SHARING THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILDREN'S LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN FIRST GRADE: CHILD - PARENT - TEACHER PARTNERSHIPS

by
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(ABSTRACT)

The purpose of this study was to describe what happens when parents and children are invited to participate in a child-parent-teacher partnership which mutually supports the child's literacy development during transition into first grade. Questions which helped focus the study were: How do child-parent-teacher partnerships develop? How are participant's understandings and expectations about literacy affected and what is their influence on literacy development? What kind of changes related to involvement with literacy occur during the transition period? What are the conditions under which partnerships were promoted or impeded? Constructivist theory and ecological theory of human development provided the theoretical foundation for the study.

Families from the researcher's classroom were invited to participate in child-parent-teacher partnerships. Eight families participated in the study. A case study design was used to describe the partnership process. Data collection consisted of three family surveys, child and parent journals, researcher folios, children's work samples, school records, written and verbal correspondences, unstructured interviews, and audio taped at home child-parent work sessions. Data analysis followed grounded theory methodology.

Analysis revealed a uniqueness to each family and each child-parent-teacher relationship. Child-parent-teacher partnerships developed with seven of the eight participatory families. One surprising partnership developed without a positive parent-teacher relationship. The eighth intended partnership failed to emerge. Findings indicate the eight characteristics of partnership development are: interest and willingness to participate; shared purpose; reciprocal flexibility; ability and willingness to negotiate and compromise; unconditional commitment; mutual

respect; effective communication; and availability of curriculum materials. Three benefits of child-parent-teacher partnerships are: enhanced literacy development; enriched parental understanding, expectation and involvement; and more informed child-parent-teacher communication.

DEDICATION

With Loving Memory to My Dear Mother
A Lifelong Learner

Ruth Pauline Whipp Sherwin

March 17, 1918
July 25, 1996

"You'll never guess what I'm thinking of doing, Mom."

"What's that, dear?"

"I'm thinking about seeking admission into a post-master's program. I might be able to get my doctorate someday."

"Oh, Sally, that's a grand idea. Do it. Yes, I think you should do it. I have some regrets about things I haven't done. Don't let that happen to you. That sounds so exciting and I'd be immensely interested in your work. Do you have any ideas on what you might concentrate?"

"I'm thinking of parent involvement with first grade reading and writing. I keep finding it a fascinating endeavor and process - parents seem like such outstanding resources. I've had tremendous support from some as they work with their child at home, and I think their child's development has really been enriched."

"That's a topic full of potential, isn't it? I'm delighted for you. Do apply, and let me know how everything is going."

Mom was intensely interested in my work and progress, and sent me many related clippings and articles. Until her passing, she remained supportive.

This is for her.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With apprehension, I crossed a threshold of possibility one spring afternoon. Dr. Jerry Niles greeted me. We met in his small, rectangular office on third floor. Amid the shelves and stacks of books and papers, we shared the thought, "Does graduate school seem like an appropriate step for me?"

With hindsight, I am certain my naiveté was obvious. A hint of possible hardship or stress sent me out the door, yet Jerry expertly and humanely drew me back into conversation and consideration. I left our meeting with affirmation.

Jerry has relocated offices four times since that meeting; it has been my pleasure watching him progress along the administrative continuum. Likewise, my journey has been marked with change and challenge. Throughout my graduate school experience, he has offered needed encouragement and direction. When I only saw trees, he guided me to the overlook for a view of the forest. During times of stress, he was there for me. When my mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer, he offered, "Put first things first." His advice has been unfailingly accurate. I am still learning how to listen.

Jerry, without your mentorship, support, guidance, inspiration, expertise, wisdom, consistency, steadfastness, and friendship, this final step would not have been possible. Thank you seems inadequate, but I offer it. You are deeply appreciated. I am forever grateful.

Additional members of my dissertation committee have offered support and insight. Thank you to Dr. Tom Gardner, Dr. James LaPorte, Dr. Rosary Lalik, and Dr. Mary Ann Lewis for your time and expertise. Your professional efforts are appreciated, and our educational community is enriched because of your membership.

Appreciation is offered to the eight families who participated with the study. Its foundation and structure were carefully and thoughtfully researched and designed, but you brought it to life. Your colorful stories weave a reflective texture portraying the partnership development process. Thank you for them.

Thank you to my family members, colleagues and friends who have been interested in me and my work. The love and support you gave during and after my mother's illness were intensely meaningful, valuable, and enriching. The power of others in our lives was never more apparent to me than at that time.

After returning to the study, your encouragement and belief in me helped with the necessary process of reenergizing and refocusing while teaching first grade. Thank you for all you have given.

Moving to Virginia in August of 1989 was a tremendous undertaking for our small family of three. We left the security of home, friends, and family in Minnesota and ventured forth. Sam was just beginning seventh grade, and Tom was entering his own doctoral program. Falling in love with Blacksburg and the gentle climate and people of the area seemed effortless.

Incredibly, eight years have passed. My most heartfelt and deepest thanks for my graduate school experience go to my sweet and continually encouraging husband and son. Tom and Sam, your belief in my abilities, your willingness to look beyond my harried days and sleepless nights, your understanding of my need for nap or respite amid the mess, your patience in letting me go to my mother during the sadness of disease and death, in other words, your love for me, has been and continues to be a source of abiding peace and contentment. Thank you for it. I pray our love will continue to grow each day.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Scenario I

"I knew Rosie would learn to read this year, but I didn't know it would be like this!" Rosie's father was astounded at the rapid pace of reading development she had begun to take. School had been in session for approximately eight weeks, and already she was beginning to read some things well and was attempting to read almost everything. Rosie was an energetic, happy first grader. Her interest in science, especially moths and butterflies, was evident during our first month of school as we began a study of the monarch butterfly. With each new detail of the metamorphosis examined, Rosie's enthusiasm grew. Soon she entered the classroom with her "very own" field guide to moths and butterflies. She carried it with her as she played outside, keeping a watchful eye for any new specimen. She read it voraciously.

