

Auerbach (1995) insists that the focus of the family literacy curriculum within a socio-cultural approach is to empower participants to direct their own learning and to use it for their own purposes. It may include, but is not limited to, direct parent-child interactions around literacy tasks such as reading with or listening to children. The relevance of parent/child interactive reading is supported by Bus & Van Ijzendoorn (1995) who claim that interest in reading is not a natural phenomenon in children. A love for reading would rather be evoked by the pleasure of sharing a book with a parent. "Children become interested in reading books because of parental efforts to evoke and support interest" (Bus & Van Ijzendoorn, 1995, p. 998). The Parent Readers program empowered Margaret by providing her with learning tools to assist her daughter's literacy development. The program enabled Margaret to engage in maternal teaching behaviour that would prepare her child better for adapting to a given educational system (Nickse, 1990; Epstein, 1986) and eventually would encourage and support her daughter in school activities. Handel & Goldsmith (1994) purport that in family literacy both adult and child form a reciprocal learning unit. Neuman (1995a) supports this view when she refers to "the benefits of parent interaction with preschoolers and the progress that adult literacy students can make as a result of the literacy-based activities with their own children" (p. 5).

In another study, France & Hager (1993) found an intergenerational reading project to be very successful. Participants were all African-Americans who came from an economically disadvantaged background. Workshops were conducted in six weekly one hour sessions, where parents and their pre-kindergarten children read predictable pattern books aloud in the school library. Each family had a home practice book for the week

between workshops.

Enabling participants to prepare their children to read was the only recruitment incentive offered by this program. A high rate of participation was recorded. Workshop leaders emphasized that parents shared responsibility for their children's educational progress with teachers. Leaders were also mindful of participants' work schedule. Sessions were structured so that someone who missed attending would not feel excluded when they returned. A typical workshop lasted about an hour and covered a range of language experiences including echo reading, choral reading, paired reading, storytelling, readers' theatre and chanting. Both parents and children were involved. Trade books were used to illustrate reading techniques and retold versions of traditional tales were used for home practice. These tales were photocopied and since they were retellings, no infringement of copyright law was involved. Organizers found that participants with varied ability levels could be accommodated in one session by using predictable pattern books and choral reading techniques. Home practice books were chosen to accommodate less able readers as well. Interviews were the main assessment tool for this project, mainly because parents found them to be least threatening. Additional information was gained from parents' logs.

The workshop resulted in improved listening comprehension for children who were regarded as at-risk pre-kindergarten students. France & Hager (1993) claimed that the program could be regarded as an inexpensive way to influence student achievement despite adverse conditions that prevail in a low-SES environment.

This intergenerational reading project is yet another study which refutes the claim that economically disadvantaged parents do not care about their children's schooling (see also Gadsden, 1995, and Handel, 1995). The project had a high attendance rate and the only incentive for participants was that workshops would help parents to prepare their children to read. Nickse (1990) noted that "some developers believe that highly structured

models that train parents by very direct instruction as 'first teachers' of their children are the most valuable in changing skills, attitudes and behaviours" (p. 44). However, the France & Hager (1995) research contends that direct instruction must be couched with a perspective that views parents as valuable contributors rather than empty vessels. Their reading project stressed the partnership between home and school - a factor which could have contributed towards the high attendance rate. At the school with the highest attendance rate, the principal and teachers also attended. Belzer (1993) quotes a family literacy practitioner who commented as follows about parents' willingness to attend family literacy programs: "She felt that many parents were reluctant to attend a class in a school where parents felt unwelcome, patronized and/or experienced open hostility from school staff" (p. 43).

A Review of Family Literacy Models

Each of the four studies presented that were grounded in the deficit and socio-cultural approach to family literacy were discussed to show the similarities as well as differences between these approaches. In both cases, the targeted populations for programs were mostly "at risk adults" (Nickse, 1990, p. 44), such as the teenage mothers in the Neuman (1995a) and Doneson (1991) studies, minority groups like the Mexican ESL families in Delgado-Gaitan's (1987) study and families coming from a low-SES background (see studies by Edwards, 1994, and Purcell-Gates, et al., 1995). The exception were the parents in the Handel & Goldsmith (1994) study who had completed high school and who were pursuing degrees at college.

The deficit studies tended to train parents as "surrogate teachers working on school-based literacy tasks" (Nickse, 1990, p. 52) and the curriculum was brought to the students (Auerbach, 1995b). In addition, these deficit studies appeared to regard the parent's role as one of transmitting literacy skills to the child (Auerbach, 1989). These studies also appeared to claim that parents did not model literacy sufficiently or did not value or support

literacy development (Auerbach, 1995b). The socio-cultural studies, on the other hand, approached literacy acquisition as a social construction instead of strictly a cognitive process. Such programs strive not to perpetuate any belief among participants "that they are deficient or incapable of learning" (Neuman, 1995b). Rather, by inviting participants to bring their social contexts into the classroom, students inform the curriculum (Auerbach, 1995a). For these reasons, this approach is also referred to as a participatory approach (Auerbach, 1995a).

As noted previously, the boundaries between the deficit and socio-cultural approaches to family literacy programs are blurred at times. Therefore, educators should reflect on where their practice falls on this continuum so that programs could be planned effectively to promote change. Belzer (1993) agrees that it is important to define one's vision of family literacy when planning a program. She says that project planners and staff should decide together what specifically they hoped to accomplish in a project. Decisions about aspects such as the target group, how and where service would be provided, and the content of the curriculum will then follow logically.

Family Literacy in the Developing World

The following two studies explore family literacy in the developing world where few programs of this nature have been carried out. Schieffelin (Schieffelin & Cochran-Smith, 1984) examined literacy acquisition of the Kaluli people who live in the rain forest on the Great Papuan Plateau. These traditionally non-literate, monolingual speakers of the Kaluli language were introduced to literacy so that they could eventually read the Bible and be converted to Christianity.

The missionaries who provided the literacy instruction placed greater emphasis on reading than writing development. Literacy materials were limited to a few simple booklets that included drawings of items such as tins of food, clothes and nontraditional dwellings. These drawings were identified with English labels. Participants were required to purchase

these materials with the result that many villagers thought of literacy as an expensive commodity.

The operant method for teaching reading in English was by syllabicating words in order to identify them. A few Kaluli learned to read aloud, very slowly and with clear enunciation. However, although the goal of the program was to help participants read the Bible, the missionary teachers made little attempt to include more comprehensive materials that addressed the social and cultural contexts of the participants' lives. The outcome of this omission, in the opinion of Schieffelin, fostered participant perspectives for literacy as being decontextualized from their lives. In addition, classes were held at a missionary station, a walking distance of two hours from the village. In order to attend classes, participants had to remove themselves, for periods of time, from the daily routines of village life which further decreased the learners' opportunities to view literacy in more comprehensive ways.

It should be noted that the missionaries also provided classes for the villagers' children who, unlike their parents, lived during the week at the mission station. Although these classes included basic reading, writing and mathematics instruction, Schieffelin (Schieffelin & Cochran-Smith, 1984) noted that the children made little effort to incorporate their literacy learning into village life when they returned there for weekends.

This study displays traits of a deficiency model. Reading instruction started with the acquisition of syllabication which is a sub-skill in the reading process. The Kaluli people were also not encouraged or even allowed to bring their social contexts into the classroom. Freire (1985) maintains that every act of reading involves a previous reading of the world and subsequently rereading the world. "There is a permanent movement back and forth between 'reading' reality and reading words - the spoken word too is our reading of the world" (p. 18). Ferdman (1990) confirms Freire's statement when he contends that "literacy ... in large part, involves facility in manipulating the symbols that codify and

represent the values, beliefs, and norms of [a] culture" (p. 187). For the Kaluli, literacy was something divorced from their worlds. Ferdman (1990) maintains that literacy training can bring about cultural separation. "When there is a mismatch between the definition and significance of literacy as they are represented in a person's cultural identity and in the learning situation, the individual is faced with making a choice" (p. 195). Fingeret (1991) supports these views when she notes: "our construction of meaning is rooted in our culture and language" (p. 9).

Wagner & Spratt (1988) reported on a study that involved sample families representative of the lower-middle-class sector of Moroccan society. These families derived their income mainly from agriculture, small trades and unskilled to semi-skilled labour. The study focused on how family variables might influence the process by which literacy was transferred across generations. Data were gathered from a sociodemographic and attitudinal survey administered to parents during a two hour interview. The researchers demanded two criteria for child selection: a) enrollment in the first year of school and b) having older siblings also enrolled in school. Individual tests of the sample children's reading abilities were carried out during the five years of primary school. Furthermore, an assessment of their metacognitive beliefs about reading and learning was conducted in their first year of school.

The interview was conducted in the native language of the primary caregiver who was in most cases the mother. No direct measurement of the parent's literacy was undertaken, because as the researchers noted, "mothers were, in the large majority, illiterate" (Wagner & Spratt, 1988, p. 363). Questions elicited information about the individual parent's perceptions regarding the complementary roles of parents, teachers and schools in the instruction of children. The child's reading score was determined from sub-tests on letter knowledge, word decoding, word-picture matching, sentence, maze and paragraph comprehension. In order to determine their beliefs about good reading habits,

children were told stories about children portraying contrasting reading habits. The first set of stories were focused on the characteristics of a good reader and the second set of stories examined children's beliefs about good reading habits. Afterwards the children were asked questions in order to identify good reader behaviours and practices.

The study reported a clear increase in the educational level attained across generations. Nineteen percent of the sample of children had one literate grandparent whereas 71% of their oldest siblings had completed the fourth grade. Twelve percent of fathers and 1% of mothers had passed the ninth grade while 39% of the oldest siblings had attained that level of schooling. Approximately one third of the highest scoring readers came from families in which neither parent had ever attended school. Parents with higher achieving children tended to stress parental (as contrasted with teacher's) responsibility in their children's education and they were more involved in their children's school progress. Children with a high score on the CGR (Characteristics of a Good Reader) metacognitive scale had a higher reading score of almost a full standard deviation compared to children who had low scores on this scale.

Heathington (1994) refers to four current definitions of literacy, i.e. the reading and writing ability definition, the years of schooling definition, the grade level equivalent definition and the functional literacy definition. She states that "the grade level equivalent definition is prevalent in educational writings" (p. 13). In the Wagner & Spratt study (1988), a low literacy level was measured in terms of having completed grade 4 and a higher literacy level was measured as having passed grade 9. Heathington (1994) rightly points out that "the definition of grade-level equivalents forces the adult into a pattern provided for children" (p. 13) which tends to be a perspective adopted by practitioners who support the deficiency model in literacy training. Freire (1985) reminds the literacy practitioner of the interrelatedness between "reading" reality and reading words - a process hardly to be equated with only passing a certain grade level at school. Fingeret (1983)

concurs when she argues that "although adults cannot decode print, they constantly are decoding the social world" (p. 137).

The Wagner & Spratt (1988) study also refutes to some degree claims made by some researchers in the field such as Park (1987) who maintains that the educational level of the mother is highly predictive of the educational achievements of the child and that "the child from the nonliterate or nonreading family enters school at a great disadvantage, which continues as parents are unable to help children with homework" (p. 40). However, other researchers such as Bradley (1987) and Epstein (1986) have found that parental involvement rather than parental literacy level influences children's achievement at school. Bradley (1987) noted that there was a high correlation between parental responsiveness to and involvement in school matters, the emotional climate of the home and children's achievement at school. The Wagner & Spratt study (1988) appears to support this latter view in spite of its limitations with respect to parental literacy ability being identified as grade level achievement.

The study on intergenerational literacy in Morocco, in particular, is of relevance for the study described in this thesis since similar conditions prevail in Namibia at present. Adult illiteracy in Morocco in 1988 was estimated to be greater than 60% which is typical for the developing countries of Africa and Asia. Morocco is a country where a number of languages coexist and where multilingualism is common. Namibia has thirteen languages and trilingualism is common. Since independence in 1956, the educational system in Marocco has undergone major changes that included a shift from French to Arabic as the predominant language of instruction and the availability of more comprehensive schooling. In Namibia, independence was obtained in 1989 and there was a shift from Afrikaans to English as the official language of instruction. In addition, young Namibians now have greater access to educational opportunities.

Conclusion

When summarizing the literature presented above, three themes are evident:

There are two main approaches to family literacy: the deficit approach and the socio-cultural approach. Within the deficit approach, successful literacy and language acquisition events are linked to the culture of schooling and to mainstream literacy practices. The curriculum is brought to the learner as a pre-determined construct and learners' weaknesses are the focus for instruction. Within a socio-cultural approach, literacy is perceived as being acted out in daily social interaction. Learner practices and concerns inform the curriculum and the social context of family life strengthens rather than obstructs literacy learning. The theoretical framework of many programs do not easily lie in one camp or another. Instead, the composition of the group that is enrolled in a family literacy program demands that elements from both approaches sometimes be included in the program.

Children's books are a valued medium for literacy learning, regardless of whether instruction is shaped by a specific approach. Adults appear to understand and identify with feelings and cognitions portrayed in children's books. Hence, they may, in turn, scaffold these feelings and insights for their children.

Marginalized parents have been shown to benefit from family literacy programs when program organizers consider the specific needs of the adult participant in their planning, when parents are allowed to articulate their dormant strengths and when less literate adults can pursue their own learning agendas while at the same time facilitating literacy learning for their children.

This chapter has provided an overview of the related literature. Chapter III presents the methodological approach taken in the study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the research framework is described. Information on the sample, the venue, the research schedule together with data collection and data analyses procedures are provided.

The Design

The major purpose of the study was to examine how less literate mothers in a rural Namibian community extend their own and their children's literacy development through the medium of shared book experiences. To achieve this goal, journal reflections, audiotaped interviews and transcriptions of discussions surrounding the readings of selected texts were utilized to collect the data. Data analyses were carried out by determining common themes surfacing from the data.

Research Framework

This study is based on current research and practice for literacy learning which focus on the social dimensions that surround literacy events as being central to that learning (Auerbach, 1989; Clay, 1991; Cochran-Smith, 1987; Heath 1982; Smith, 1985). My work was greatly influenced by Paulo Freire's model of "conscientization." I became aware of and accepted the concept that people construct knowledge as learners rather than just simply accepting the knowledge of others.

A qualitative inquiry was thought to be most suited to this study. According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992), a qualitative inquiry is evolutionary. Its open, emergent nature sets the stage for discovery. In qualitative inquiry, the researcher becomes the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1988). The members of the target group were seen as people acting "not on the basis of predetermined responses to predefined objects" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 36), but as people interpreting, defining,

constructing meaning, people whose life world could be best entered by me becoming a participant observer. The researcher's activities become subordinate to her role as a participant (Merriam, 1988).

Gaining Entry

The Sample

The vice principal of a school in a rural community in northern Namibia recruited about fifteen mothers whom she thought might be interested in the project. The only selection criterium was that these women should already have children in grades 1 to 3 or that they would have children entering grade one in January 1997. Since the study is based on the inclusive Freirean model, no minimum level of literacy ability for participants was required. Eight of the 15 women who met the criteria, agreed to participate in the study. These women were the target population for the study. It should be noted, however, that the study indirectly connected with 40 children.

Figure 2 shows a summary of information about participants. Meetings were regularly attended by eight women whose age ranged from 21 to 50. They had an average of five children each. The eight participants spoke seven different mother languages but all of them understood Rukwangali which is one of the local languages in the Okavango region. Six women in the group were not officially employed. One person was self-employed and another one had to work twice a week during her lunch hour to get release time from work to attend the meetings.