Rosie's dad remained enchanted with her rapid progress and we communicated often about her growth and development. I offered specific methods, techniques and materials for use at home which might further facilitate her learning and interests. It was a pleasure to participate in her learning together. We shared observations and examples which stimulated the exchange of ideas and directions we could take both at home and at school, ideas and directions aimed at maintaining and fostering her learning and her love of learning. Rosie's dad and I grew to be partners in learning, a partnership which was mutually beneficial and educational to child, parent and teacher.

Scenario II

I'll do everything I can to help Lon have a good first grade year." It was clear that Lon's mom was intent and serious in her statement. The family had recently moved from New York and was still undergoing adjustments to their new life in Virginia. Although Lon's mom related that he was excited about first grade

and learning to read, he especially " ... loves to play. I know he'll need some help with his schoolwork, and I'll see that he gets it."

Following an informal assessment of Lon's strengths in September, it was determined that he might benefit from support services through the Chapter I program, a remedial reading class supported by federal funds. However, when Lon was evaluated for admission into the program, he missed the "cut-off" by a few points. There were other children in more need of assistance than Lon.

Lon's mom stepped in and reiterated her interest and willingness to work with him at home. Specific guidelines, materials, methods and techniques were discussed with her, and the work began. Mom and teacher became partners in Lon's learning. His progress was steady and sure. Work at home was consistent and became a regular feature of family life with dad and mom working interchangeably with Lon. Positive feedback was regularly provided to Lon by teacher and parents. Methods, techniques and materials were adjusted as progress was made. Parent-teacher communication continued throughout the school year, usually in the form of short notes.

As spring approached it was clear that Lon had made tremendous progress with literacy development. His motivation and interest in reading and writing had blossomed as well. By the time Lon left my classroom he was an above average first grade reader and writer. With his parents and teacher working together as partners in learning, both Lon's educational experience and his attitude toward learning were enhanced.

Personal Reflection

Although I had often entertained the notion of involving parents with their child's first grade literacy experience, my journey toward actually implementing some aspect of parent involvement began during a visit to a Minneapolis first grade classroom. A group of teachers from my small Minnesota community had traveled early one morning to observe a language arts skill development program. A wall chart caught my eye and, following inquisition, I learned that children took home small sheets of paper upon which the titles of five books read at home were recorded. When sheets were returned, the totals were recorded on the chart.

This avenue toward parent involvement appealed to me; it appeared to require minimal initial or long-term teacher effort, it seemed that parents could easily become involved, and a record of children's home reading could be maintained. Therefore, my initial effort at parent involvement began with a modification of this activity. I designed small sheets to my liking (which included verification by parental signature), wrote an introductory parent letter describing the activity, and prepared small, individual envelopes (I prefer not to use wall charts for record keeping which can be constant visual reminders of individual achievement and which therefore may foster competition) for the completed and returned sheets (totals were maintained on the front of each envelope). Trelease (1985) strongly encourages teachers and parents to read aloud to children, and I concur. Therefore, I accepted books read by *or* to the child. From January through May of that year, students from my classroom read 1,145 books at home. I was astounded!

One student stands out in my mind. Dean was an eager yet distractible six year old. His interest and motivation in school were basically negative; he did not hesitate to let me know that he generally did not like school. Yet, during this parent involvement activity, Dean read 240 books, far surpassing any other child in the class! His mother overflowed with enthusiasm and disbelief - Dean loved reading and being read to and enjoyed the challenge of completing each recording sheet. Family trips to the library grew to be a weekly habit and mother-child free time was consumed with reading. His motivation and interest in school improved. Dean taught me that providing opportunity for a variety of student experience is essential when attempting to meet individual student's needs and interests. His mother taught me that some parents are willing to sacrifice time and energy to enhance their child's learning.

Whether children's reading was modified or influenced by this project is difficult to determine; however results of six and one-half years during which first graders and their parents participated with the activity are impressive: 16,255 books! The range of involvement was from 5 (obviously this activity does not appeal to everyone) to 800 books read during the course of one school year. At the end of each year, children left with their recording sheets stuffed in their individual envelopes, for some a memorable collection of familiar titles.

Because the first year of parent involvement was successful, during the next year I invited parents to practice reading specific texts with their child; the convenience of basal stories on sheets prepared by a secretary from the elementary reading office beckoned as an additional avenue for involvement. Again, I initiated the experience with an informational parent letter which included an opportunity for the parent to determine when their child could satisfactorily read the story which would be sent home; a spot for parental signature was provided on each sheet which was to be signed when the parent thought their child could "read this well". Although this condition was implemented because I simply did not have time to check each child on each story, I soon began to experience an additional benefit: empowering parents with this decision making opportunity could enable them to become an educational partner. Some parents began describing their child's learning style to me, rather than vice versa. Others noted that they were learning how their child learned. Thoughtful seeds were planted and began to germinate: two (parent and teacher), sharing mutual support of a child's developing literacy, may be more effective than one.

An additional idea took root: could the experience of parents of first grade children, who become directly and positively involved with their child's education, facilitate and influence their involvement during later school experiences? In other words, could first grade offer an especially fertile opportunity for parent involvement which might have long-term repercussions? (Although the notion is not addressed in this study, it may warrant consideration.)

During subsequent years, efforts at parent involvement increased, including sending home additional types of reading books (such as small books sequenced with increasing reading difficulty, first start easy reader books, easy to read picture books, and more advanced books for more able readers) and other suggestions for home reading and writing projects and activities. All activities were individually selected and distributed; children progressively received more challenging activities according to their level of development and interest.