Only four ladies attended the first meeting. It appeared that there was some initial confusion about what the program would entail. According to the project information received by them, they believed it would provide them with an opportunity to learn English. I carefully explained that the project was intended to assist mothers in exploring the world of print in meaningful ways with their children and that research has proven that children will become readers and even better readers if reading is a part of the home culture

Name	Age	# of children	1st Language	# Sessions attended	Other languages spoken		Employed
					Fluent	Rudimentary	
Mary	21	1	Sambyu	12	Afrikaans	English	No
Udette...	37	6	Rukwangali	15	Afrikaans	English	Yes
Anné....	43	10	Afrikaans	13	Gciricku Herero Damara Rukwangali Ombalantu Mbukushu	English	No
Chepa...	45	5	Portuguese	14	Afrikaans English Rukwangali		No
Pethua...	45	5	Rukwangali	14	Afrikaans		No
Mitha....	47	7	Oshivambo	14	Afrikaans Rukwangali	English	Self employed
Sindé....	53	3	Luchazi	9	Rukwangali	English	No
Kasiko..	50	3	Gciricku	13	Rukwangali Afrikaans		Yes

Figure 2. Participant Information. (Pseudonyms were used.)

of their older family members such as parents, aunts, grandparents and cousins (Mountainbird, 1991; Sharp, 1991; Handel & Goldsmith, 1994). I also explained that a project of this nature did not exclude the possibility of acquiring conversational English since all the books which I intended to use for discussion with the group were English books. I then showed the books and allowed the participants ample time to page through them. After this first meeting, I telephoned the people whose names were on the list who had not attended. I tried to establish as much personal contact as possible with participants as well as motivate them to attend. Handel and Goldsmith (1994) stress the role of motivation in family literacy programs when they note:

> ... motivation [is] particularly important because, as with most family literacy programs, Family Reading is directed to low-income participants who are not good readers, whose early school experiences may have been problematic and who are often under a great deal of life stress (p. 152).

From the second meeting onwards attendance was fairly regular, as shown by the summary in Figure 2.

It should be noted that when working with parents with limited English proficiency, family literacy program activities should build parents' confidence in working with and reading to children in English (Yu, 1994). However, facilitators do their students a disservice by equating family literacy with *English* family literacy. Parents can negotiate meaning best in their first language and they should be supported in doing so (Auerbach, 1995a). Fitzgerald (1993) confirms that "significant cognitive benefits can accrue from maintenance and enhancement of native language and literacy alongside English language and literacy development" (p. 638).

The Venue

I selected this specific school in rural northern Namibia because I had been a member of staff in 1983. In addition, a friendship of 13 years standing with a person who is still a member of staff in 1996 ensured that I would have accommodation for the duration of the project. I also thought that a project of this nature would render a special service to

the community in this remote, rural area since development projects of this nature tend to be offered in more urban communities in Namibia at present.

The school offers classes from pre-primary (age 4) to grade 10. It has an English medium as well as an Afrikaans medium stream in grades 1, 2 and 3. Instruction from grade 4 onwards is entirely through the medium of English in Namibia. This school used to be a school exclusively for whites until Namibia became independent from South Africa in 1989. Ever growing enrollment numbers since 1989 have led to the decision to phase out pre-primary classes completely in 1997 to open up more classroom space for subject area teaching.

Temperatures in northern Namibia often soar to +38 - +41 degrees Celsius during November and December. When I was planning my research in Canada, I thought of scheduling group meetings once a week at 9:00 or 10:00 a.m. when it would still be cool. However, the principal could only offer us space in the school at the end of the school day at 1 p.m. After some deliberation at our first meeting, the group decided to meet twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 3 p.m. This arrangement allowed us to finish the project in the first week of November instead of the beginning of December as I had initially intended. In addition we were able to escape most of the extreme heat towards the end of the year.

The staff at the school, and the principal and vice principal, in particular, were very supportive. I was allowed to make use of the school's computer and photocopy machine. Occasionally the administrators supplied me with crayons and board magnets from school supplies which I returned upon completion of the project. Staff and administrators alike were interested in the progress of the project and I genuinely appreciated their encouraging words after the less than successful sessions.

The Research Schedule

Of the eight ladies enrolled in the project, seven regularly attended 15 sessions from September 12, 1996 until November 5, 1996 with each session lasting about two hours. In other words, participants were involved for a total number of 30 program hours. Children's story books, an information text, nursery rhymes, an alphabet book and a book on numbers were presented and discussed. Adult print material was shared on one occasion when it complimented a theme with which the group was dealing. Furthermore, on one other occasion, participants were involved in making a craft. A synthesis of the program sessions is given in Figure 3.

During the planning stage of my research, I intended to schedule meetings according to the workshop model described by Handel and Goldsmith (1994). Within their model, a workshop starts with an introductory activity. With the exception of the first workshop, sessions begin with participants reporting on their reading to children at home. Subsequently, the facilitator presents a children's book in a specific genre and he/she demonstrates a reading strategy. The reading strategy is practiced in pairs. Pair work is followed by a group discussion structured to move through three levels: "text-based inquiry, personal relevance, and generalization" (Handel & Goldsmith, 1994, p. 156). Participants then prepare for the reading at home and they borrow the books. Adult reading is included as an optional activity.

Overall, I tried to adhere to this model for my project. However, the nature of the group and members' limited English proficiency forced me to modify and/or extend certain aspects of this model to meet the needs of my respondents. A typical meeting during my project unfolded itself in the following stages. Snacks and soft drinks were served to set the scene for learning in a social context (Handel, 1992). Some participants also needed sustenance since they had to walk up to five kilometers to get to the school. Participants then reported on reading/sharing of books at home with their children. Subsequently, a

# Session	# Women	Text Read	Class Proceedings	Discussion Topics	Home Activity
1 12/09/96	4	-	Introduction of participants. Reasons for participation. Explained project. Recruitment of more people.	What is literacy? The importance of family literacy.	Journal writing/ illustrations
2 17/09/96	6	Leo the late Bloomer	Introduction of new members. Read text/translation/discussion.	Interpretation of labels: e.g. does "Leo" mean "lion?" (Afrikaans: "leeu.")	Oral story telling: parents. Drawings: children.
3 20/09/96	8	Leo the late Bloomer Two by Two	Paired reading: Leo the Late Bloomer. Noah's story in Rukwangali. Read text/translation/discussion: Two by Two. Recreation of animals in play dough. Singing in local languages.	The importance of regular attendance. The ingredients/method for making play dough.	Making play dough at home.
4 24/09/96	8	Two by Two	Sharing stories and drawings (See home activity 17/19/96). Uninterrupted reading of text by facilitator.	Joys of story telling /drawing. Personal naming protocols.	Read/share Leo the Late Bloomer.
5 26/09/96	6	An African Mother Goose: -Jaha and Jamil, -Taleh , Taleh. Two by Two.	Feedback: Leo the Late Bloomer. Transposing and singing; - Jaha and Jamil: Jack and Jill, - Taleh, Taleh: Peter, Peter, Pumpkin Eater. Studied map. Located Botswana and Tanzania.	Intergenerational aspects of literacy.	Read/share Two by Two.
6 31/09/96	7	An African Mother Goose: -Canopies are falling down.	Sang familiar rhymes. Reading, transposing and singing; -Canopies are falling down: London Bridge is falling down. Conversational English .	Text is grounded in participants' experience. The size of the ark.	Teach/sing rhymes.

# Session	# Women	Text Read	Class Proceedings	Discussion Topics	Home Activity
7 08/10/96	4	The Little Red Hen.	Feedback: Two by Two. Read text/translation/discussion.	Bears. Size of the ark. Why the flood? Cooking in the ark. No man is an island unto himself. To eat means to work.	Read/share The Little Red Hen.
8 10/10/96	8	Magazine article on rape (Afrikaans).	Collages: Being a mother. Discussion on choice of pictures. Discussion on rape.	Differences/similarities of motherhood experiences. Rape/homosexuality/ prostitution.	(Re)read/share Leo the Late Bloomer, Two by Two.
9 15/10/96	8	An African Mother Goose: -In the African Air, -Will there Be a Lap for Me?	Feedback: The Little Red Hen. Reading, transposing and singing; -In the African Air: Hey Diddle Diddle. Read text/translation/discussion.	The "moral" of The Little Red Hen.	Read/share Will There Be a Lap for Me?
10 17/10/96	8	An African Mother Goose: -Kalahari Days Hot, -Chicory, Pickory, Pock - Alphabet Rhyme. The Very Hungry Caterpillar	Feedback: Will there Be a Lap for Me? Read text/translation/discussion. Volunteer reading of text by participants.	Identifying characteristics of fathers/grandparents. "Egungu" (caterpillars) - a local source of protein.	Share/read/sing familiar rhymes and rhymes of choice: An African Mother Goose.
11 23/10/96	7	The Very Hungry Caterpillar.	Feedback: An African Mother Goose. Uninterrupted reading of text by facilitator.	Illustrations in An African Mother Goose. The "picture" (map) of Africa. The medium of teaching in grades 1 - 3.	Make greeting cards with children. Read/share The Very Hungry Caterpillar.

# Session	# Women	Text Read	Class Proceedings	Discussion Topics	Home Activity
12 25/10/96	6	An African Mother Goose: -The Ebony Tree, -My First Alphabet Book Three Blind Mice.	Feedback: The Very Hungry Caterpillar. Reading/transposing/singing; -The Ebony Tree: Here we go 'Round the Mulberry Bush. Focus on words (A-M) in My First Alphabet Book. Read text/translation/discussion.	Food and healthy eating habits. Illustrations in The Very Hungry Caterpillar.	Share/read/sing The Ebony Tree. Share My First Alphabet Book.
13 29/10/96	8	My First Alphabet Book. Three Blind Mice.	Singing the ABC. Project evaluation. Focus on words (N-Z) in My First Alphabet Book. Read texts/translation/discussion. Uninterrupted reading of text by facilitator and participants.	Children's response to stories by drawing. Participants' increased self confidence to speak English. Parents and children enjoy story telling. Regular story times reunite families.	Teach/sing the ABC. Share My First Alphabet Book. Read/share Three Blind Mice.
14 31/10/96	7	First Numbers. Mig the Pig.	Feedback: My First Alphabet Book. Feedback: Three Blind Mice. Read texts/translation/discussion. Role play during reading of Mig the Pig.	Children's surprising knowledge of English. The origin of the magic ointment. Illustrations help to master print. Clustering of similar articles facilitate learning.	Teach children to count (1 - 10). Read/share Mig the Pig.
15 05/11 /96	8	-	Feedback: First Numbers Feedback : Three Blind Mice. Feedback: Mig the Pig. Handing out of "prize books." Farewell party.	The rabbit doctor is a traditional healer. No man is an island unto himself. Travel accoutrement. The illustrations in First Numbers and Mig the Pig. Celebration of milestones in life.	Read/share prize book

Figure 3. A Synthesis of the Family Literacy Programme.

new text was introduced, followed by a discussion that focused on themes addressed by a specific book. Handel (1992) maintains that identifying and discussing themes help adults value the books. The degree of involvement in a discussion served as a gauge for me to determine if a second reading might help participants arrive at a better understanding of the specific text.

Participants were free to take books home whenever they wanted to. To strengthen group cohesion, each meeting was concluded by singing together. This last event was initiated by our group member Chepa who expressed her feelings about the singing: "You know, in Africa we like to sing. Every time we are together in a program such as this one, we start singing so that we can be together" (Journal entry, November 7).

The literature overwhelmingly supports the use of children's picture books in adult literacy training. (See Bloem, 1995; Sharp, 1991; Mountainbird, 1991; Smallwood, 1992; Handel & Goldsmith, 1994). According to these researchers, the stories are generally well written but short enough so that even new readers will not be daunted by the length of text to be read. Adults read these shorter books quickly which gives them a sense of accomplishment. The possibilities for students' comprehension and enjoyment are also expanded because children's books employ the double media of print and illustration. Regarding illustrations, Mountainbird (1991) adds that books with realistic illustrations should be used with beginning adult readers since they can attach meaning more readily to the realistic than to abstract or elaborate pictures. Smallwood (1992) indicates that children's books mostly address mature themes and topics. Therefore, adults can appreciate them with greater depth and maturity born from experience. Bloem (1995) concurs with this perspective.

A home reading of children's books with their own children empowers adult students because they can use their skills to help someone whom they love (Sharp, 1991) and the reading event can emphasize their "roles as competent parents, rather than their

roles as deficient readers" (Sharp, 1991, p. 216). Bloem (1995) emphasizes what might be the most important reason for using children's literature in adult literacy training when she suggests that it might help adult students to acquire a reading habit, whereas traditional skill and drill approaches focus on retention only.

Data Collection

In this study I used a variety of techniques for data collection. The major sources of data collection were the reflective journal, interviews and audiotapes of class discussions. I kept a reflective journal on what happened during the group meetings and I wrote in it after I had made home visits. Audiotapes were made of discussions in class. Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with respondents at the start and upon completion of the project. I took pictures of some of the writing and drawing assignments which were completed in class. I also made photocopies of writing done by participants during our meetings.

Journal

Spradley (1980) indicates that a fieldwork journal "will contain a record of experiences, ideas, fears, mistakes, confusions, breakthroughs, and problems that arise during fieldwork" (p. 71). Sister Therèse Craig wrote extensively about personal journal writing for self-discovery and growth. She says that "journal writing refers to the private, self-expressive, and reflective writing one can do as a way of understanding self" (Craig, 1983, p. 373). The language used in journal writing tends to be more metaphoric. In those metaphors, there is hidden knowledge that was present in our unconscious that we did not realize we knew (Craig, 1983).

Initially, I intended to slip out of the participant mode immediately after the meeting and become the observer who records observations of the latest meeting in my fieldwork journal. However, the hot evenings made it difficult to be productive and I quickly decided to postpone journalling until early the following morning. The heat, the varied

literacy abilities of the group and logistical arrangements such as providing transport made each meeting emotionally and physically draining. My journal entries concerning my fears about participant retention, mistakes such as introducing individual oral reading too soon and problems arising from having to deal with speakers of seven different mother languages became more comprehensive and exploratory when done the next morning.

After the more successful meetings, I was only too happy to record breakthroughs and successes in my journal straight-away. An entry on one particular day shows that the texts discussed on that day were a good choice. Claudette told me when we left the room that Kasiko said today the teacher did "nice" books with them. (Journal entry, October 24).

Through my writing, I arrived at insights and solutions which I would not have been able of otherwise. During preparation for my research, I was advised to allow participants to take home books whenever they wanted to. Pretty soon I discovered that there was not much to reflect on concerning the initial feedback stages of our meetings. I realized then that some participants needed a second reading of a text before they could paraphrase it and share it with their children in a meaningful way.

Regular read-backs of my journal provided me with a sense of sequence and assisted me in the planning of future sessions. By talking it through with myself on paper, I decided to introduce a short text such as Leo the late Bloomer as a first reader. Two by Two would be the second reader. The length of this text might discourage participants with reduced reading strengths who actually joined the project to learn to read and write English. The shorter nursery rhymes would be the next reader. These rhymes would be text of manageable length which most participants could read in English and thus provide them with a sense of accomplishment.

Journalling did not only help me to plan my field work but it also helped me to arrive at a better understanding of self. The meeting of October 31, was particularly stressful for me. A group member offered to provide the snacks for the day. However,

she arrived without the food and offered as an excuse that she had to visit an acquaintance who experienced death in the family. She proposed that if she had walked back home, she would have been late for the meeting. I drove her home to fetch the food and this delay resulted in the meeting starting forty-five minutes late. The rest of the group was only too happy to wait for a portion of the traditional, very popular "mahango" porridge. When the two of us came back, Chepa noticed that I was upset and I recorded as follows in my journal: "Chepa explained that I found myself in Africa. If the sun is still high there is plenty of time to do something." I realized that if I truly wanted to enter and understand something of the life-world of these women, it would also mean adjusting my clock which I did for subsequent meetings.

Journalling also helped me to arrive at an even more profound understanding of myself as a product of my culture. I grew up in the hey days of apartheid when differences rather than similarities among people were stressed. I had entered this project fully aware of my own feelings and prejudices as possible sources of bias (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). By analyzing proceedings during our meetings in my journal, I gradually came to understand the many similarities which bound us together, first as women and homemakers, then as mothers who care about the future of our children at school and lastly as learners of literacy who want our achievements to be recognized, however small they may be. Recording my feelings and prejudices in my journal became a method to recognize and control my own bias (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Interviews

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) state that in qualitative research, interviews may be used in two ways. They may be the dominant strategy for data collection. However, they may also be employed in conjunction with participant observation, document analysis or other data collection techniques as was the case in this project.

I used semi-structured interviews as a "less structured alternative to the scheduled standardized interview ... available to the qualitative case study researcher" (Merriam, 1988, p. 73). My first interview was intended to be what Van Manen describes as "a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 66). Questions during these first interviews addressed demographic information, retrospective thoughts on the participants' own experience of school and opinions about their children and grandchildren's current schooling. Since I was particularly interested in participants' memories about school, it was necessary to interview because I was "interested in past events that are impossible to replicate" (Merriam, 1988, p. 72). I wanted to determine how the respondents' experiences at school influenced their modeling for literacy as parents. In addition, some questions were directed towards eliciting input from participants to ascertain the success of the current family literacy project (See Appendix A).

During the first interviews, I could detect a certain amount of apprehension about the unfamiliar situation where a relative stranger was interested in so much information about the life world of participants. In retrospect, I realize that I should have included more socializing events with my subjects, such as going for a coffee at the local coffee shop. Bogdan & Biklen (1992) point out that such activities may not produce a great deal of data, but they "may enhance your rapport and put you into a better position to collect better data in the future" (p. 90). The interviews allowed me to explain again that participants would be granted total anonymity when I wrote my thesis and that the interview was necessary to arrive at an understanding of the whole person who was interested in literacy learning. Glesne & Peshkin (1992) stress the importance of anonymity in research. "Participants have a right to expect that when they give you permission to observe and interview, you will protect their confidences and preserve their anonymity" (p. 117).

I had anticipated that each interview would last about 45 minutes but most interviews took two hours or longer. I tried to show my genuine interest in the respondents as people by looking at pictures of family members and admiring crafts which they created and sold to earn additional income. In a few incidences, I shared a meal and a couple of drinks before the interview even commenced. Van Manen (1990) stresses the importance of participation: "The best way to enter a person's life world is to participate in it" (p. 69).

When I conducted the first interview with two of the older participants, it was frustrating to find that they frequently misunderstood my questions and that not even questions such as "Can you give an example?" "What was it like?" could get the dialogue back to the level of concrete experience. I decided to conduct the post interview not only in Afrikaans and/or English, but to also have the questions translated into Rukwangali and Gciricku - two of the four indigenous languages spoken in the Okavango region.

The purpose of my post interview could best be described in Van Manen's words as "a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 66). Questions focused on participants' preferences regarding texts discussed during meetings, my strengths and weaknesses as facilitator and whether attendance in a project of this nature had brought about meaningful change in family literacy interactions and other family behaviours. (See Appendix B).

One of the women was quite ill with high blood pressure because of the scorching heat and I could not conduct a post interview with her. The post interview was the only interview that I had with the oldest group member who could not speak either English or Afrikaans. I engaged the services of an interpreter to facilitate the interview. I also made use of a respondent's daughter as an interpreter in one other case.

For the remainder of the post interviews, translations of the questions in Gciricku and Rukwangali were available should participants wish to avail themselves of them. I

have a limited understanding of Rukwangali and I cannot understand Gciricku at all. Instructors at another vocational training centre in town did surface translations of the questions and checked them for typing errors after they had been typed. My only way to gauge the accuracy of a translation was to keep a copy of the English version and to ask the interpreter to translate the essence of the question back to me in English or Afrikaans.

During the post interview sessions, some of the participants clearly wondered if a completed event was worth so much retrospection. I explained that my "teacher" in Canada would want me to collect this information for the final document to be written on this project. One lady made her feelings known via the interpreter in no uncertain terms: "She says the project is over, she enjoyed attending the classes and she doesn't think it's of any use to answer that question now." I explained that as she was the only participant who could understand neither English nor Afrikaans, her opinion, in particular, was of critical importance to assess the significance of the project. We then proceeded with the interview.

All interviews were tape recorded and subsequently transcribed. They were difficult to transcribe since I had to translate what was said from Afrikaans into English. Verbatim transcripts were often impossible as I tried to retain the meaning of what was said while at the same time capturing something of participants' unique way of expressing themselves. I was "sensitive to the subtle undertones of language" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 112). I wanted to enter the life world of these women and I would have to heed their language because "idiomatic phrases ... are born out of lived experience" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 60).

Session Discussions

After the third whole group meeting, I started audiotaping participants' feedback on the texts which they took home for sharing/reading. I did not elect to audiotape from the onset because I wanted a feeling of mutual trust to develop first among group members and me. Merriam (1988) cautions against the obtrusiveness of mechanical devices when he

states "Although mechanical devices such as videotapes, film, or tape recorders can be used to record observations, the cost and obtrusiveness of these methods often preclude their use" (p. 96). The ladies were suspicious about the purpose of the voice activated dictaphone when I asked them if I could audiotape their discussion for the first time. The conversation was initially visibly strained so I stopped recording after a few minutes to allow them to listen to their own voices. This procedure helped them to become more relaxed. Towards the end of the project, a participant would sometimes even hold out her hand for the recorder to ensure that her contribution towards the discussion would be clearly audible on the tape. I periodically handed out copies of the transcripts to participants and read these aloud to them, so the women could see the print rendition of their oral discussions. This process helped alleviate any concerns about a hidden agenda on my part. I believe that this strategy also helped to have the recorder accepted as another "ear" during discussions.

Bogdan & Biklen (1992) warn that some researchers tend to rely on their recall rather than a tape recorder when they want to record their subjects' statements. Researchers following this method often find that it is very difficult to recapture fully a long event. When I had difficulty recapturing what was said during class discussions, I resorted to the tape recordings. I did not tape record during the first three sessions and I feel that I had lost out on some of the richness of the data. Bogdan & Biklen (1992) also caution that tape recorders can create the illusion that research is effortless and that novice researchers tend to lose sight of the time consuming task of transcribing audiotapes. These authors maintain that without a system of prompt transcription in place, a project is doomed to failure. I tried to transcribe a class discussion as soon as possible after a particular session. When I had finished transcribing, I would do a read-back of my journal entries for that session. Transcribing these audiotapes helped me to relive the experiences line by line and I arrived at a deeper understanding of them. This process also resulted in my making

additional entries in my journal for that specific meeting. The transcripts helped me, as participant observer, to internalize and to commit to memory what had been discussed. (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Data Analysis

Bogdan & Biklen (1992) indicate that there are two approaches to qualitative data analysis. In one approach, analysis occurs concurrently with data collection and is more or less completed by the time the data have been gathered. This is an approach followed by experienced fieldworkers. The other approach involves analyzing the data after all data collection is completed. I decided to incorporate aspects of both approaches. As a novice researcher, I held back from fully-fledged, ongoing analysis since I did not have "an eye for the conceptual and substantive issues" (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 154) that were displayed in the field. However, I did some preliminary analysis in the field to ensure that the data that were being collected would be substantial enough to accomplish analysis later (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Data Analysis in the Field

Guba & Lincoln (1981) refer to data analysis in the field as "continuous checking" (p. 212). I practiced continuous checking for the strength of data analyses by firstly employing multiple methods of inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). My reflective journal writing, the audiotaping of session discussions together with the interviews conducted twice with most respondents allowed me to triangulate findings from one area of data collection with findings from the two remaining data sources.

I conducted an ongoing analysis of my journal entries in order to adjust my focus to the intent of the study and to explore my emerging perspectives. Constant read back or "continuity feedback" (Progoff, 1992, p. 24) is central to journal data analysis. This metacognitive activity is a "means of maintaining a perspective ... and of readjusting our perspective to meet current situations" (Progoff, 1992, p. 24).

The audiotapes were transcribed and read aloud to respondents as a means of incorporating "member checks" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 212). These two researchers maintain that this activity is part of the process of continuous checking and it is important because of "recognizability of the description by those who lived the experience" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 213). The member checks could not provide for deep analysis of the transcriptions because of the limited English language abilities of the participants. However, the checks were a means to including participants' responses to the data, albeit at a minimal level.

As part of the process of continuous checking, Guba & Lincoln (1981) suggest two stages of interview analysis: analysis of the single interview and "analysis of the interview as part of a larger set of interview data, which will be integrated to form the total inquiry" (p. 183). After having completed each of the pre and post interviews, I reflected in my journal on the individual respondent's personal context, the possibility of respondent bias and the interactional process between the respondent and me (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). This process helped me to determine the value of each interview in terms of information gathered and its contribution to additional leads in the data analysis procedure (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

Analysis after Data Collection

When my fieldwork was completed, I took a vacation break. Bogdan & Biklen (1992) recommend a similar course of action. It enables the researcher to distance him/herself from the details of the fieldwork, he/she gets the opportunity to put relationships between researcher and subjects in perspective and the researcher develops new enthusiasm for data analysis that might otherwise have become tedious. Subsequently, I proceeded with "uncovering thematic aspects" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 92) in the data as a whole. Bogdan & Biklen (1992) refer to this process as developing "coding categories" (p. 166).

Guba & Lincoln (1981) point out that devising categories involves both convergent and divergent thinking. Convergence is determining what pieces of data converge on a single category or theme. Divergence is the task of fleshing out the categories once they have been developed (Meriam, 1988, p. 135). Van Manen (1990) confirms that "themes have power when they allow us to proceed with phenomenological descriptions" (p. 90).

After having devised a common set of major codes and subcodes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) which emanated from all data sources, I submitted them to a fellow graduate student in the doctoral program for an "outside audit" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 186). This auditor read my journal and the transcriptions of both audiotaped class sessions and the interviews in order to determine whether my categorizations of themes were done appropriately, that is "within the realm of commonly accepted good practice" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 186). In addition, she indicated whether the categories were supported by exhaustive evidence from all sources of data collection. My external auditor confirmed my analyses with respect to the major themes surfacing from the data.

Summary

This chapter has presented the methodological procedures with respect to sample selection, data collection and data analysis. Chapter IV presents the findings and results of the study together with a discussion of these results.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, an analysis of the data collected is presented. Data were collected from pre and post-interviews, journal entries and transcripts of discussions during group meetings. Four prominent themes emanated from the data: a) lived experience as text interpretation b) adult literacy acquisition as a developmental process, c) music as support for literacy learning and d) the reciprocal nature of collaborative learning. The chapter concludes by providing an in-depth portrait of one of the participants to show her development as a learner of literacy and as literacy model for her children over a period of two months.

Lived Experience As Text Interpretation

Goodman (1996) contends that "all language is used and learned in the context of expressing and comprehending meaning" (p. 67). In The Reader, the Text, the Poem, Louise Rosenblatt (1978) charted the construction of meaning during reading as an ongoing transaction between the reader and the text. This transaction involves the reader and the reader's background knowledge about the topic being read together with the context of the reading event and the literacy experiences that the reader brings to the text. *Schema* theory highlights the significance of a reader's background knowledge during the reading event. Background knowledge or prior knowledge is grouped as knowledge structures in long-term memory. These structures are referred to as schema (Lipson & Wixson, 1991).

Rosenblatt also identifies the different stances towards reading. She distinguishes between efferential and aesthetic responses to text. When reading efferentially, "the primary concern of the reader is with what he will carry away from the reading" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 24). In other words, the reader concentrates on the end result of the reading, the information that will be retained when the reading has been completed. During aesthetic reading, on the other hand, "the reader's primary concern is with what

happens *during* the actual reading event" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 24). The reader consciously focuses on how the text influences him emotionally. Within the efferent zone, the text is understood by a wide range of people. Rosenblatt refers to this interpretation of the text as the *public* meaning of the text. On the other hand, when the reader adopts an aesthetic stance to text, the meaning of that text is constructed in a very personal and *private* manner (Rosenblatt, 1978). For example, when I read Hamlet, my efferent responses include information that the play is about a Danish prince whose life is troubled. When I take an aesthetic stance to the same text, I view Hamlet's difficulties from personal and private perspectives, such as having a friend whose fiancé committed suicide or having had to experience the death of a beloved one in the family.

Throughout the family literacy sessions, I tried to model an aesthetic reading of text. Reading a new book was always followed by discussion in which participants were encouraged to bring their background knowledge and personal experiences to the text. Their private meanings were not judged in terms of their correctness. Rather, they served to demonstrate that text could be interpreted from multiple perspectives. The discussions also enabled everyone to arrive at an even more comprehensive understanding of the text.

The introduction of Two by Two by Barbara Reid and its ensuing discussion clearly illustrated the importance of religion, and the social significance of the church in this rural, predominantly black community. The church and religion are still binding factors in the life of the rural African. During my teaching in Namibia, for example, I often taught singing classes at what were formerly referred to as "black schools." It never failed to amaze me that students would choose to sing specifically hymns should the teacher be a few minutes late for class. Furthermore, during the week, the church also becomes interwoven into the fabric of daily life. The church hall, for instance, often becomes the venue for Bible studies, adult literacy classes and even a crèche for working mothers from the church community.

During the post-interview, I asked the women which book had most appealed to them. Five ladies chose Two by Two. Without exception, they indicated that they had heard (and read) the story of Noah in church. However, this book was the first opportunity for them and their children to respond to the pictures that accompanied the story. Many questions were asked during the home readings. Mitha's children wanted to know how the people managed to live with the snakes in the "watto" (ark). Her response was that all the pairs of animals had their own room in the "watto." Udette's children wanted to know who buried all the corpses but their mother had no answer for them. Anné suggested in our class discussion that she should have said the fish ate them. Anné's children were concerned about where the people found food for 40 days and 40 nights inside the "watto." Their mother proposed that everybody ate only bread. Kavango people live in a hot, dry climate and the next question inevitably had to be: "But didn't the bread get stale?" Their mother indicated that it was all God's secret. He gave Noah a recipe for bread that would not become stale. At present, preaching in many of the rural black churches in Namibia is often still done in a transmission mode. These women probably came to know about Noah in this efferential way. To them, it was a welcome change to look at the story accompanied by pictures and just respond to the illustrations. It was clear from the discussions of interactions during home readings that both the mothers and children were trying to ground their response to the text in real-life experience.

Pethua elaborated why, of all the texts we read, the story of Noah was the best for her:

> It tells us about people of many years ago whom God punished. The people in our world today are like the people in Noah's times. They drink a lot. They don't have pity on people. They just kill people. Children of two or three years old are being raped. But Noah was definitely the best. (Post interview, November 10).

Chepa further explained that the "watto" was, in fact, the church of today. "Jesus Christ saves all who are in the 'watto.' If you are outside, you find that the devil will eat you, like

the rain in olden times" (Post interview, November 12). Many Westerners tend to see rural life in Africa as almost pristine. However, Pethua sees a reflection of her own society in the people who were wiped out by the big flood. From her perspective, her community is also fraught with evil. When Chepa, in turn, interprets Two by Two, she acknowledges the role of the church in her community. Within the "watto" you know that you have been saved by Jesus Christ, but outside the "watto," without the support of fellow Christians, you are more prone to attack by the forces of evil.

When we discussed The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle, I was unaware that the local people ate caterpillars as a source of protein. I blundered by forcing my interpretation of the book on participants. I noted that while the story deals with the theme of hunger, it also teaches about the life cycle of the caterpillar. When participants reported back on the home reading of the book, most of the discussion centered around the fact that the older generation ate "egungu" (caterpillars). Of much more relevance than hunger or the life cycle of the caterpillar was the evolution of traditional culture as acted out by parents who ate "egungu" and their children who refused to do so as a result of contemporary culture. Mitha's comment summarized the feelings of her peers when she said: "They [her children] laughed at me because I eat this 'egungu' [caterpillars]. ... They don't eat 'egungu' ..." (Class discussion, October 24). The women's personal responses to the texts vigorously supported different constructs for caterpillars and their functions in their own and in their children's lives.

It was standard procedure for the duration of the study to have participants translate my Afrikaans explanations of a new text into the local languages. Participants usually took the books home after a second reading in class. As facilitator, I wanted the women to understand the referents of as many words as possible (Rosenblatt, 1978) so that they would be able to paraphrase the story for their children. My efforts to encourage personal responses, however, were not always successful. This was evident on October 15, when

the women took home Will There Be a Lap for Me? by Dorothy Corey after only one reading. On October 17, only Mitha reported that she had discussed the book with her children. Such behaviour was inconsistent with the eagerness and dedication which the group had displayed until then. I mulled over the incident in my journal and decided that there were a number of possible reasons for this deviation in the group's behaviour.

First, the group might not have been able to relate to the theme which deals with an older child's fear that there will not be room for him in the family after the arrival of his younger brother. Big families are still the norm in present-day Africa and the concept of an unwelcome child is unknown to Africans. If a single mother becomes pregnant and she cannot take care of the baby, a grandmother or a member of the extended family steps in to take over the responsibility of raising the infant. A second possible explanation could have been that there was simply no time to read the book. A day in the life of the rural African woman is still mostly occupied by struggling to keep a big family fed and clothed on a very limited income.