Frequently a parent and I negotiated decisions regarding their child's activities or the parent's involvement. More than one parent determined that their child did not enjoy a specific type of activity, or that they did not believe that their child would benefit from working on it; therefore the activity was canceled for that child. Also, some parents thought that certain activities, which seemed to

frustrate their child, should be put on hold; again, their judgment of the situation was respected. In negotiating with parents about their involvement with their child, a concerted effort was made to listen carefully to parental concerns, and respond with appreciation and respect for their needs, interests, and understandings of their family circumstances.

During my efforts to involve first grade parents, most have appeared to be eager and supportive to participate with their child's literacy development. Comments such as, "I want to help out at home" or "We'll do what we need to at home" were not uncommon. Heath (1983) finds this to be the case as well, "Most parents agreed that they wanted to help. The question was how " (p. 281), and Mavrogenes (1990) notes, "Research indicates that most parents are willing to help their children with their education, but do not know how to go about it... " (p. 4). Only once in five years did a parent protest: "That's not my job." Following a description of the volunteer nature of my parent involvement invitation, including the premise that a parent may be able to give ten to fifteen minutes of individual attention to their child a few times each week on a regular basis (something a classroom teacher would find impossible), she relented: "I guess I can do that." Two years later, with hindsight, this mother was extremely supportive and appreciative of my efforts to involve her during her child's first grade experience.

The journey toward parent involvement with my first grade families was not predetermined. By taking small, seemingly manageable steps toward involvement, the concept of child-parent-teacher partnership evolved over time and with experience, culminating in a fundamental belief that children, parents, and teachers can become valuable educational partners in the enhancement of young children's literacy development.

Background

The Call for Parent Involvement

A report was issued in 1983 which is "... often credited with launching the latest education reform movement in the United States" (Walters, 1993, p. 12). Bell (1993) summarizes the purpose of the report and reform highlights of the decade since it's publication. In an effort to focus public attention on our schools

and colleges, Bell, Secretary of Education in 1981, established the National Commission on Excellence in Education and directed it to examine the quality of education in our country. On April 26, 1983, the commission's report, *A Nation at Risk* , which was predominantly negative in conclusion, was released and immediately became a feature story nationwide. Generally, teachers received blame for the negative findings, and reforms centered on making changes in schools. Numerous states responded to the report with legislative action such as establishing mandates or directives. Unprecedented Presidential and gubernatorial attention to the issue of school reform flourished. The issue of equal funding appeared in some states' judicial systems. Corporate America joined the reform movement in an effort to fix the schools. The decision-making authority of the schools came under scrutiny, and flatter organizational structures were seen throughout the nation.

The report (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) recognized that the responsibility for educational success rested not only with faculty members, administrators, policy makers, and the mass media, but with parents and students as well. Speaking directly to parents the report states,

> As surely as you are your child's first and most influential teacher, your child's ideas about education and its significance begin with you. You must be a *living* example of what you expect your children to honor and to emulate. Moreover, you bear a responsibility to participate actively in your child's education. (p. 35)

The call for parent involvement had sounded and numerous reverberations have followed. Two practicing teachers, Davis and Stubbs (1988), believe that children's home community experiences should be valued and relate that "... parental involvement has been identified by some as the greatest development in education since the setting up of compulsory state education" (p. 3). Elementary language arts teacher Routman (1991) holds that "... strong parent involvement is not a question of 'Should we?' but rather a question of 'How should we?'" (p. 485), and believes educators must "value parents as experts" (1996, p. 40). Elementary school principal Ribas (1992) encourages administrators to foster direct and effective communication between teachers and parents.

Family literacy researchers Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) support school policies which nurture young children within a framework of close contact

between teachers and parents. University professor Gelfer (1991) perceives the mutually interdependent role of parent and teacher as an avenue for providing optimal learning experiences for young children. ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center) Director Flaxman and staff writer Inger (1992) note that strategies for greater involvement of parents in school decision making and programs for parents to support the education of their children are being fostered by educators, political leaders, and community groups alike. Likewise, Bell (1993) believes that parents, workers in child-care centers, and others must be motivated to make after-school hours and weekends more educationally productive.

Traditionally, parents have been encouraged to provide support for their child's educational efforts as they related to homework (Pickens & Kies, 1988). According to Doyle & Barber (1990), from colonial times to the end of World War II, schools were considered "... primarily a dispensary of information " (p. 8) and the topic of homework was discussed with little controversy; questions related to home study dealt with such concerns as how much should be studied and at what age. Following World War II, our nation became increasingly less rural and more urban, television and other forms of mass media began flooding society with information, and schools could not as easily identify "...just what 'everyone should know' ...[and yet] ... the old questions persist: How much homework? How often? To whom? For what purpose? At what age? Unfortunately, after all these years there are still no definite answers" (Doyle & Barber, 1990, p. 9).

What little research related to parental involvement with homework has been conducted has lead to inconclusive results (Coulter, 1979; England & Flatley, 1985; Cooper, 1989). Topping (1985) does observe a link between parental interest / encouragement / and educational outcomes. Conners (1991) supports an active rather than a supervisory parental role with homework, and Otto (1985) notes that increased homework may result from school improvement efforts. Branson and Provis (1986) summarize: "In terms of time and opportunity to interact with children as individuals, the parent-child dyad is potentially more capable of providing stimulation and generating cognitive growth than the comparatively brief interludes a teacher can give to one child " (p. 11).

Early Reading and Writing

The potential for parent involvement as it specifically relates to their child's literacy development was rarely valued or encouraged until the 1960's and 1970's, when a nurturing perspective (that is, reading readiness could be accelerated by appropriate experiences) toward the teaching of reading emerged. Historically, the topic of teaching early reading and writing could be categorized into a period of minimal interest and research (1900s - 1920s) and a period of preparation for reading or "reading readiness" (1920s - 1980s).