However, my personal conclusion is that the women's behaviour was due to not being able to relate the book to their experiences without initially having control over the textual content. Mitha, on the other hand, could relate to the book's message because she had been divorced for eleven years. She left Ovamboland after the divorce for Rundu in the Okavango to make a fresh start in life. In the process she gave up the support structure of her extended family. In Will There Be a Lap for Me? reference is made to Daddy's hard and bumpy lap and Grandma's soft and squishy lap. Grandma also waited with the older grandchild for the new baby to come home with the parents. Grandparents are seen as a source of wisdom within the black Namibian culture. They live with their children and grandchildren and fulfill two main roles, namely those of confidant and mediator. A young man, for example, who wants to marry his girlfriend, approaches her grandparents and they will initiate a meeting between the parents on both sides. Should a married grandchild

have marriage problems, it would be regarded as a sign of disrespect if she had spoken to her own parents about them. Normally she would confide in her grandmother who would advise her on how to handle the situation.

Mitha maybe saw the book as an opportunity to allow her children to talk about the privilege of having grandparents and a father in the home which they had to forfeit in their own lives. The children asked questions: "Ma, when we were small, did our dad also hold us, like now, this baby?" and "Now, our grandmother - did she also hold us when we were small?" (Class discussion, October 17,). She assured them that she put their interests first: "So I said, don't worry, my children. You are not hungry. Some people are with their father, mother and grandmother, but they don't get food. You are fortunate, my children" (Class discussion, October 17).

After this incident, I heeded Rosenblatt's advice that learning to respond, in a personal way, to text takes time. If the reading of the text occurs too quickly, "a brief summary of the 'plot' would have served the reader just as well as the complete text" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 25). From that point onwards, the group only took a book home after we had done a second reading of it in class.

John W. Ivimey describes the travels of three small rodents in Three Blind Mice. When they were hungry, a farmer gave them something to eat but his wife alerted the cat. In an effort to escape from the cat, they fell into a bramble hedge which scratched them and made them blind. On top of that, the farmer's wife also chopped off their tails with a carving knife. Fortunately they met with their friend, Dr Hare, who gave them a magic salve which helped them to regain their eyesight. Afterwards the mice built a house, learned a trade and lived happily for ever after.

During the home readings of Three Blind Mice, there was little discussion about the mice that lost their tails. A possible reason for this is that mice were just seen as vermin and whatever bad luck befell them, they deserved it. However, the hare doctor sparked

some discussion. Pethua's child wanted to know what animal it was that she saw in the picture. Her mother explained that it was a rabbit and when you kill it, "it becomes food for us" (Class discussion, October 31). Mitha and Chepa's children, on the other hand, wanted to know more about the rabbit in the story.

Mitha "The rabbit is a doctor? Rabbits also have traditional healers?" So I said exactly, rabbits are just like humans. Then they said: "No Ma, you lie. A rabbit cannot be a traditional healer."

Chepa They [the children] were curious to know how the rabbit could find the ointment if he was an animal. I explained that the rabbit just happened to be a medicine man. (Class discussion, November 5)

A traditional healer or medicine man within the African context could best be described in Western terms as a herbalist. Aspiring traditional healers do their training with an established healer for a period of between one to five years. To qualify, they take an oral examination with their trainer in which they have to prove that they can identify roots, leaves and tree bark correctly, as well as the ailment for which a particular medication is prescribed. Traditional healers are not bound to affiliate with a professional association and their consultation fees vary. (M.V. Chaka, personal communication, March 9, 1997)

Whereas Pethua and her child discussed the hare in terms of a basic food source that roams the wild, the discussion in Chepa and Mitha's households centered around the hare being a doctor or medicine man which is a top position in the Namibian traditional, societal hierarchy. Each group of children attempted to ground the text to their own experiences and at times even questioned the veracity of the text when it conflicted with those own experiences. One may suggest that even at this early stage of their literacy development, the children saw direct connections between their own lives and textual content.

On October 17, Mary reported that she had read and discussed The Little Red Hen with the children at home. She explained the story to them, but they had a hard time buying into her interpretation. Mary continued: "They said: 'This picture is a hen and we eat the hen. The hen has wings. How can a hen sweep the floor, mend the clothes, rake

the leaves, mow the grass?' " She tried again to explain to the little ones that it was not a hen. "The hen was a mother and she had three children. These three children just slept all day and dreamed about food" (Class discussion, October 17). Perhaps because Mary and her nephews and nieces interpreted the story differently, it increased their fascination with the text. Mary remarked that "they didn't want to give the book back" (Class discussion, October 17).

Some of the books appealed to individuals for various reasons. Leo the Late Bloomer by Robert Kraus was the first book to be discussed with the group. I conducted my pre-interview with Mitha following this discussion. She was a dynamic, self-employed divorced mother of seven children who received no financial assistance from her children's father. Despite the fact that she had to leave school after grade 8, she became the owner of a busy, very popular "cuca shop" (liquor outlet), where she sold meals as well as beans and millet. She harvested the beans and millet from her own patch of land which was given to her by the "hompa" (tribal head).

I asked Mitha what she had learned from reading Leo the Late Bloomer. She responded that she had enjoyed reading it tremendously and she particularly liked Leo's comment on the last page, which reads "I made it!" Mitha took pride in her own life achievements. Furthermore, at the time of our first interview, Mitha still had no electricity at her business and her fridges ran on lamp oil. However, when I made the appointment for the post interview, she had managed to save the N$8,000 to connect an electricity cable to the premises. Take-away meals were prepared on site. A barbecue and dance on Friday nights added another dimension to her already flourishing business empire. Mitha indeed "made it" to become a very successful single parent and business woman despite adverse circumstances. The pleasure she demonstrated in reading about book characters who mirrored her success, was tangible.

Kasiko, who happened to have the least schooling of all the participating women, could also relate to Leo straight-away. She explained as follows: "Leo is like me. I cannot read [English], I cannot what, what. Maybe one day I'll read [English] like Leo. If I go to school until November, maybe Kasiko will read, maybe Kasiko will draw" (Pre-interview, September 12). During the post-interview I asked Kasiko if there was one thing about the project that she would not forget. Without hesitating, she mentioned Leo, because "in the end, in the alphabet book, I could read 'look, see.' I could read - like Leo" (Post-interview, November 12).

The women also used text as a means to modify their children's behaviour. Chepa, who still had five children at home, had to settle a dispute at her house over lunch as to who would wash the dishes and who would put them away. One afternoon we discussed The Little Red Hen by Paul Galdone during the group meeting. After the meeting, she went home and told the children to come and sit with her while she read the book to them. She reported that as a result of her reading this book to them, "they were more ... interested [eager] to work" (Journal entry, October 15). Chepa recognized an event in her own home in the text and she exploited the children's own lived experience of reluctance to work in order to teach them a lesson about laziness.

On October 29, I made the following entry in my journal: "I wonder why most members could point out the moral in The Little Red Hen, but only Mitha could identify the theme of healthy eating habits in The Very Hungry Caterpillar?" (Journal entry, October 29). Mitha loved spinach and her children saw eating that vegetable as quite a cross to bear. The caterpillar in The Very Hungry Caterpillar ate a leaf after a junk food eating binge and felt much better. Mitha used this incident in the book to teach her children about healthy eating habits and told them: "If you would eat spinach twice or three times a week, you would also be healthy" (Class discussion, October 24).

Three Blind Mice was the second last book that the group discussed. Two women managed to abstract a "moral" from the book. Chepa said that "maybe these mice had parents who gave them what they needed, but since they ran away from the house, they had to face many problems. It teaches that we have to stick together as a family" (Class discussion, November 11). Anné insisted that the book taught a person that at some stage in life, you had to settle down and work to earn a living. During the post-interview, Kasiko indicated that Three Blind Mice was one of her favourite books. She likened the story to the Parable of the Prodigal Son in the Bible.

Mig the Pig by Colin and Jacqui Hawkins was the last book to be taken home for a home reading event. When I asked Pethua how her daughter responded to the text, she noted: "I showed her the pig and she said: "Ma, look, the pig is very big. I want to eat its meat' " (Class discussion, November 5). Meat is a sought-after but expensive commodity in the Kavango region. Pethua's daughter found it easier to relate to the pig as a food source rather than as an animal which performs higher order, human-like activities such as wearing a wig and going for a ride in its gig.

As the reader might have noticed by now, my interpretation of this theme (lived experience as text interpretation), is based mostly on the feedback of the women's interactions with their children. During our group meetings, I encouraged the women to respond to a text in the language of their choice. These discussions were mostly conducted in Gciricku and Rukwangali. Since meetings were conducted in a learner centered way, I tried to avoid asking someone to interpret comments for me. Instead, I gauged from reports on the home reading events whether the women allowed their children to respond to text in a personal way. I assumed that if the women did not judge their children's responses in terms of right or wrong, it indicated that they had accepted personal response as a valid response to text.

One incident in particular, however, provides an example of the women's immediate response to a text during our group session. The Little Red Hen was an obvious favourite. I asked Mary for her reaction to the text. She responded that "it's the things that happen in our homes. You say [to the children], 'go and do that.' They say 'no, I won't do that' " (Class discussion, October 8). Udette added that if her "big ones [children]" did not help her in the house, she acted like the little red hen. She refused to give them food. Anné took offence to Udette's interpretation. To her it was unacceptable that one could let a person go hungry just because s/he was lazy. Anné happened to be someone who was familiar with the sensation of hunger. She told me during the pre-interview that she disliked school because it meant that she had to live in the hostel. The food that the pupils were served often had insects or worms in it and the students often went to bed hungry.

Schema can never be static because they are continuously changed by new experiences. Children, for example, may relate to Franklin in the Dark by Paulette Bourgeois because they might have also experienced fear of the dark. Adults, on the other hand, may relate to the same book because they might have experienced fear of taking a plunge into the unknown such as pursuing a new job opportunity or immigrating to another country. However, schema do not only change because of radically different experiences. Pearson & Stephens (1993) claim "some very minor learning occurs ... even in the most straightforward act of comprehension" (Pearson & Stephens, 1993, p. 11). These researchers maintain that an encounter with a new example of a well-established schema such as *chair* changes that schema slightly. In other words, a reader's schema for *chair* will be different because of a novel experience with the concept in text.

Reading Two by Two changed two participants' schema for "watto." Before we started reading this story, I asked Chepa to tell it in Rukwangali. I do not understand the language, but I picked up repeatedly on "mo Noah, mo watto" while she was talking. A "watto" is a dug-out canoe which the local people use for fishing and commuting between

Namibia and Angola. I realized that the women had a schema for "watto" which was born from lived experience. Chepa admitted that she had always wondered what Noah's "watto" looked like. However, the illustration of the ark on pages 4 and 5 of Two by Two helped her to visualize somewhat what it may have looked like. Kasiko's grandchild, while he was studying the picture, wanted to know how big the "watto" was. She explained to him that it was a big "watto," "the big watto like a country." (Class discussion, October 10). For two participants in particular, their schema for "watto" would never be the same again after having read Two by Two.

Pearson & Stephens (1993) also state that schema theory encourages literacy professionals

> to examine texts from the perspective of the knowledge and cultural backgrounds of our students in order to evaluate the likely connections that they would be able to make between ideas that are in the text and the schema that they would bring to the reading task (p. 11).

When I chose the texts for this study, I tried to anticipate the knowledge and cultural backgrounds of possible participants. I chose a book such as The Beauty Contest of the Birds by Joachim Voigts because it was written by a Namibian author. As the study progressed, I realized that the book was an inappropriate choice for the women. Although it had big, colourful illustrations, a beauty pageant was a culturally foreign concept for the participating group. Such thinking is in line with the socio-cultural approach to family literacy where, according to one researcher, the direction of curriculum development is "from the community to the classroom" (Auerbach, 1995a, p. 21).

The data clearly support that the participants and their children constructed meaning from text in terms of their own schema and in terms of their experiences of success, the Bible, the demands of motherhood, traditional customs and food. Participants indeed interpreted text as lived experience. Similar findings are evidenced in the literature (Doneson, 1991; Handel & Goldsmith, 1994). The challenge for the literacy facilitator remains to create a continuity between reading the world and the act of reading words

(Freire, 1983). The literacy learner reads her world by talking about her experiences within a community of learners who share her world view. Existing schema are challenged by the learner's own effort to make sense of her world together with her fellow learners who help shed a fresh perspective on the learner's already established schema. The learner performs the ritual of reading words that, in turn, influences her reading of the world. Between the two events, change occurs. That "watto," that caterpillar, the child who struggles at school - are seen in a new light. The learner rethinks her understanding of the world as a result of her interaction with the text.

As the women in this study indicated, when they had the opportunity to explore texts in ways which related the print to their own lives, they brought to the text rich cultural experiences that assisted them in their interpretations of that text. The sharing of those experiences allowed a community of literates to develop. When the women, in turn, shared the books with their children during the home reading events, the circle of the literate community expanded.

The skill-and-drill workbook activities usually prepared as literacy learning materials for less literate or non-literate rural African women (Balara, 1992) are designed to focus on the surface features of print. Text is often presented as single words, or unconnected sentences. There is little in such material to whet the appetite for discussion. On the other hand, the connected discourse contained within the children's literature selected for this study, demonstrate that there is much in such print to which adult readers can relate. Because of the repetitive language used in such texts, the adults learn the skills necessary for reading as they read. In short, they build a schema for what it is like to be a reader as they are involved in the reading task. Perhaps of greater importance, they model this understanding for their children.

Adult Literacy Acquisition as a Developmental Process

> Less literate adults, like children,
>
> construct their knowledge about print and their strategies for reading and writing from their independent explorations of written language, ...and from their observations of others engaged in literacy activities (Teale & Sulzby, 1996, p. 134).

While adult literacy learners construct their knowledge about print, they display behaviours similar to the emergent literacy behaviours of young children. Sulzby (1991) defined emergent literacy as being "the reading and writing behaviours of young children that precede and develop into conventional literacy" (p. 273). For the purpose of this analysis, I analyze the emergent reading and writing behaviours as displayed by the women who took part in the study. Such literacy behaviours are not considered childlike; rather the behaviours demonstrate the developmental nature of adult literacy learning.

a) Pictures to Print

These women were products of an era of schooling where learning to read was a skill-and-drill affair (Bainbridge Edwards & Malicky, 1996) that included the completion of many worksheets, no children's literature and limited scriblers to write in. When I asked Kasiko about her memories from the mission school which she had to leave in 1958, she responded as follows: "The sister does school with us ... just puts the corn kernels ... draw here an A, draw here B ... You write in the sand and you go to the classroom." I wanted to know if there were any books in the classroom. "No books ... pictures. You wrote on the pictures [worksheets]," she answered (Pre-interview, September 15, 1996). With the exception of Chepa, who completed grade 10 in Angola, it was a novel experience for participants to page through a book and to realize that the pictures were a rough guide to the message in print (Clay, 1979).

At the first meeting, participants indicated that they were uncertain as to what the program would offer. I displayed all the texts which I intended to discuss during the next meeting. Participants paged through them and discussed them in whatever language they

preferred. Judged by the enthusiastic pointing of fingers, it was obvious that the colourful illustrations were of interest to the women straightaway. I always introduced a new text in the last ten minutes of a session after we had finished discussing the previous text. The women were free to page through it, discuss the illustrations among themselves and ask me any questions if they wished to do so. Two by Two, The Little Red Hen and Jaha and Jamil went down the hill: An African Mother Goose, were already chosen favourites during this "preliminary" stage. We devoted one meeting to making collages on the theme "I am a woman" as preparation for reading The Little Red Hen. I suggested that the pictures had to tell a "story" about participants' feelings regarding womanhood. I stressed that making a collage was one way to respond to a text. Pictures of pregnant women, children and food dominated the collages. Generally, the collages depicted women as procreators and nurturers.

When I introduced Two by Two, the group just paged through the book, looked at the pictures and discussed among themselves what the pictures meant. Afterwards, I handed out play dough and asked participants to replicate something which had struck them in the pictures. Most women chose objects from real life experience such as the seeds and flowers in Mrs Noah's apron, the crocodiles and snakes from the animals and the baby in its basket on the last page. As little as ten years ago, the Okavango river was crawling with crocodiles. Children, who played near the water as well as women who came to the river to either fetch water for household purposes or to do laundry, fell prey to these beasts that lurked just under the surface of the water. Such incidents led to a hostility from the local people against these animals and today the crocodile population has virtually been wiped out. Furthermore, the searing summer heat in the Okavango region, combined with a high humidity and dense vegetation, make it the ideal habitat for up to two metres long snakes to flourish. Lastly, because of the extremely limited availability of jobs in this rural community, the local women still see motherhood as their principal vocation in life. The

women spoke in their own language while they were experimenting with the play dough. I also gained from this activity by learning that the Rukwangali word for "child" was "mukeke."

Kasiko, however, was fascinated by the elephant's "mataku" (buttocks) on page 22. She insisted on replicating them in play dough. Nudity, as such, is not a taboo within the black Namibian culture. It piqued my interest when Kasiko explained in her pre-interview that while she was at school, a successfully completed assignment would earn one a reward such as candies or a loin cloth from the sister. "At that time [1958], you wore only a cloth with nothing under it" (Pre-interview, September 15). I think she associated books with school and school implied wearing a loin cloth to cover private body parts. It was an unusual experience for her to see a pictorial representation of an elephant's "mataku" in a book and to make a model of it in play dough.

The women's initial interactions with their children during home readings also reflected their fascination with the pictures in the books. Initially these home readings consisted of an approximation of the text in the mother tongue and ample discussion concerning the pictures. Kasiko and her grandchild had the following discussion about Leo the Late Bloomer: "My grandchild just said: 'It's beautiful. What did they draw there? It's lion. It sits in a tree. And what's this? It's an elephant with a paper. What is this, Mama? It reads' " (Class discussion, September 26). Pethua showed her daughter the pictures in Two by Two and the boas on page 22 captured her daughter's attention in particular. She wanted to know if the snakes did not bite. Udette did not only tell her children the story of Two by Two in Rukwangali and discuss the pictures, she also labeled the animals for them in English and Rukwangali. Bainbridge Edwards & Malicky (1996) explain that "children's first words are usually labels for items in their environment that they act on" (p. 106). Harkness & Miller (1982) maintain that before a child is able to interpret pictures or understand stories, he/she must be aware of "the conventions in use

regarding representation and meaning as they may be used by authors or artists. As a beginning step in this, ... he must realize that pictures as well as words are symbols that represent the real world of objects" (p. 7).

When the women took home Jaha and Jamil went down the Hill: An African Mother Goose, they reported that their children liked the book because of the beautiful pictures. The rhymes from Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa which were accompanied by illustrations of wild animals, sparked the most discussion. More ladies started labeling these animals in their mother tongue as well as in English. The illustrations accompanying Counting Fish (Ethiopia), drew some interest because fish used to be a readily available source of protein in the Okavango River. However, a rapidly growing population has drastically depleted the fish stocks. The rhyme reads as follows:

> One, two, three, four, five -
> I caught a Nile perch alive!
> Six, seven, eight, nine, ten -
> We had ten fish, and then again!

By the time the rhymes book was taken home, we had already finished discussing First Numbers as well as The Very Hungry Caterpillar. Counting to ten in English occurred during the discussion of both these books. Some women attempted to read the rhyme with their children and the daring few were very pleased that they already knew enough English to independently venture one small step into the unknown.

Some members in the group started focusing on print earlier than others. Anné reported that two of her children who were already going to school read Two by Two and she helped them with "words like 'thought' and those kinds of things" (Class discussion, October 8). When we had finished discussing My First Alphabet Book in the group, I encouraged the women to first identify the label of the object in print, to translate it into mother tongue if it was deemed necessary and to then allow the children to identify the object in the accompanying pictures. Anné proudly reported that her child could identify words like "ambulance, monkey, ostrich" after she had discussed a couple of pages with

her. She was particularly impressed that her daughter could identify "ostrich." The group read Taleh, Taleh (Botswana) as one of their rhymes in Jaha and Jamil ... . The last two lines read as follows:

> Put it in an ostrich shell
> And there she kept it very well.

Most group members felt that it was much easier to say "mpo" (ostrich) in Rukwangali than to try and pronounce, in English, the last phoneme in "ostrich." Udette displayed an extreme awareness of the message in print which accompanied a picture. Without being encouraged to do so, she photocopied the last two pages of My First Alphabet Book for her daughter Elly, who was in grade one. She requested Elly to first say the labels of the objects such as apple, bear or cat and to then write the words underneath the pictures.

In summary, these less literate women moved from pictures to print and encouraged their children to do likewise.

b) Writing as Labelling

Writing was an optional activity during the program. Participants were given an exercise book for note-taking. Most of them started keeping lists of the English labels of objects which they wanted to know together with their equivalent in one of the local languages as was suggested by the group. On September 19, Udette wrote down the following labels in her workbook while the group were discussing the names of the animals in Two by Two:

chameleon	- rungongoro	(Rukwangali)
sharks	- haaie	(Afrikaans)
	- sakisi	(Rukwangali).

She made following entry was made on October 15:

go	- gaan	(Afrikaans)
	- zende	(Rukwangali)

tomorrow	- môre	(Afrikaans)
	- mungura	(Rukwangali)
today	- vandag	(Afrikaans)
	- neina	(Rukwangali)
weekend	- naweek	(Afrikaans)
	- sivuke	(Rukwangali).

Udette's notes are representative of the type of notes kept by most of the group. Whereas the women were increasingly more willing to verbalize their thoughts and negotiate the meaning of text orally, their writing did not progress beyond the labelling stage.

The link between language, thought and society is conceptualized in the theories of Vygotsky. He maintains that "the higher mental processes, such as verbal thought cannot develop apart from the appropriate forms of social life" (John-Steiner & Tatter, 1983, p. 83). The learner is able of cognitive or abstract generalizations, because an interpersonal or social learning process has been transformed into an intrapersonal one (Vygotsky, 1978). In addition, oral language is important, because speech is "an excellent example of sign usage which, once internalized, becomes a pervasive and profound part of the higher psychological processes" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 126).

Elsasser & John-Steiner (1977) grounded their research on the writing process in the description of language codes provided by Vygotsky. According to them, writing and thought or inner speech represent a monologue. Oral speech, on the other hand, in most cases represents a dialogue, since others are present. During written speech, an author lacks situational and expressive supports, because he/she relies on words and their combinations to communicate (Elsasser & John Steiner, 1977). In this study, the group relied heavily on its situational support system for oral expressiveness and effective reading behaviour. However, their writing was still at the surface level of text production. If

participants had been exposed to a program of this nature over a longer period, they might have progressed to delivering a more sophisticated written rendition of text.

c) Negotiation of Meaning

During this study it was evident that adults, like children, "creatively construct language in social situations" (Bainbridge Edwards & Malicky, 1996, p. 108). Clay (1991) explains why the social environment of text is so important. "Happy, relaxed, stimulating relationships between children [learners] and between child [learner] and teacher [facilitator] promote growth of personality which in turn advances achievement" (p. 40).

The women in this study were dependent on one another for translation from Afrikaans and English into the local languages. In turn, I, as the facilitator, was dependent on the group for translation from the local languages which I do not have a knowledge of into either English or Afrikaans. Two group members in particular had limited skills in English. Most of the meaning of a new text would have been lost for them if the group had not been allowed to act as interpreters for one another. Chepa and Anné were extremely helpful when meaning had to be negotiated in different languages. Chepa was equally proficient in Afrikaans, English, Portuguese and Rukwangali. Anné was the polyglot of the group who could speak Afrikaans as well as six indigenous languages fluently. After the home reading of Two by Two, all the women reported that the children wanted to know what kind of an animal the bears on the cover were. Bears are not found in southern Africa. After some deliberation, Chepa suggested that "ehombo" was the Rukwangali label and the women agreed.

Two examples of co-operative learning highlight the women negotiating meaning for their children. Kasiko's grandchild wanted to know how long the people had to stay in Noah's ark. Chepa could provide the answer of 40 days and 40 nights. Kasiko also thought that the dove on page 26 brought an olive twig back to the ark so that it would have

something to eat. In my transcript, I recorded myself asking: "Please explain to her how things worked with the dove" (Class discussion, October 10). After much deliberation in Rukwangali and Gciricku within the group, she nodded that she now understood that the olive twig was actually an indication to Noah that the water was subsiding.

The women learned how to mean (Halliday, 1975) or make sense within their community as literacy learners by talking. Bainbridge Edwards & Malicky (1996) stress that "oral language skill is the foundation for literacy development" (p. 115). The role of the facilitator becomes extremely important in that he/she must treat learners as "legitimate conversational partners" (Bainbridge Edwards & Malicky, 1996, p. 115). Clay (1991) stresses that a facilitator must create opportunities for learners to talk and he/she should then "talk *with* them (not *at* them)" (p. 69 - my italics). Throughout our sessions, I encouraged the women to talk about their interactions with their children and grandchildren because when learners are encouraged to talk about familiar content, it provides them with "opportunities to experiment with ways of expressing themselves" (Clay, 1991, p. 37).

As facilitator, I always tried to indicate that I valued every group member's contribution to a discussion. Over time, the group also started to value one another's contributions. Kasiko, for example, who had limited literacy skills in English, initiated discussion with her grandchild on The Little Red Hen in a very innovative way. She told him the wrong labels for the various animals, by pointing at the "mbisi" (cat), for example, and telling him that it was "mpuku" (mouse). Afterwards she told him to look at the pictures and to tell her the story. Two weeks later, the group took Will There Be a Lap for Me? home. Anna did not have time to read the book with her children. However, she was so impressed with Kasiko's approach that she subsequently employed a similar strategy to "read" Will There Be a Lap for Me? with her children.

The atmosphere of mutual trust and confidence within the group developed group members' self-confidence (Clay, 1991). On October 29, Anna reported: "Now I'm not

shy to speak English. If I make a mistake, someone will correct or help me and it is O.K." Chepa excitedly explained that she discussed My First Alphabet Book with her children in English. "They realized that Mother (used to) keep quiet. She didn't read, she didn't talk to them, but now I am talking to them [in English]" (Class discussion, October 29). The growth in self-confidence was particularly noticeable in one group member. Udette appeared to be very shy and restrained initially. She attended all the meetings and contributed increasingly more to the discussions. During my post-interview I mentioned to her that "you changed during the time which I've known you ... you were more open ... you took part in discussions and it was fun to have you as a member of the group" (Post-interview, November 13). She agreed, explaining that she also suffered from high blood pressure at the start of the program. She thought that this affliction could have made her appear more withdrawn than what she really was.

The importance of the social environment in language development is also recognized by supporters of the interactionist model of language acquisition. These interactionists claim that "there must be a fully functioning human being ... and a fully functioning social system in place before language development occur" (Bainbridge Edwards & Malicky, 1996, p. 104). Culture, society and the learner's psychological makeup and cognitive abilities are not seen as separate entities. "The interactionist views all of them as interdependent" (Bainbridge Edwards & Malicky, 1996, p. 104). John-Steiner & Tatter (1983) contend that the interactionist theory integrates two perspectives in language studies. They are the "social, external approach on the one hand and a ... cognitive, internal focus on the other" (John-Steiner & Tatter, 1983, p. 82).

d) Summary

The women in this study displayed developmental literacy learning behaviours. Initially, they tended to be more picture bound to negotiate the meaning of text. When they started to rely more on the print rendition of the text, meaning was still socially mediated.

Since a variety of language groups were represented within the group, the oral discussion surrounding text was extremely important. The facilitator, as well as participants, were dependent on one another for the interpretation of meaning in one another's language. Writing development, however, generally lagged behind reading development.

Music as Support for Literacy Learning

The visitor who returns to Namibia again and again is, in the words of "das Südwesterlied" (a song commonly sung in pre-independence times as a kind of "national" anthem), the one whose heart was burned by the Namibian sun. However, in most cases he/she is also one of the select few whose ears became attuned to the pulsating musical rhythm that permeates every action, every gathering - the very being of the black African.

There is music for every occasion in Africa. Special songs are sung after the birth of a new baby, at funerals, during harvest time, when a woman toils at the pounding block, to beg ancestral spirits to intercede on behalf of those who were left behind. There are also songs that are sung for pure entertainment only. None of these songs are just empty words. They are composed to inculcate traditional values in the young or to communicate a message. It is, for example, traditionally inappropriate behaviour for a black woman to confront her husband with a specific request. Instead, she rather gets up early in the morning while he is still sleeping and she starts singing while she is pounding maize at the pounding block:

> Amuna anga, gulireni ndowa
> Ine ndisilira anzanga kudambo (A Chichewa song)
>
> My husband, buy me a pail (for water)
> I envy my friends at the well.
> (by implication - because they all have new pails)

The sensitive husband will take note of this request in song and try to comply with her wish. At the same time, the song has therapeutic value for the woman. She makes her wish known in a very unassuming way while still serving her husband.

On another occasion, the men are working hard, perhaps digging the foundations of a new house. The sun is hot and they urge one another on:

(The name of the person) ha katuli
Ki mutu ya sebeza katata
Lwa taba ha lu inzi ni yena sa musebezi
U fumana mataa kwa balimu ba hae ba ba
Fa kaufi ni yena, ku mu fa mataa
Ku lubekiwe (the name) kakuli muzebezi wa eza
U lukilwe ku ezwa ki bantu ba ba nata (A Lozi song)

(Mr X) doesn't give up
He is really a hardworking man
We are proud of him
He gets his stamina from the spirit
When he starts to work
The spirits give him strength
In praise of (Mr X)

The song is repeated until all the names of the people in the group have been mentioned. The individual is encouraged to perform to a higher level through group recognition and encouragement.

In mainstream, black churches of southern Africa the singing is sincere, in spontaneous four-part harmony, but somewhat subdued. Singing is often acapella but, when a pianist is available, she accompanies the singers on a piano. However, in the breakaway independent churches, traditional instruments and especially drums have made a come-back. Singing and dancing are an integral part of the service in those churches and preaching is mostly done in the vernacular. Sometimes the singing or dancing will be announced, but often it will start on the spur of the moment to encourage a preacher or to affirm a sermon.

During my years of teaching at what were formerly known as "black schools", I often used songs, especially by the Beatles, to "teach" poetry in the ESL class. The students and I would discuss the lyrics on paper, listen to the recording once and by the time the recording was played a second time, the class would start singing along spontaneously. Dancing would always remain an optional activity. Suddenly these words

on a page were no longer only mere words. They literally took on sensory characteristics (Katz & Thomas, 1992).

When I chose the books for this project, I tried to include at least one example from different genres of children's books. Jaha and Jamil Went Down the Hill: An African Mother Goose was chosen as an example of a rhymes book. It has colourful, evocative illustrations and the map of Africa enables the reader to place countries, that might have only been names, in the geographical context of Africa. In most cases, the illustrations also depict some aspect of the culture or geography of a specific country, e.g. an open-air market on the Mali page, a Maasai woman with her colourful neck adornments on the Kenya page and Saharan dunes and camels on the Algerian page. I thought that the unfamiliar content of such pages would lead to interesting discussions between parent and child in Namibia. Singing the rhymes was not even a consideration when I chose the book.

The day the women made animals out of the play dough, they started singing spontaneously. I realized that after a stay of two years in Canada, I had forgotten how the people of Africa live through music. That day, the women proceeded with singing Rukwangali songs. During our discussion afterwards, it appeared that Chepa was conductor of the church choir. She explained why she initiated the singing in class: "You know, in Africa we like to sing. Every time we are together in a program such as this one, we start singing, so that we can be together" (Class discussion, September 20). After that, it was a given that the women's literacy learning would not consist of purely reading or discussion activities only. Singing became part of every subsequent meeting. On the reverse side of the title page of Jaha and Jamil ..., there is a list of existing English rhymes that correspond to the rhymes in the book. I chose to discuss the African version of well-known rhymes of which the tunes were familiar to me.

The group attempted to read the Tanzanian rhyme *Jaha and Jamil* (Jack and Jill) first. We read it a couple of times and the women found it difficult to enunciate the words in beat with the natural rhythm of the language. The group had similar difficulties when they read aloud the Botswana rhyme *Taleh, Taleh* (Peter, Peter, Pumpkin Eater). I taught them the tunes afterwards and after a while the singing became less strained. Singing those two rhymes spilled over into the women teaching me a Rukwangali song about Noah. By the end of the class, we repeated the rhymes and Noah's song. Kasiko became so enthused by the singing that she started dancing. The music truly eliminated the intimidating factor imposed by the more formal, "classroom-like" setting.