From the late 1800s to the 1920s, very little research was done on the subject of early reading (Durkin, 1980) and the pervasive attitude toward literacy development was one of "benign neglect" (Teale & Sulzby, 1986, p. viii). It was generally believed that literacy development did not begin until the child met formal instruction in school. Upon school entry, students followed a lock-step approach to reading; the same instruction at the same time and in the same order. Children were forced to repeat grades until they passed. This resulted in "...massive numbers of children failing initial reading instruction ... [providing] an impetus for educators to consider other ways of viewing beginning reading instruction" (Teale & Sulzby, 1986, p. viii).

Reading Readiness

From the 1920s to the 1980s educators began to view the early childhood and kindergarten years as a preparation period and the concept of "reading readiness" dominated the view of literacy development (Betts, 1946; Durkin, 1980; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). In fact, Betts observes, "Today the term 'reading readiness' is on the tip of almost every teacher's tongue [and] is familiar to many parents" (p. 103). It is noted that some separation of the reading readiness concept did occur within this period.

From the 1920s to the 1960s, the "nature perspective" of reading readiness dominated educational theory and practice; that is, reading readiness was the result of maturation, thereby encouraging a wait and see what develops approach (Gesell & Ilg, 1949). This perspective was strongly reinforced by a research project undertaken by Morphett and Washburne (1931) which

encouraged reading to begin at the mental age of 6 years 6 months. Although there was opposition to this perspective (Gates & Bond, 1936; Betts, 1946), influence from the Morphett and Washburne study was felt for decades (Durkin, 1980; Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Feitelson, 1988; Sulzby, 1991).

There was also a developing acceptance and use of tests during the 1920s and 1930s (Durkin, 1980): "... almost a craze to measure everything" (p. 50). During this time period the reading readiness test came into existence (Betts, 1946); The Metropolitan Readiness Test survives to this day. Reading readiness workbooks were published and the notions of diagnosis and intervention accompanied readiness test and workbook development. Betts challenged contemporary thought: "... making available some type of reading-readiness materials has caught on rapidly....[and] the whole question of preparation for reading has been thrown open" (p. 267). The wait and see what develops approach gradually was replaced with the premise that environmental influence can affect readiness.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, the "nurture perspective" of reading readiness dominated educational thought and practice; that is, reading readiness could be accelerated by appropriate experiences (Durkin, 1980; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). The launching of the Russian satellite, Sputnik, in 1957 sent a reverberating challenge throughout the educational community: teach more and teach it earlier (Durkin, 1980). Bruner (1960) made an influential statement of the time (Durkin, 1980; Teale & Sulzby, 1986), "We begin with the hypotheses that any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development" (p. 33). Of additional influence was work done by Bloom (1964) indicating that the majority of intellectual development occurs during the first five years of life, and Bloom (1976) emphasizing that the home develops language, the ability to learn from adults, and some qualities (such as work habits and attention to tasks) basic to school work. The door to the importance of the child-parent relationship in literacy development had opened.

A brief summary of the reading readiness era will offer a contrast with the current perspective of literacy development, that of emergent literacy. Reading readiness implies that reading instruction begins when a child has mastered a set of skills, that writing instruction should be delayed until the child can read, that functional reading is overshadowed by mastery of skills, that what went on before

formal reading is irrelevant, and that children pass through a hierarchy of reading skills which should be monitored by testing (Teale & Sulzby, 1986).

Emergent Literacy

A paradigm shift occurred in the 1980s which gave credibility to a child's earliest literacy experiences. The term emergent literacy is used to denote "... a reconceptualization of what young children are learning about reading, writing, and print prior to school ... the period between birth and the time when children read and write conventionally" (Sulzby & Teale, 1991. p. 727-8).

A misconception of reading readiness is that there is some "moment" when real reading and writing begin (Clay, 1972; Feitelson, 1988; Gillet & Temple, 1990). Learning to read and write begins in the home (Heath, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey Gaines, 1988; Czerneiwska, 1989; Hannon & James, 1990; Gillet & Temple, 1990; Juel, 1991; Hildebrand & Bader, 1992). Many support the premise, consistent with the emergent literacy perspective, that developing meaning or "making sense" enhances learning (Clay, 1972; Holdaway, 1979; Bissex, 1980; Clark, 1984; Ghatala, 1986; Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Taylor & Dorsey Gaines, 1988; Laminack, 1990). Bissex exemplifies this premise in a description of her son's literacy development efforts.

> Paul, like his parents, wrote (and read and talked) because what he was writing (or reading or saying) had meaning to him as an individual and as a cultural being. (p. 107) ... It has become increasingly clear that language acquisition is not merely imitative but systematic and creative, in the sense of the child constructing the rules for himself. (p. 134)

In summary, the emergent literacy perspective recognizes that literacy development begins before formal schooling, that listening, speaking, reading, and writing develop concurrently, that literacy develops in active engagement with real life settings, and that children do critical cognitive work in literacy development from birth (Teale & Sulzby, 1986).

Recognizing these emergent literacy characteristics, primary school educators are summoned to acknowledge, appreciate, and respect the literacy context and culture of each child's home and community. Shor (1992) eloquently summarizes: "What students bring to class is where learning begins" (p. 44). As

we begin to view children's literacy development as initiating in the context and culture of their home environment, it is logical to think of home - school partnerships as a way to promote, encourage, foster, and nurture this development.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to describe what happens when parents and children are invited to participate in a child-parent-teacher partnership which mutually supports the child's literacy development during transition into first grade.

The premise that the parent is the child's first and foremost teacher is widely supported (Lightfoot, 1978; Sinclair & Ghory, 1983; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Gelfer, 1991; Kiah, 1992; Darling, 1992; Kies, Rodriguez & Granato, 1993, Boyer, 1995) as is the premise that literacy permeates family culture (Heath, 1983; Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Sulzby, 1991; Taylor, 1991). Awareness of these powerful premises beckons literacy educators to heed the call for parent involvement.