The group's next "assignment" was to tell their children stories and to ask the little ones to draw pictures in response to the texts. Most of the women brought these drawings to the next meeting. Mary, however, wrote the words to *This is the way I brush my teeth* (comb my hair, wash my face) on a poster for her nephews and nieces. The children drew toothbrushes, toothpaste, soap and face cloths to illustrate the song which they all subsequently sang. After having shared with the group about what she did at home, Mary was more than willing to put her poster on the blackboard and to teach the song to the rest of the group. Any music teacher will admit that it is not always easy to inspire a whole class to sing along, let alone motivate an individual to sing solo in front of a group. Mary, however, knew that she had done something different and she was eager to earn the recognition of the group. Very early in the program she used singing as an alternative literacy (Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984) to communicate with her children.

On September 31, I taught the group *Canopies are falling down* (Gabon) to the tune of *London Bridge is falling down*. The singing was so enthusiastic that the people from the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation who were recording in the adjacent school hall, came by to stop us because we were making too much "noise"! Learning and singing *In the African Air* to the tune of *Hey Diddle Diddle* proved to be difficult. The first line

reads: "Hey, diddle diddle, Cricket did fiddle" and the women found it very hard to read because of its repetitive nature. In addition, the -ed ending in the three past tense verbs, "mimicked," "rumbled" and "grumbled" posed a problem. The women did not find the tune easy to learn either. I heeded Guglielmino's (1986) advice that if one wishes to use music and songs for language learning, "the tune should be easy to learn and easy to sing". (Guglielmino, 1986, p. 25). Although we never attempted to sing this particular rhyme again, we read it during every subsequent meeting. I thought it to be particularly suitable to help the women get their ears attuned to the stress-timed rhythm of English as well as to practise the past tense ending of regular verbs.

The next song to be sung was the Madagascar rhyme *The Ebony Tree* (Here We Go 'Round the Mulberry Bush). On October 24, I made the following entry in my journal: "Most people sang along heartily without even looking at the book." I realized that the singing had helped the women overcome their fear of speaking English spontaneously. From then onwards, we also read rhymes such as *Kalahari Days Hot* (Botswana), *Chicory Pickory Pock* (Cameroon) and *Alphabet Rhyme* (Zambia and Zimbabwe) that did not have any familiar tunes that they could be sung to. The women were very willing to volunteer reading aloud if we had first practised the pronunciation of multisyllabic words that they regarded as "difficult."

When the group read *Alphabet Rhyme* (Zambia and Zimbabwe), they indicated that they would like to practise the pronunciation in English of every letter in the alphabet. On the spur of the moment I decided to teach them to sing the alphabet to the tune of *Happy Birthday to You* (Figure 4).

The women really appreciated this activity since most of them never learned the alphabet in the ESL class at school. The activity also paid off in more tangible results. On October 29, Udette reported during our class discussion that she now helped her daughter Elly, who was in the English medium grade one class, with her homework. She started

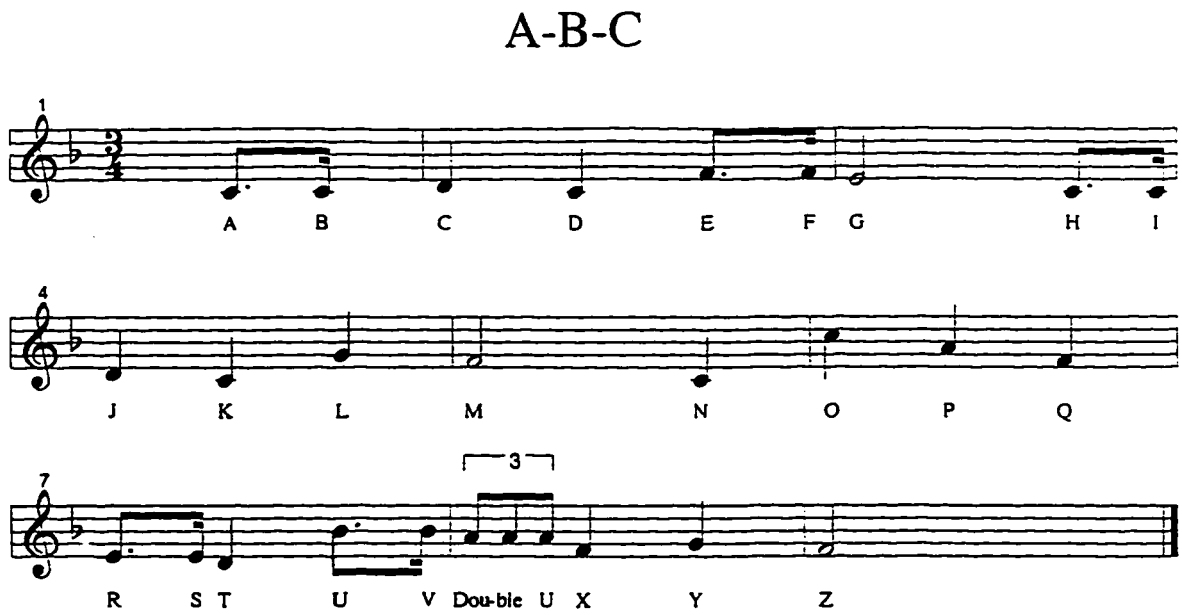

Figure 4. Happy Birthday to You.

(Music, courtesy Dr. Robert de Frece)

asking Elly to spell the words in her reader in English, whereas before Udette did not know the pronunciation in English of letters such as H, I, J, U, V, W and X, Y, Z.

When the women took the rhymes book home for a week, I did not give any suggestions as to how they should approach the rhymes with their children. After the group meeting following that week, I made these entries in my journal:

> everybody indicated that they spent ample time discussing the pictures with their children
>
> the illustrations of animals with the *Alphabet Rhyme* (Zambia and Zimbabwe), sparked a lot of discussion during the home reading (Journal entry, October 23).

Four participants went beyond only discussing the illustrations. They indicated that they read the rhymes we had discussed in class in English to their children and they taught

the children to sing them as well. *Canopies are falling down* was a favourite with the children involved because most of them had already learned *London Bridge is falling down* at school. Chepa asked if she could have the book for another week. As a family, they had been compiling a book of songs for years. Some of these songs they would sing during the family prayer meeting in the evening. Others they sang during weekend evenings to strengthen the bond in their family. Her children loved singing the rhymes in Jaha and Jamil ... and she wanted to copy them into their family song book.

During the literacy celebration at the last meeting, the women added *Old Macdonald had a Farm* to their expanding repertoire of English songs. My aim was to teach the group English labels for certain animals as well as the sounds that they make. I asked permission to audiotape the group's singing "for my teacher in Canada." Chepa insisted that all the new songs should be rehearsed once more. After that practice session, she gave me her conductoral approval for the recording.

During the post-interview I asked each participant which book appealed to her most. Udette could not choose a favourite, but three of the remaining six women chose Jaha and Jamil .... Sindé and Mary indicated they "liked" the songs. Chepa liked the songs, but she also liked the colourful illustrations. She used to teach drawing in Angola and as a teacher of drawing, colour appealed to her. She also found that one could infer a lot about people's customs from the illustrations. Ironically, there was no rhyme from her war-torn home country, Angola.

When I arrived at Pethua's house for the post-interview, a choir consisting of children from the neighbourhood awaited me. They sang the ABC with Pethua as the beaming conductor. Afterwards, she asked if, before we proceeded with the interview, her older daughter could sit down with us to sing *Old Macdonald had a Farm* again. Pethua felt uncertain about the pronunciation of words such as "neigh" and "quack" and she had forgotten parts of the tune. After four repetitions, she indicated that she and her daughter

would be able to sing it. Udette made a similar request two days later and while I was interviewing her, her four year old daughter ran through the sitting room, singing "E I E I O." I believe that, in the case of at least two families in the Okavango, *Old Macdonald had a Farm* became part of the family's music heritage.

Music can be regarded as one of the alternate literacies (Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984). Woodward (1984) refers to math, drama, art and music as "alternate communication systems" (p. 3). Music in Africa is practiced within the context of social interactions for social purposes such as worship, celebration and entertainment. As such, it fits in with the socio-cultural approach to family literacy that recognizes literacy as a social and cultural phenomenon, being practiced as people go about their daily lives (Elish-Piper, 1996/1997; Auerbach, 1989; Heath, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines 1988; Morrow & Paratore, 1993).

The importance of music in language acquisition was also recognized by Dr. Georgi Lozanov's approach to language teaching. It was commonly referred to as *Suggestology* (Guglielmino, 1986). Within this approach, music is one of the means used to achieve "relaxation and harmony needed to increase learning effectiveness" (Guglielmino, 1986, p. 20). Music lowers learners' inhibition level (Lems, 1996, p. 2). In the words of Paulo Freire, reading the words when singing definitely does not become "walking on the words - an empty, technical process" (Freire, 1985, p. 19). Instead, learners learn to grasp the *soul* of the words in songs. Within this study, the rhythms and words of the rhymes in Jaha and Jamil Went Down The Hill: An African Mother Goose stayed on the tongues and in the hearts of young and old alike.

Music and singing perform social and cultural functions for the black African community and as such these two activities have earned themselves a place in the family literacy curriculum leaning towards the socio-cultural approach. The women made gains in fluency of their spoken English because of singing and their ears became attuned to English

prosody. Learning songs in the official language of the country had prestige as well as motivational value for this particular group.

The Reciprocal Nature of Collaborative Learning

"Imvi ndi mgodi wanzeru"

Grey hair is a symbol of great wisdom. (A Chichewa proverb)

In the traditional African community, wisdom is passed on by the elders. Younger generations learn from grandparents, uncles and aunts within the extended family, but one can also learn from any person older than oneself. When an outsider to the extended family counsels a person, symbolic blood ties are established. The counseling individual is, for example, now called "kuku" (grandmother) and "sukulu" (grandfather) in Lozi, a language spoken in the Caprivi region of Namibia. For traditional Africans, the only wisdom that counts is wisdom that has been gained from experience.

Very little teaching is done by parents because there are certain "taboos" which are not to be discussed with them. Young people learned about these taboos when they reached the age of puberty and they had to attend initiation rites. These initiation "schools" were led by elders of the village. Topics such as sexuality, marriage, behaviour towards parents and grandparents and a person's role during occasions such as a funeral or a mourning feast would be covered here. However, migration has led to the fragmentation of the extended family with the result that these rites are now only still practiced in the more remote, rural areas of the country.

I adopted a *co-operative learning* approach during my literacy sessions with the participating women (Galbo, 1989). Crew (1995) uses the phrase "trading places" (p. 19) to describe reciprocal learning partnerships. According to Crew, trading places essentially means "relinquishing your hierarchical role as tutor and becoming a co-learner" (Crew, 1995, p. 19). Gross (1990), in turn, refers to this co-operative trading of places as abandoning the "banking system which requires students to be depositories for their

depositor teachers" (p. 129). Trading places requires a certain level of humility from the teacher/tutor/facilitator. The tutor almost has to adopt a service mentality similar to J. Herman Blake's Reciprocal Learning Model of Service Learning as quoted in Krans & Roarke, (1994, p. 21). A pre-condition to service learning is to "listen eloquently" (p. 21).

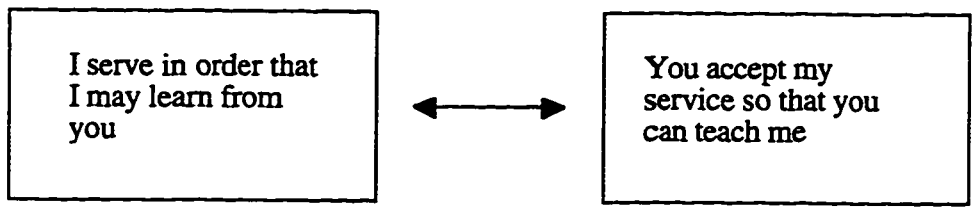

Figure 5. Service Learning is Reciprocal Learning.

Seven language groups were represented among the participating women, a situation that fostered a collaborative learning atmosphere from the onset. The normal procedure during a session was that I would explain a new text in both Afrikaans and English. If anything was unclear, the women would interpret for one another in the required language. Throughout the entire project, I was concerned that the women found this translation to be a very cumbersome procedure. Perhaps they would have preferred to have had a facilitator who could speak one of the local languages. However, "positive relationships among individuals from different ethnic backgrounds" (Galbo, 1989, p. 9) has been reported as one of the positive outcomes of co-operative learning. The women indicated during the post-interviews that the constant interpreting did not bother them. According to Udette, she had "no problems", because

> we asked you many questions, but whichever question we asked you, you explained to us in Afrikaans and English. If a person didn't understand Afrikaans or English, someone would explain whatever was said in Rukwangali (Post-interview, November 9).

Mary also did not have a problem helping others to understand text. During the post interview, she told me that: "You did well. You got a group which couldn't speak certain languages, but you tried to help them" (Post-interview, November 9).

The women exhibited scaffolding-like behaviours during their home reading episodes. Applebee & Langer (1983) refer to *scaffolding* as the "instructional support ... that is needed to carry the task through successfully" (p. 168). Anné, for example, was discussing Two by Two with her children. They wanted to know the Rukwangali label for "bear" for which there is no label in that language, because bears are not found in southern Africa. However, she reminded them of a movie they watched together as a family on television. A little boy found a bear in the bush and brought it home. He fed it, but the officials from nature conservation were unhappy that a child walked around with a bear in a suburb where other people lived. "So then they remembered what a bear was," Anné said (Class discussion, October 8). The scaffolding from previous experiences to understand new ones was very usual within the home reading events.

The map on the last page of Jaha and Jamil ... was the first map of Africa that some of the women had ever seen. We located countries all over Africa during our meetings. However, when the women took the book home, they only pointed out Namibia's neighbouring countries to their children, that is Angola, Zambia, Botswana, and South Africa. Namibia was familiar knowledge to all the women and their children and it was the level at which "independent problem solving" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86) could take place. It seems that, with the exception of Chepa, the women determined Namibia's neighbouring countries as "the level of potential development" in geography for their children. Udette's first question was even closer to home. She asked her children if they knew the capital of Namibia. They did not know the answer. This is understandable, because although Rundu is only 750 kilometres north from Windhoek, it cannot be assumed that everybody has been there. Relatively few people in the region have the financial resources to afford a car and hitching a ride to Windhoek is relatively expensive.

Anné read The Little Red Hen twice with her children who were in grades two and three. The children had already started ESL classes at school. On Friday and Saturday,

she read the book with them in English and they talked about the illustrations. On Sunday, she left the book with them and told them to read the story for themselves. If they did not know certain words, they were to come and ask her. Anné did not determine which words they should learn. She helped her children to come to a basic understanding of the text and then surrendered control to them, merely encouraging them to adapt their own language resources (Searle, 1984).

It often happened during the home reading events that the women gave control of the learning situation to their children. Chepa indicated that her children had to help her with some of the words in the book. She indicated that not being able to read well in English did not make her feel that she lost esteem in the eyes of her children. Anné added that she felt proud every time her children corrected her pronunciation errors during a home reading event. Kasiko had very little knowledge of English and she surrendered control of the reading event completely to Norman, her grandchild. She listened while Norman told her the story of The Little Red Hen in Gciricku from the illustrations. To quote her own words: "Norman was the teacher. I listened to Norman" (Class discussion, October 15). When Kasiko took Three Blind Mice home, Norman's "bigger brother taught me some of the words." Kasiko had to sit for an "examination" and when she pretended to have forgotten the label for "fish," he tried to scaffold it for her. "Granny, it's a fish. It was in the sea. Didn't you see it on television?" (Class discussion, November 11).

Gross (1990) states that within learning partnerships, there is a readiness to reveal oneself, "sensitivity to matters of interest and importance to the other" (Gross, 1990, p. 138). As a co-learner who came from a more western cultural background, I had to be especially mindful of this aspect. On October 10, the group discussed an article about rape which I took from a local magazine for women. The women expressed their concern about the high number of rape cases in the Okavango region where sometimes even older women were raped by school boys. Furthermore, they complained that the men in their society

generally did not treat women with respect. Anné described it as follows: "To most men here, women do not have a gall" (women do not really count - Class discussion, October 10). After independence, prominent black female leaders such as Minister Libertine Amathile and Advocate Bience Gawanas started promoting women's liberation in Namibia. This liberation process has not yet taken solid root in rural Namibia. Therefore, I tried to refrain from making judgmental comments during this particular discussion. Rather, I tried to explain that esteem was rooted in the self and that approval from others could only enhance one's own self-esteem.

There were many occasions when I was placed in the position of learner. For example, when the group discussed The Very Hungry Caterpillar, the women told me that the local people ate caterpillars as a source of protein. I immediately suppressed a reaction of revulsion and commented that "food is food and when it fills the stomach, it is good" (Class discussion, October 24). Furthermore, I was frequently struck by the religious piety of the women. Banners such as *Thank you, Lord, for the husband You gave me* and *The family that prays together, stays together,* served as seat covers or wall hangings in virtually every home. The refreshments that I served at the start of each meeting were also not taken for granted. Chepa reminded me during the pre-interview that they would like to pray together before we ate the snack. I complied with her request. However, it was a humiliating experience to realize that I was initially insensitive to how these women lived their religion.

According to Crew (1995), trading places in the learning situation also requires "willingness to empathize, to see and feel the learning experience through the eyes of students" (p. 20). An incident involving Kasiko vividly drove home this point to me. We were reading The Little Red Hen for the second time and I suggested that the group take turns reading the book page by page. After our meeting, Kasiko came to me to return the book and said: "Take this book, Teacher. I'm an old woman. I cannot read English"

(Journal entry, October 10). It appeared that someone in the group grinned when she made a mistake when it was her turn to read. I did not even notice the incident because no one was reading fluently. However, as a result of her distress, I only asked for volunteers to read aloud and at the next meeting we had a discussion about etiquette within a group learning context. Chepa explained to Kasiko in Rukwangali that it had often been said that one did not have to read the English texts. Paging through the book and telling the story from the illustrations in the mother tongue was sufficient. When we walked back to the vehicle in which I was to take the ladies home, Chepa continued holding Kasiko's hand. Kasiko sat in the front with me and she told me that she would continue attending the classes. Galbo (1989) hails a willingness to encourage and assist as one of the outcomes of co-operative learning. Chepa's behaviour displayed such encouragement.

The most rewarding part of the whole study was to relinquish my hierarchical role as a "teacher" and to become a co-learner (Crew, 1995). On September 26, for example, we sang the first two rhymes from Jaha and Jamil... That was also the day that the ladies reported on their home readings of Two by Two. Chepa asked if I wanted to learn a Rukwangali song about Noah. I agreed. She wrote down the words for me. Rukwangali is a very phonetic language, like Afrikaans, my first language. Hence, it was easy to sing along without really understanding the meaning of the words I was singing.

Furthermore, during the interviews, it struck me that the women were willing to share even though they did not have an abundance of material possessions. At Pethua's house, she sent her daughter to buy an African can (450 ml instead of the normal 355 ml) of Pepsi and Fanta for each of us. I was asked to choose which one I wanted. After the interview, I received two bottles of beer and a paw-paw from her garden which I took home. Udette gave me a liter carton of pure fruit juice. In Rundu, this is a substantial gift, because anything beyond basic foodstuffs of bread and maize meal is sold by small market retail grocers and prices are exorbitantly high. When I arrived at Kasiko's house, a jug of

Kool-aid and a plate with two muffins stood under a net on the coffee table. She called Norman, her grandchild, to come and fetch his glass of cool drink. He longingly looked at the two muffins, but he was strictly admonished that they were meant for the "teacher".

After spending some time in Canada, it was different to learn again from these ladies that the clock in Africa does not tick in seconds and minutes. During the first two meetings, I became panicky when only one or two people would be present at 3:00 p.m., the official starting time of our meeting. By 3:30 p.m., two thirds of the group would have arrived and by 3:45 p.m., it could be accepted that everybody who planned to attend that specific meeting, was present. Extending the meeting beyond the closure time of 5:00 p.m. was no problem to the group. Chepa explained it to me as follows: "We find ourselves in Africa. If the sun is still high, there is still plenty of time to do something" (Journal entry, September 31). Adapting to the African clock made life considerably easier, but it was certainly difficult to adjust to the North American clock when I returned to Canada again!

I learned one very important lesson from facilitating this program. Racial hatred and disharmony are stoked by the political activist. Most of the women who took part in the project were willing to accept the hand that life dealt them. Their only wish was for their children to have a better future. Udette, for example, asked me after the pre-interview if I would talk to her daughter who was in grade eleven. She did not care much about school work and wanted to leave school at the end of the year, whether she passed grade 11 or not. Udette felt that, at present, grade 12 was the minimum requirement to advance in life and that possibly my encouragement could help her change her mind. Chepa's five children attended a local Junior Secondary School where the pupils had to pay high school fees. Chepa was happy to pay the fees in monthly installments, because she liked the way the teachers maintained discipline in that particular school. She insisted that "us Africans ... need a strong hand whom we can respect" (Pre-interview, September 3). Mitha paid each of her children an annual incentive bonus corresponding to the grade level that they

passed at school. A child in grade one would earn N$100 and a child in grade 12 would earn N$1,200. Furthermore, she would like to see schools offer programs similar to my project in future. She explained: "We black people - our children suffer. There's not even a little help for us parents. We don't know how to help our children with their studies" (Post-interview, November 8). Kasiko also contended that she would like to attend further similar programs in future. She elaborated:

> School must continue helping parents to read books to their children. The children will benefit from it. If the children see that Mom goes to school, they will think but how can I stay away from school? (Post interview, November 11).

For the duration of this project, I tried to establish and nurture a collaborative learning atmosphere. The learning partnership between the women and me was mirrored in learning partnerships between the women and their children during home reading events. Initially, my goal for this study was to explore how less literate mothers could involve their children at home in literacy events as a result of their participation in a family literacy program. I adopted a socio-cultural framework for my "teaching" of family literacy. The sequence of our meetings resembled those of the workshops conducted by Handel & Goldsmith (1994). During our meetings, learning transcended the mastery of text only. It included "the understanding of self and cultural processes" (Crew, 1995, p. 19). As researcher, I relinquished my hierarchical, "know-it-all" role. As a group, we shared our experiences, our love for music and together we learned about intercultural literate behaviours. After two months, I was sad that the process of mutual inquiry, reflection and sharing had come to an end because there was an affective bond among all of us. The project provided the opportunity for all of us, the women and me, to develop new understandings for the concept of learner. The project also enriched us as we sought to find these common grounds that enable us to take on the mantles of teacher and learner. As Kramer (1987) has noted, the integration of cognition or knowledge with affect or emotion, lies at the very heart of wisdom.

The following portrait of one participant demonstrates how she wore the mantle of learner and teacher interchangeably.

Kasiko: A Portrait

Kasiko's name was on the list of interested possible participants that the school recruited for me. I contacted her because she was the second oldest person on the list and I wanted respondents from different age groups. She confirmed her interest in the project straight-away, because she wanted to help her "mukeke," (children) but she also wanted to learn some English. At the hospital where she worked, she could understand when patients spoke Afrikaans to her. However, when they spoke English, she could just understand "good morning" - and that was "makura" (that was all). Her ambition was to be like Leo of Leo the Late Bloomer. If only she could learn to speak, read and write some English!

Kasiko was a warm, but slightly reserved woman who displayed an almost regal pride in the way she carried herself. She was 49 years old and she took care of her two grandsons. Norman was in grade 1 and her brother, Chris, was in grade 3. Their mother had to leave school at the end of grade 7 because of her first pregnancy. She tried to go back to school after the birth of her first child but the desire to study was no longer there.

During our first interview, I asked Kasiko if I could call her "Granny", the name most people referred to her by. She obviously appreciated this gesture of respect. During our interviews and casual conversations, she explored the nooks and crannies of her past with me. Her experiences at school were far from ideal. She had to leave the mission school after grade 5. Attending a mission school implied a tension between values of Victorianism and traditional beliefs and customs. For instance, nudity was not to be natural to her any more. She was required to wear a loin cloth and when she was sixteen, she received her first dress. Teaching supplies in her school were virtually non-existent. When asked about her memories of school, she did not mention reading or writing.

However, the candies which were given as a reward in the basket-making class, came to mind straight-away. She spoke fondly of her teachers' recognition of her craft work.

Almost 35 years later, she still valued the importance of good schooling. She realized that without it one could only ask for odd jobs such as gardening or chopping wood. She was very happy when one of her daughters passed grade 12 and joined the army. However, she did not see her own grade 5 qualification as an insurmountable obstacle in the job market, because she was willing to learn informally. When she started working at the local hospital, she told the matron that she wanted to learn. Eventually, she performed the duties of a staff nurse. She washed patients, took temperatures and blood pressure readings and gave injections. However, the medical system moved forward and imposed higher academic standards. Grade 10 was now the minimum requirement for a staff nurse and today Kasiko could qualify only as a cleaner. This was her current position.

She was willing to work during her lunch break in order to get an hour off from work twice a week to attend our meetings. Ironically the same system, which once assigned her the duties of a staff nurse, now required a supervisor to phone and confirm if my project would indeed run. Only then was she allowed to make alternate arrangements for release time. The price tag on informal learning was indeed higher than what it used to be.

Kasiko had poor eyesight and Mary, the youngest member of the group, voluntarily acted as her scribe during meetings. Throughout the program, Kasiko did not contribute towards the discussions unless someone asked her something specifically. Perhaps she had been reminded of her low literacy skills in English once too often. In addition, some of her co-workers laughed at her when she told them that she was learning English. She could tolerate that ridicule until one day, when reading aloud a page from The Little Red Hen, she made a mistake. Someone from our little community of learners whom she had

come to trust, sniggered at her error. For the moment, this response to her efforts was a crushing defeat and she wanted to give up coming to the sessions. By the end of the meeting, however, her old drive was back and she informed me that she would continue attending the meetings. Chepa had reminded her that the purpose of our project was first and foremost to expose the children at home to children's literature. Learning to read, write and speak English, was just an added incentive and Granny should not deprive her "mukeke" of the opportunity to discover more about books. Those kind words of encouragement helped to soothe her hurt feelings.

At first, Kasiko just discussed the illustrations in the books with her "mukeke." Later on she allowed Norman to be in control of the discussion. As she noted: "Norman was the teacher. I listened to Norman." A certain amount of her lived wisdom had already rubbed off on her grandchildren. They were reading Will There Be a Lap for Me? and Norman needed to be reassured that Granny loved both him and his brother. His older brother, however, remarked that Norman's name was always mentioned first and then his. He could understand that, since "the younger child needs more love" (Class discussion, October 22).

During our reading of The Very Hungry Caterpillar, some of the people in the group were embarrassed to admit that they ate "egungu." Kasiko, on the contrary, was open about it and even added "dis lekker" (it's good). The Very Hungry Caterpillar also hallmarked the day Granny learned to count from one up to ten in English and she said the days of the week after me. Generally, I tried to avoid such teaching behaviour. However, she participated with the eagerness of a child because if she was successful in this effort, it would mean she would be a few steps closer to being like Leo - able to speak, read and write more English.

During the post-interview, it transpired that Kasiko did not only read the books with her own "mukeke," but with other children as well. Twice a week, on Tuesday and

Thursday nights, there was "story hour" at her house for the children in the neighbourhood. Together they shared the stories and discussed the illustrations. She talked about the words in the book. She asked questions and in turn was questioned by the children. She mediated the meanings of the book for them by incorporating their experiences to those presented by the author. In other words, even with her limited knowledge for text, she provided the children with a positive model for what it meant to be a reader.

As a literacy learner, she was very aware of her own progress. She spoke eloquently about her reactions to the texts presented in class. She shared that she really benefited from working through My First Alphabet Book. She could now read words such as "look" and "see." However, she knew that there were many words in that book that she still needed to learn the meaning of. In addition, she said she would never forget the story of Three Blind Mice, because it reminded her of the Parable of the Prodigal Son in the Bible. Kasiko was determined to join the Public Library so that she could continue reading to her "mukeke." Furthermore, she wanted to enroll in English classes offered by Non-Formal Education for Adults because she felt she had to continue improving her English.

She was also aware of her power as learner model within her environment when she indicated that the local school must offer programs similar to this one again. "The children will benefit from it." If they see that Granny goes to school, they will think "but how can I stay away from school?" (Post-interview, November 12).

After two and a half months, Granny chose My First Alphabet Book as a gift book to acknowledge her participation in the project. On the last day, when she came home, Norman wanted to know where her report card was. After all, she had been going to "school" twice a week. She responded that the book was her report for now. Her true report card was waiting for her "in heaven."

Women, like Kasiko, who are given continued support, encouragement and opportunities to explore text from their own cultural perspectives, develop text understandings that are both meaningful and purposeful. In addition, they do not see their poverty, minimal education or reduced employment as barriers to positive learning experiences. Rather, when their literacy learning occurs within a Freirean framework, and when they are recognized for *who* they are and the leadership role they play in their communities, they act as positive learning models for those who surround them. Kasiko resembles thousands of rural Namibian women. Her wealth of experience, her wisdom, her commitment to family and her dedication to learning as a life-long process highlight the untapped richness that Namibian society must recognize as it moves into the 21st century. Her voice, and the voices of her peers across the country, have much to offer in extending the literacy knowledge and abilities of both Namibian children and adults.

Reflections Upon the Research

The results of this study are encouraging. Marginalized and less literate mothers extended their own and their children's awareness for literacy and their ability with literacy tasks through the medium of children's literature. The method of "instruction" through which these literacy changes occurred, placed emphasis on the interconnectiveness between learners' world experiences and textual content. The set of literacy practices in which both the adults directly and their children indirectly were involved, highlight the role of literacy as a cultural event as opposed to simply a psycholinguistic skill. As the women discussed their reactions to text and as they provided opportunities for their children to do likewise, they began to establish social literacy practices that went beyond the transmission or transfer of literacy skills. As they collaborated with one another, with the facilitator, and with their children, they took on the mantles of both learner and teacher. Such roles may suggest, for less able literates in particular, that the powerful effects of collaboration go beyond the transfer of surface features of text in the search for textual meaning.

The study also indicated that when text is a source of enjoyment, when the topics contained within it have personal meanings and interest, the participants "practice" the text more frequently. Such practice is an indicator of long term reading outcomes (Snow, 1993).

It is possible that the role I took as facilitator influenced, to a degree, some of the outcomes of this study. That the women moved from superficial to more personal responses to the books presented may have been a result of my modeling during the sessions. However, at no time did I suggest how they should interact with their children during the home shared book events. The women are to be credited for incorporating and encouraging their youngsters to see text in personal ways. As the study demonstrates, the women's desire to make home reading events vibrant, meaningful and interesting for their children evolved as a "natural" outcome once the women had grasped the concept that there is more to reading than the words on the page.

While the study might be criticized for the small number of participants and the rather short duration of the family literacy project, it demonstrates that programs that focus on the strengths of participants (their world experiences) can serve as a strong motivator for them to approach literacy learning tasks (the print) with confidence. As they read their world within the text, they move to reading the word.

I am not suggesting that Family Literacy, as an approach to adult literacy education, is a panacea for addressing the problems of illiteracy in Namibia generally and within rural populations in particular. Rather, I propose that such programs, especially when they are designed and implemented within socio-cultural perspectives, hold a positive notion for family literacy as opposed to family illiteracy. The literacy tasks presented in such a program move beyond "fixing families", or "making them over" into the image of their mainstream peers. Disadvantages families, such as those in this study, bring unique and powerful voices to bear upon the literacy learning situation. That such voices should be

recognized and respected would not appear to be solely program dependent. It seems reasonable to suggest that the policies that drive adult literacy programs have greater influence on learners' achievement than the actual programs themselves.

How we define literacy, influences the way we present program offerings. If we see the purpose for increasing learners' literacy abilities as that of fueling the engines of commerce, then our programs will reflect such views. In such programs, perspectives for learners as empty vessels, individuals to be fixed up who adopt the role of passive acceptor of knowledge to meet the needs of others, will hold sway. If, on the other hand, we perceive literacy as an avenue towards democratization, our programs will encourage learners to critique the status quo. In addition, as program policy makers and program implementers, we will see learners as informers of and active participants in their journey to greater literacy achievement for their own ends.

The present study was an initial, albeit very small step, towards achieving the latter perspective. That eight rural women made minute progress in this direction, is encouraging. That they influenced the literacy learning behaviours of 40 children in spite of their limited English, reduced economic circumstances and sparse literacy abilities, excite the imagination for what might occur within adult literacy learning in Namibia.

Summary

This chapter has explored the themes that surfaced from the data collected. In addition, it provided a more detailed portrait of one of the women who participated in the Family Literacy program. Chapter 5 presents an overview of the study together with implications for further research and instruction.

CHAPTER V

OVERVIEW, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter contains a brief overview of the study, the main findings and conclusions. Recommendations for further research and implications for teaching are also presented.