The questions which helped focus this study were:

- how does the partnership develop (such as the nature of conversations within the relationships, what is discussed, and what is accomplished)?
- how are participant's understandings and expectations about literacy affected and what is their influence on literacy development?
- what kind of changes (such as observations about literacy, interactions around literacy, and habits related to literacy) occur during the transition period?
- what are the conditions under which partnerships are promoted or are impeded?

Theoretical Perspective

Constructivist Theory

There is support for the theory that learners construct knowledge (Bott, Davis, Glynne-Jones, Hitchfield, Johnson, Tamburrini, & Brearley, 1970; Farnham-Diggory, 1990; Sulzby & Teale, 1991; Marshall, 1992), or as Darling-Hammond (1993) summarizes, "learners actively construct their own knowledge in very different ways depending on what they already know or understand to be true, what they have experienced, and how they perceive and interpret new information" (p. 754). Dewey (1929) has a sense of this complexity when he states, "Each investigation and conclusion is special, but the tendency of an increasing number and variety of specialized results is to create new points of view and a wider field of observation" (p. 20). The premise that learning is constructed is also noted by Dewey (1938): "... there is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education. If this be true, then a positive and constructive development of its own basic idea depends upon having a correct idea of experience" (p. 7).

The constructivist theory of learning demands that teachers must be skilled professionals who can facilitate divergent learning in a supportive environment. School reform becomes a complex undertaking when diverse learners with differing needs and interests are coupled with skilled professionals (Darling-Hammond, 1993) and, where appropriate, teachers' beliefs and understandings about the nature of learning may need to be changed (Marshall, 1992).

This study was based on the constructivist theory of learning premise that learners (children, parents and teachers alike) are diverse, have varying needs and interests, and construct their learning and knowledge. The purpose of the study was to describe what happens as children, parents, and a teacher construct their learning, knowledge, and understanding of how they mutually support children's literacy development during the transition into first grade. During this process, they were involved in what may be termed an ecological system, that is, their relationship to each other was interactive and interdependent.

Ecological Theory of Human Development

There is support that an interactive relationship between the school and the community exists (Litwak & Meyer ,1973; Lightfoot, 1978; Brandwein, 1981; Dobson, Dobson, & Koetting, 1985; Hanson, 1986; Davis & Stubbs, 1988; Flaxman & Inger, 1992). According to Bronfenbrenner (1986), "...external influences ... affect the capacity of families to foster the healthy development of their children" (p. 723), and " ... a powerful factor affecting the capacity of a child to learn in the classroom is the relationship existing between the family and the school" (p. 735). The school and the home have an interdependent influence on the developmental process.

To view the relationship between the school and the community, including the home, as part of a complex ecological system is consistent with the ecological theory of human development (Ost, 1988). There exists an ecology (an interdependent relationship) between the child, the parent, and the teacher; what happens with the child at home influences the child at school, and vice versa. Gilgun (1992) encourages the use of ecological family research; "...research that investigates the interface between families and external environments ... adds to knowledge of the processes of family interaction and human development" (p. 242).

This study was based on the ecological theory of human development premise that an interdependent and interactive relationship exists between the family and the teacher. Three individuals, the child, the parent, and the teacher, are the foundation of the partnerships described in the study, and from these three individuals, three paired relationships evolve: child-parent, child-teacher, and parent-teacher. Because each of the paired relationships inform and are affected by each other, a triad relationship (child-parent-teacher) also emerges which may strengthen the partnership. This interactive, interdependent partnership is consistent with the ecological theory of human development. The interrelationship of the three individuals and their focus of effort toward the child's literacy development may be described through an organizing framework.

Organizing Framework

A graphic representation of the major organizing ideas for the study (Figure 1) illustrates that the focus of this study was on children's literacy development mutually supported by a child-parent-teacher partnership. Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language (1989) defines literacy as "the quality or state of being literate, esp. the ability to read and write" (p. 836). Duffy and Roehler (1989) note that traditionally reading has been perceived as a series of skills or competencies to be mastered, typically accomplished by breaking the components of reading into small parts beginning with knowledge of alphabet letters, then progressing to alphabet sounds, syllables, words, phrases, sentences, and so on. As previously stated, however, the contemporary perspective of emergent literacy credits what young children learn about reading and writing in the home, in meaningful engagement with real life settings, prior to school entrance. The step by step mastery of skills perspective is replaced with an understanding that reading "starts by seeking meaning" (Duffy & Roehler, 1989, p. 34). Establishing a moment when a child begins to seek meaning related to reading would be impossible and naive.

My understanding of the reading and writing process has been informed by various resources, such as literature, educational colleagues, and parents, but first grade children have been my best teachers. Why is it that, following weeks or perhaps months of struggle, a child seems to suddenly "get it"? Why is it that reading and writing seem to develop easily for some? A deep appreciation for the complexity of reading and writing acquisition has grown within me, and the term "magic" seems to describe the process; something magical seems to make reading and writing happen. Gillet and Temple (1990) describe a sense of this magic with the use of the term "mystery":

> When we seriously consider how children learn to read, the issues are not as obvious as we might have thought There is a core of mystery to the process that has resisted a clear explanation in spite of the hundreds of books and thousands of investigations reading has inspired over the years - far more that any other topic in education. (p. 3)