Overview

The main purpose of this study was to examine how less literate women extend their own and their children's literacy development through the medium of shared book experiences. The Family Literacy study was couched within the dimensions of a socio-cultural theoretical perspective wherein participants were viewed as having a cultural richness and broad personal experiences as the basis for their and their children's literacy learning. Underpinning the theoretical framework was a definition of literacy as an active, constructive meaning making process of print.

The sample for the study consisted of eight rural Namibian women of whom seven regularly attended fifteen family literacy workshop sessions. The criteria for selection consisted of a) having children/grandchildren enrolled in grades 1 to 3 or b) having children who would enter grade 1 the following year. Each workshop session included reading and discussing a text from children's literature; other activities, such as writing, crafts, and/or singing were also included. At the conclusion of each session, the women took home the text that had been discussed to share it at home with their children.

Sources of data collection consisted of individually conducted audio-taped semi-structured interviews, classroom discussions (also audiotaped) and notations written in the researcher's reflective journal. The women were interviewed at the start and upon completion of the project. Because of the limited knowledge of English and/or

Afrikaans of some of the women, some information provided by them was translated from their indigenous languages into English.

The audiotapes of group discussions and individual interviews were transcribed. A concerted effort was made to maintain meaning across languages during the audio-tape transcription stage. Data were analyzed by identifying the common themes that surfaced within and across data sources. Four prominent themes emerged: a) lived experience as text interpretation, b) adult literacy acquisition as a developmental process, c) music as a support for literacy learning, and d) the reciprocal nature of collaborative learning. In addition, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the literacy learning of the women as a result of their involvement in the study, an in-depth portrait of one of the women was included to highlight the role of parent as literacy learner and literacy model for her own and other children.

Findings

Lived Experience As Text Interpretation

Reading a new book was always followed by discussion in which the women were encouraged to bring their background knowledge and personal experiences to the text. Their responses were not judged in terms of correctness. Rather, their comments served to demonstrate that multiple interpretations of text are possible and that individuals may draw from the collective pool of contributions to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of text. The women and their children constructed meaning from text in terms of their own schema and experiences of success, the Bible, demands of motherhood, traditional customs and food.

As the women brought their cultural experiences to bear upon the texts both in the group sessions and with their children, their interpretations for the selected texts extended beyond the surface features of text to more meaningful and purposeful

constructs. On several occasions, the women employed the texts to modify or explain family behaviours and to emphasize generational differences. Furthermore, the development of their personal interpretations and their acceptance of their children's interpretations encouraged them to perceive literacy learning as an enjoyable activity.

Adult Literacy Acquisition as a Developmental Process

The women constructed knowledge about print in ways similar to emergent literacy behaviours of young children. Their behaviours reflected the developmental nature of literacy learning - pictures to print, writing as labeling and the negotiation of meaning. However, the adult learners differed from children in that they brought more comprehensive background experiences to the reading event.

Members of the group were all products of a school system where literacy was acquired in a skill-and-drill mode. Initially, they relied on illustrations to negotiate meaning of text for themselves and for their children during home reading events. Some individuals also paraphrased the text in their mother tongue for their children. As the project progressed, the women became increasingly less picture bound for their textual interpretations. This shift in literacy learning behaviour became especially clear in the way they abstracted themes from books. Some participants also facilitated this journey into more decontextualized thinking for their children by offering possible interpretations of the text. On the other hand, writing activities mainly consisted of word labeling in English together with their equivalents in one of the local, indigenous languages.

Oral discussion was the foundation in the women's literacy development. Discussions during the literacy sessions allowed women to voice their opinions - an opportunity which they are not always culturally afforded. Initially, the women negotiated meaning for each other in the local languages only. As their self-confidence grew, they inquired about English labels and phrases and eagerly practiced them.

Eventually, some women reported they read rhymes to their children in English. Generally, however, the parents paraphrased the texts read at home in their mother tongue.

Music as Support for Literacy Learning

Traditional African society evolves around natural rhythms. Songs are often sung for entertainment and frequently the lyrics serve to instill traditional values in young people or to convey messages about cultural perspectives. The women's spontaneous singing in group sessions surfaced "naturally" as a means to expand their knowledge of and ability to use both English literacy.

They enjoyed singing rhymes when the words were easy to learn and the tune was easy to sing. Singing appeared to help participating women to gain confidence in speaking English spontaneously and served as a form of alternative literacy for them. This study suggests that since music and singing serve social and cultural purposes in the black African community, it has a natural place in literacy curricula designed to serve those communities.

The Reciprocal Nature of Collaborative Learning

Throughout the project, the women negotiated meaning as a community of learners. This group was also interdependent for translation of text into the various local languages represented in the group. At home, the women formed learning partnerships with their children. When problems arose, the mothers scaffolded new experiences for their young in the light of previous experiences so that their children could arrive at a better understanding of authors' intended meanings.

Traditionally, wisdom is passed on hierarchically by elders in the African community. Conversely, participating women frequently allowed their children to be in control of the learning situation at home. As mothers and in one case, a grandmother,

they did not perceive this reversal of roles as a threat to their status in the traditional family position of honour.

The learning partnership among the group also required me to be increasingly sensitive to cultural customs and concerns to which I previously had not related. This project allowed me, as facilitator, to journey with the women as a co-learner of language, text and culture.

Recommendations for Further Research

The present study has sought to explore the influence of a family literacy program on the literacy learning of Namibian adult rural women and their children. To refine, augment, and increase the relevance of the study, the following suggestions are made for further research in Namibia in the area of family literacy.

1. The women self-reported on what occurred during the home reading events in the present study. Further research could examine the actual interactions which evolve between mothers and children within the home environment during the shared reading event (see Heath, 1982, and "ways of taking" from books as a part of culture).

2. Since many participants scaffolded the reading event for their children by telling stories, additional research could examine story structures among different oral cultures in rural Namibia and the ways in which such stories may assist in print processing.

3. This study indicated the powerful influence of one grandmother as literacy model. Future studies in family literacy could allow grandparents to participate, in order to examine the quality of the interactions between grandparents and grandchildren as they mutually explore literacy.

4. This study did not allow for a comprehensive exploration of the role of writing within this family literacy program. Other research could perhaps examine if

less literate rural women could extend their literacy activities at home to include writing. Writing "for meaningful purposes" such as writing of letters, shopping lists, lists of "things to do" and the making and sending of greeting cards, have been identified by researchers such as Elish-Piper (1996/97), Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines (1988) and Heath (1983). Sensitivity to cultural demands for writing might provide for a broader understanding for literacy learning within the rural Namibian context.

5. The current research could be extended to incorporate a follow-up case study of one of the participants (cf. the case study of Margaret in Handel & Goldsmith, 1994). Such a study would reveal whether literacy continued or did not continue to be a part of her life and the life of her children. Should it be found that she expanded and extended her own literacy and that of her children as a result of participation in this program, such findings could serve as an impetus for implementation of similar programs in future.

6. Despite honourable intentions of conducting the present study once a week over a period of three months, participants opted for a more intense, condensed program due to climatic constraints. A similar program of longer duration might show more rigorous change in the literacy behaviours of participants, particularly in the area of writing. However, Nickse (1990) warns that intense participation over a longer period is only possible when the parent is unemployed or if the program schedules activities after hours to accommodate working parents.

7. Due to limited sponsorship for this study, childcare could not be provided during the sessions. Similar research could explore where children come to the site and join their parents for part of or the entire workshop (cf. France & Hager, 1993). Observing interactions between parents and children could provide facilitators with greater in-depth data than when they have to rely solely on a report of the event.

8. Readers might question the absence of males in this study. However, this project was meant to break ground in unexplored research territory within the Namibian context. I chose a homogenous group to maximize group interaction. Future studies in family literacy involving both parents could explore the interactions and dynamics of a mixed group. In addition, such studies could explore the role of the father interacting with his children.

Implications for Adult Literacy Instruction

On the basis of the study findings, the following implications for teaching are suggested.

1. Literacy instructors may wish to re-examine their perspectives for what are appropriate text selections. Books which highlight the nature of the human dimension cross cultural barriers. Themes such as fear, loneliness, unhappiness, honesty, bravery or achievement can be interpreted within a cultural perspective, without the text demonstrating that it is actually culturally contextualized. As this study demonstrated, children's literature provides an ideal text source. In addition, the repetitive language within such texts allow less able readers to gain control over text very quickly.

2. Even though adults move through emergent literacy stages, they remain adults. Instructors must recognize the richness of experiences which adult learners bring to the learning situation. Instruction must meet them at their actual developmental level in their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Their "funds of knowledge" (Moll & Greenberg, 1990) have to be recognized, honoured and respected as they develop as readers and writers.

3. Facilitators need to be encouraged to also include art, music and dance into their programs. For example, the rhymes and songs of people that come from an oral tradition could be used as launch pad texts for oral discourse. In addition, some of

these lyrics could be translated into the target language to be used as predictable language exercises. As Hinzen (1989) rightly notes: "The diversity of languages in a country contributes to a rich cultural heritage and how much do we respect this fact in our literacy efforts?" (p. 513).

4. Literacy facilitators need to adopt a learner-centered approach to their instruction if participants in their programs are to have an active role in their own learning. For students who expect the teacher to be the fountain of knowledge, their journey to more open and accepting forms of instruction will initially be slow. However, over time, when the learners are encouraged to be risk-takers and when they realize that their responses are accepted, they will develop as critical thinkers and self-empowered learners.

5. The cultural and social practices of adults must be recognized and incorporated into literacy learning activities. Instruction which is respectful of and incorporates the lived experiences and goals of the participants, heightens their desire to learn and provides them with tangible reasons for continuance within the program. Family literacy settings are ideal locations not only for adults to learn but also to demonstrate their power as teachers of their children.

6. The central actors in family literacy programs are the learners and their families. Like what occurs in families, instruction that includes an interchange of ideas, trust and mutual respect provides the springboard for co-constructing the content of the program.

7. Family literacy instructors need to focus on the strengths of their less literate adults rather than their deficiencies. As competent adults who cope with life under difficult circumstances, less literate adults are well equipped to bring rich experiences to the learning situation. Instruction which recognizes ability as the launch pad for learning rather than simply attempting to erode perceived weaknesses, will

allow a literacy curriculum to evolve that is community and participant based rather than predetermined by outside sources.

Conclusion

As a possible alternative to traditional methods of teaching literacy, this study had focused on a powerful Freirean way for developing literacy. Learners were encouraged to bring their worlds, their realities (Freire, 1985) into the literacy classroom when they explored text. The eight participating women demonstrated that extrinsic awards for learning were not a requirement for them. A "simple" text like a children's book had of itself the motivation to lead them to print when they were allowed to interpret it in the light of their own experiences. This approach could augment and expand the present literacy training program in Namibia. By capitalizing on the fullness of the Namibian adult experience, affordable resources can enhance the literacy learning of adults. In turn, parents will lay the foundation for their children's literacy behaviours that are needed to survive, prosper and become productive members of Namibian society.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONS - PRE-INTERVIEW

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONS - PRE-INTERVIEW

1. How old are you?
2. Which school standard (grade) did you finish?
3. If you think back of your experiences at school, what will you always remember?
4. You have children or grandchildren at school. Do you think their experiences of school are different to yours?
5. Do you think it is important to be able to read and write? Why?
6. Have you gained anything from our meetings up to now?
7. Is there anything you would suggest be included in the sessions?
8. Did you read or share Leo the late Bloomer with your child?
9. Did you personally learn anything from reading that book?
10. Do you think a program of this nature could be offered by schools as a service to parents?

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONS - POST-INTERVIEW

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONS - POST-INTERVIEW

(English)

1. Do you mind sharing with me what you have learned from our sessions?
2. Have the sessions influenced your interactions with your children in any way?
3. Which session did you like best and why?
4. Which book was of greatest interest to you and why?
5. Which things do you think I could have done but I did not?
6. What will you remember most from the sessions?
7. In what way are you going to try and continue reading to your children?
8. Do you think the school/community could offer programs similar to this one in future to assist parents of young children?

(Rukwangali)

1. Malirongo musinke muna gwanamo poruveze oru tuna yakara none?
2. Malisinto musinke gana kwamako kovana veni konyima zo ruveze oru?
3. Ruveze musinke ono larapo unene momalirongo aga ntani konda musinke ono harere malirongo aga?
4. Mbapira musinke zina kutovarapo unene ntani konda musinke ono kuuyungira ngoso?
5. Yininke musinke eyi muna hara kumuruganena eyi nadira kururgana momalirongo aga?
6. Yinke eyi muna kudiworokapo unene melikwamo lina?
7. Ngapi omu ngomu kambadara kutwikira komeho mokuresera vana veni?
8. Ekwafo musinke ngazi gava Nkarapamwe ndi Sure mokuvatera vakondi ngwendi nyone komeho oko tuna yuka?

(Gciricku)

1. Makushongo munke muna wnamo paruvede runo tuna ya kara nanwe?

2. Makushinto munke anakwamoko kuvana venu muruku ya ruvede runo?

3. Ruvede munke ghuna shanapo unene mumakushongo ghano ntani mukonda munke ghuna horere makushongo ghano?

4. Mbapira munke yina ku tovarapo unene ntani mukonda munke muna ku ghambera ngoli?

5. Vininke munke ovyo muna shana kumu rughanena ovyo kani piri kurughana mu makushongo ghano?

6. Nke ovyo muna ku vhurukapo unene mulikukwamo linya?

7. Weni omo ngamu kambadara kutwikira kumeho mukuvarwira vana venu?

8. Mbatero munke ngayi tapa nkarapamwe ndi shure mukuvatera vakondi yira anwe kumeho oko tuna tamba?

APPENDIX C

BOOKS READ DURING THE PROJECT

APPENDIX C.

SUMMARY OF BOOKS READ DURING THE PROJECT

Butterfield, M. First Numbers. Leicestershire, UK: Ladybird Books Ltd.

The combination of simple text and full colour photographs is ideal to introduce young children to first numbers and helps them to develop valuable pre-school skills.

Carle, E. (1994). The Very Hungry Caterpillar. New York: Philomel Books.

This book describes the life cycle of the caterpillar, from being a little egg to being a beautiful butterfly. A couple of pages lend themselves to teaching children how to count from one to five.

Corey, D. (1992). Will There Be a Lap for Me? Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman & Co.

Kyle's special place is on Mother's lap. It's just right for resting and talking and listening to stories and watching the birds. But Mother's lap is getting smaller - there's a baby growing inside her. So Kyle waits and waits, and he wonders, "Will there be a lap for me?"

Galdone, P. (1973). The Little Red Hen. New York: Clarion Books.

The little red hen's three lazy housemates do not want to help her with daily chores. She punishes them by eating the cake which she baked to the very last crumb - all by herself.

Hawkins, J. & Hawkins, C. (1995). Mig the Pig. London: Dorling Kindersley.

Children learn to read new rhyming words as they flip the pages of this book about Mig the pig and her adventures with a wig, a twig, and a fig.

Ivimey, J.W. (1987). Three Blind Mice. New York: Clarion Books.

Inspired by the lines of the original nursery rhyme, Ivimey expanded the rodents' tale. The three mice tried to escape from the farmer's cat. They fell into a bramble hedge which scratched them and made them blind. Fortunately they met with their friend, Dr Hare, who gave them magic salve which helped them to regain their eyesight. The mice built a house, learned a trade and were doing well.

Kraus, R. (1971). Leo the Late Bloomer. New York: Harper Collins.

Leo couldn't read. He couldn't write. He couldn't draw. He ate sloppily. "What's the matter with Leo?" asked his father. "Nothing," said his mother. "Leo's just a late bloomer." Leo's mother was right. In his own good time, Leo bloomed.

Kroll, V. (1995). Jaha and Jamil went down the hill: An African Mother Goose. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge Publishing.

This book preserves all the fun of the original Mother Goose favourites while creating a modern treasury of rhythm and rhyme. Colourful illustrations reveal some of the splendour of Africa from north to south and east to west.

My first alphabet book. (1995). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The reader has to match the words to each picture. The large type helps children to recognize the relationship between the sound and its letter symbol.

Reid, B. (1992). Two by Two. Ontario: Scholastic.

To save his family from the big flood, Noah builds a boat. It has to be huge, because two of every animal are coming to stay ... for forty days and nights. No ark since Noah's own has shown the colour and diversity of life as the one of Barbara Reid.