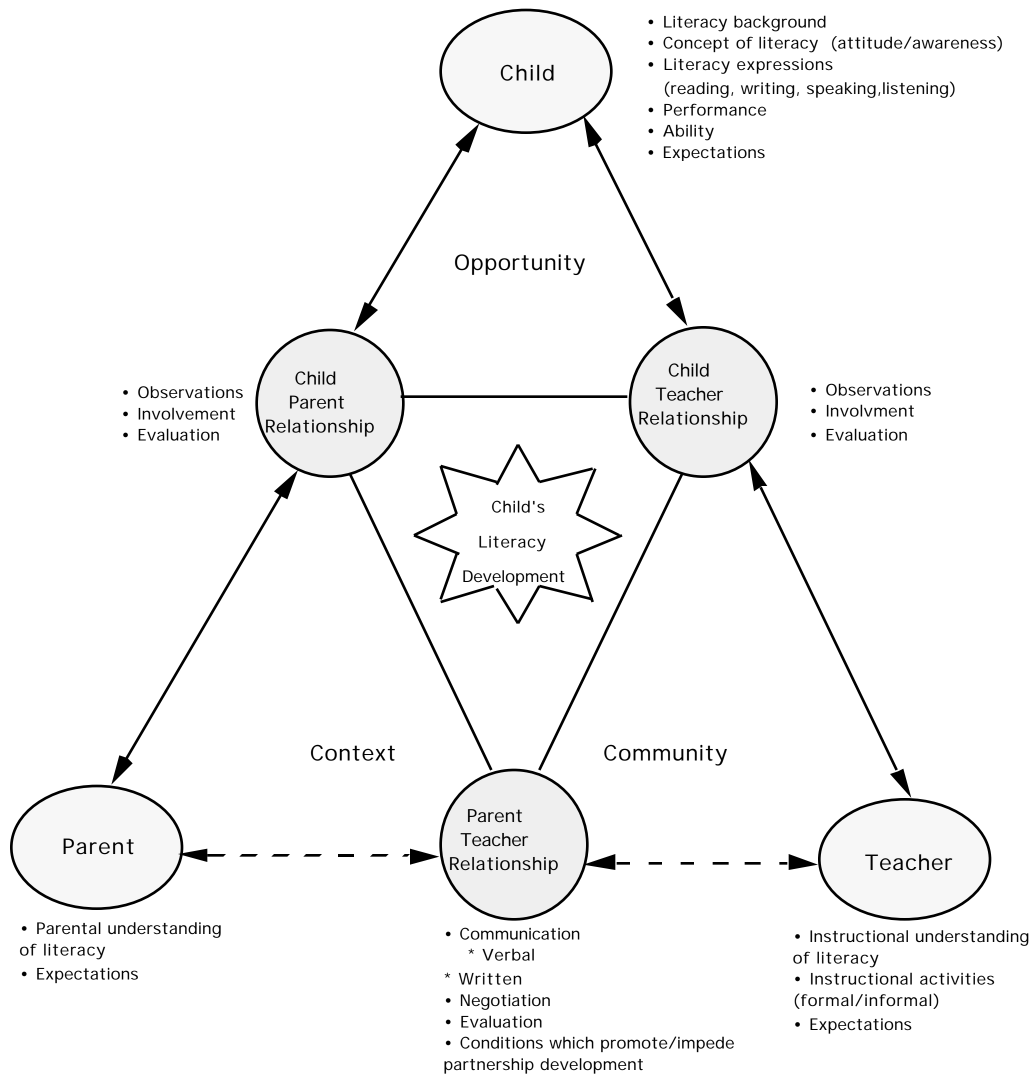

Figure 1: Organizing Framework

As a child, their parent, and their first grade teacher join together in partnership, an avenue of understanding and a means of shedding light on the mystery, thereby enhancing the child's literary development, may emerge.

It is important to consider the context of the emerging partnership. The home and classroom are unique locations; each child, parent and teacher bring individual and diverse context to their respective settings, reflective of such characteristics as their interests and values. Influential characteristics of the wider community such as economical, cultural, social, and familial, should be recognized. Finally, opportunity for participation (such as having time to participate) will influence the emerging partnership; Crosby (1993) notes that, according to a 1990 report, "...for the first time, the majority of women with children under age 6 were in the work force and ... 64% of all children living with one or two parents did not have any parents at home full time" (p. 604). How does opportunity for involvement influence conditions which promote or impede partnership development?

Each participant (child, parent, and teacher) enters the partnership as a unique individual, with accompanying understandings and expectations of literacy development and literacy activities. In addition, characteristics of the child, such as literacy background, literacy expressions, performance, and ability, are unique. The individual characteristics of each participant influence the dyad relationships (child-parent, child-teacher, and parent-teacher) as well as the potential triad child-parent-teacher partnership.

The child and the parent enter the first grade experience with what may be described as an established, interactive relationship. This relationship has normally developed through the years since the child's birth. The child and parent may engage in various literacy activities long before formal schooling begins, and both may have an understanding of their relationship as it relates to literacy development.

Consistent and continuous contact usually fosters a relationship between the first grade teacher and the child during transition into first grade. The child and the teacher will engage in various literacy activities together, and both may develop an understanding of their relationship as it relates to literacy development.

Although the parent and the first grade teacher may never meet, that is the exception. On the contrary, as previously stated, most first grade parents eagerly anticipate the first grade experience and make an effort to at least meet their child's teacher. Many parents of first graders seem to offer an out stretched hand to the teacher with hope that their child will have a positive and productive year. The teacher in this study offered, in a sense, an out stretched hand to the parents of her first grade children, inviting them to join her in a mutually supportive partnership for the enhancement of their child's literacy development. Foregrounded in this study is a description of the developing parent-teacher relationship, including efforts to communicate and negotiate, which offers understanding of how and under what conditions the parent-teacher relationship is promoted or impeded.

The three dyad relationships (child-parent, child-teacher, and parent-teacher) may take on the characteristic of a partnership when, following invitation for participation, parents and children willingly agree to work together in partnership with the teacher in order to enhance the child's literacy development. The child, the parent, and the teacher may construct their understanding of the partnership through their interactive, interdependent ecological relationship.

Educational Significance

The excitement, apprehension, and anxiety which can surround a child's entrance into first grade have been frequently palpable during my 14 year tenure with five, six, seven and eight year olds. Most parents and students anticipate, and it is typically assumed, that this is the year they will learn to read. But when will it happen? How will it happen? Will I learn to read today? Will I learn to read tomorrow?

Juel (1991) observes that "we know surprisingly little about the transition from what has been termed *emergent literacy* to beginning reading" (p. 759). Sulzby (1991) supports emergent literacy research which investigates "children's development in process, through observational studies, rather than through predictive or retrospective designs" (p. 275). Research encompassing the child-parent-teacher experience during the transition into first grade, which typically includes a transition from emergent literacy to conventional forms of reading and

writing, may further illuminate first grade educators' understandings of literacy development and provide insight into and guide practitioners' practice.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This review includes a look at constructivist theory and ecological theory of human development, both of which offer theoretical support for the study. Three relationships, child-parent, child-teacher, and parent-teacher are reviewed with emphasis on interaction between the relationships and children's literacy development. Finally, a description of literacy development for young children completes the review of literature.

Constructivist Theory and Teaching

Scenario

By 1988, Mark Black had been a fifth grade teacher for ten years. Following personal interviews and observations of his mathematics teaching, Wilson (1990) described his teaching style as energetic, enthusiastic, encouraging, focused, teacher-directed, mastery-oriented, positive, procedural, and orderly, "...a prototype of the 'effective' teacher" (p. 297). He offered help to students when needed, consistently attempted to teach students the steps of mathematical computation, was receptive to parental concerns regarding curriculum coverage, and tested according to the requirements established by the California Assessment Program (CAP).

Mark's school system adopted a new mathematics text in 1988, *Real Math*, considered to be reflective of the current vision of California schools. This vision assigned "... primary importance to a student's understanding of fundamental concepts rather than to the student's ability to memorize algorithms or computational procedures" (Wilson, 1990, p. 300). A box of manipulatives, intended to facilitate understanding of concepts, accompanied the new texts. Mark was thrown into a conflict. Understanding of the vision and purpose of the curriculum change were unclear to him. His educational training and experience

focused on student mastery of mathematical procedure to cover curriculum; the testing requirement continued and, for Mark, overshadowed the new educational vision. He adapted to the situation by taking the innovative curriculum and editing it to the familiar, using what he understood to be important and valuable for his students, and skipping over sections which he deemed unimportant or unnecessary. The box of manipulatives sat unopened while the procedural mastery of step by step computation continued.

Standardization vs. Diversity

Numerous teachers could identify with Mark Black's dilemma. A conflict exists within the educational community. Mark's conflicting educational mission has him delivering instructional services and assessing student mastery through the CAP, while attempting to meet diverse learner needs and develop learner understanding of fundamental concepts. He summarizes,

> ...all they really want to know is how are these kids doing on the tests? They want me to teach in a way that they can't test, except that I'm held accountable to the test. It's a Catch-22. [Rules and procedures are] easy to test. (Wilson, 1990, p. 302)

Darling-Hammond (1988) states, "The teaching profession in America is at a crossroads. Efforts to professionalize teaching...have contrasted sharply with initiatives that...deprofessionalize the occupation and the act of teaching" (p. 4). Five years later, Darling-Hammond (1993) reiterates the conflict as a theoretical dilemma: "At this moment we have two very different theories of school reform working in parallel - and sometimes at cross purposes - throughout the US" (p. 755). The conflict stems from two different views of how students learn: behaviorist vs. constructivist. From the two differing views of learning, two different theories on the role of teachers develop: semiskilled workers vs. skilled professionals. Subsequently, two competing models of school reform emerge: standardization vs. diversity.

The behaviorist theory of learning, dominating the field of education since Thorndike promoted it in the 1930s, ("... fundamental facts of learning whereby a situation which first evokes response A later evokes response B, different from A" Thorndike, 1932, p. 1) is essentially a stimulus-response approach to the

learning task (Darling-Hammond, 1993, p. 754). This theory is characterized by providing outside stimulus (such as legislative mandates, assessment directives, additional course requirements, teacher-proof curricula, and step-by-step / cookbook / procedural teacher manuals) which is directed toward students who enter schools with "blank slates" ready for assembly line processing and response. Therefore, teachers can be semiskilled in the sense that they are told to "...follow [the textbook] page by page" (Wilson, 1990, p. 303). In organizational management terms (Theory X - Webb, Greer, Montello & Norton, 1987), teachers need top-down directives because they cannot be trusted to make sound decisions about teaching or curriculum. Consistent with the behaviorist view of learning, school reform is dependent on finding the right formula or determining the correct stimulus to achieve the desired response.

Behaviorist theory of learning is in sharp contrast with constructivist theory. As previously stated in Chapter I, there is support for the notion that learners construct knowledge (Farnham-Diggory, 1990; Sulzby & Teale, 1991; Marshall, 1992; Darling-Hammond, 1993). The constructivist view of learning demands that teachers must be skilled professionals, "...well prepared, with a strong grounding in child psychology ... developmental psychology, cognitive science, learning theory - teachers with strong pedagogical training as well as good subject matter backgrounds" (Meek, 1988, p. 15). The constructivist theory is aligned with Theory Y of organizational management (including such notions as work to a person is as natural as play or rest, and people will exercise self-direction and self-control toward objectives to which they are committed, Webb et al., 1987) and " ... attends more to the capacities of teachers and to the development of schools as inquiring, collaborative organizations ...." (Darling-Hammond, 1993, p. 755). School reform becomes a complex undertaking when diverse learners with differing needs and interests are coupled with skilled professionals in a supportive environment. Cronbach (1975) notes the complexity of the undertaking, "Once we attend to interactions we enter a hall of mirrors that extends to infinity" (p. 119).

Conflicting educational models are not a new phenomenon. Tyack (1974) notes that historically American educators have been in debate regarding purpose and structure (p. 41). The standardization vs. diversity controversy was demonstrated as early as 1885. While one educator sought a "one best way" of

educating children everywhere (Tyack, p. 39), another feared that the individual child was forgotten and proposed that the "...first task was to strive to understand him, to interest him, and to make him happy" (Tyack, p. 82). Also, Dewey (1929) believes that scientific knowledge "... liberates individuals ... and ... makes for diversification rather than for set uniformity" (p. 12).

The educational debate continues. Standardization in some regions is flourishing and teachers are evaluated as "ineffective" if the needs and interests of the students are considered (Darling-Hammond, 1993, p. 758). In 1988, Georgia was testing kindergartners for promotion (Darling-Hammond, 1988, p. 17). Certainly some student failure is destined within the standardization model of reform.

This study is based on the constructivist theory of learning premise that humans are diverse, have varying interests and needs, and construct their learning and knowledge. We need highly skilled, knowledgeable teachers to address this diversity.

> As a country we cannot expect to maintain, or regain, economic and political status in the world while allowing our human capital to fall out however it may. We're in a situation where we simply cannot allow children to fail. (Meek, 1988, p. 12)

Darling-Hammond (1996) notes the conclusion of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, following two years of study and discussion, "... the reform of elementary and secondary education depends first and foremost on restructuring its foundation, the teaching profession" (p. 193).

> A more complex, knowledge-based, and multicultural society creates new expectations for teaching. To help diverse learners master more challenging content, teachers must go far beyond dispensing information, giving a test, and giving a grade. They must themselves know their subject areas deeply, and they must understand how students think, if they are to create experiences that actually work to produce learning. (p. 194)

In keeping with the purpose of this study, as children, parents, and a teacher join in partnership to enhance children's literacy development, and as they construct knowledge of how such partnerships are promoted or impeded, insight may be gained into how educators and families can work together to foster children's educational development.

Ecological Theory of Human Development

As previously stated, there is support that an interactive relationship between the school and the community exists (Litwak & Meyer ,1973; Lightfoot, 1978; Brandwein, 1981; Dobson, Dobson, & Koetting, 1985; Hanson, 1986; Davis & Stubbs, 1988; Flaxman & Inger, 1991). Bronfenbrenner (1979) offers "... a new theoretical perspective for research in human development ... new in its conception of the developing person, of the environment, and especially of the evolving interaction between the two" (p. 3). His new perspective is consistent with and supports this study: "A child's ability to learn to read in the primary grades may depend no less on how he is taught than on the existence and nature of ties between the school and the home" (p. 3). A summary of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of human development may facilitate understanding of the home-school relationship.

The ecological environment may be thought of as nesting structures, much like a set of Russian dolls. At the center or inner most level is the immediate setting of the developing person, such as the home for a young child. The next level moves beyond a single setting to the relations between settings, such as the home and the school for the primary student. The third level is less specific and encompasses events which occur in settings where the person is not even present. Bronfenbrenner theorizes that, within cultures and subcultures, the settings or nesting structures tend to be very similar; they can be distinctly different between cultures.

The various environments have a dynamic, interactive relationship to one another and to the developing person; there is an interplay between the person and the environment. A formal definition may be helpful.

> The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 21)

Specific terminology has been used to identify each of the nested, concentric structures or settings. The *microsystem* is the setting or place where the person

experiences face-to-face interaction. The key to this system is the concept of experience; it is more than a place with material and physical characteristics. How this place is perceived by the person is emphasized.

The next setting or nested structure, the *mesosystem*, consists of the interrelations between two or more settings where the developing person actively participates, such as relations between the home and school for the child, or between home and work for the adult. Finally, the *exosystem* refers to one or more settings where the developing person does not actively participant, but where events occur that affect or are affected by what happens in the settings containing the developing person. For example, an exosystem for a young child might be the parent's place of employment or the parent's network of friends. A final term, *macrosystem* , refers to consistencies in the content, form, and belief systems of lower order systems (micro-, meso- and exo-) which exist in the culture or subculture.

Description of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory would be incomplete without emphasis on the "...general phenomenon of movement through ecological space" (p. 26). Whenever a person's position in the ecological environment is altered (whether by a change in role, setting or both), an ecological transition occurs, such as a woman having a baby, a child entering day care, a teenager going to college, or an adult changing a job. During transition, there is the "...process of mutual accommodation between the organism and its surroundings that is the primary focus of ... the ecology of human development" (p. 27). In terms of this study, during transition into first grade, the first grade child, the parent, and the teacher accommodate to the change in their lives; typically the child has never before experienced this setting, and while the parent and teacher may have previously undertaken a similar experience (the parent may have had other children attend first grade, and the teacher may have previously taught first grade), no two experiences are alike, and accomodations must be made.

Later work by Bronfenbrenner (1981) stresses,

> In order to develop normally, a child needs the enduring, irrational involvement of one or more adults in care of and joint activity with the child. [also needed is] ...*time* for parenthood, primarily by parents, but also by other adults in the child's environment, both within and outside the

home. (pp. 38-9)

This could be interpreted as a call for parent-teacher partnership. Also, Bronfenbrenner (1986) notes: "... no researchers have examined how school experiences affect the behavior of children and parents in the home" (p. 727). This study helps fill the need for descriptive research on what happens in the home when a teacher invites parents and children to join in partnership for the enhancement of children's literacy development.

The Child-Parent Relationship in Literacy Development

Ideally, it is within the family that children experience their first safe, secure, and pleasant learning environment. To reiterate, many support the notion that the parent is the child's first and foremost teacher (Lightfoot, 1978; Comer, 1980; Sinclair & Ghory, 1983; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Gelfer, 1991; Kiah, 1992; Darling, 1992; Kies, Rodriguez & Granato, 1993; Boyer, 1995). Typically, the family is the first context for relationships and the child-parent relationship is the first interpersonal learning environment.

As previously discussed, until the 1960s it was generally accepted that learning to read either began in school or was dependent on maturation and consequently, the importance of the child-parent relationship in literacy development was rarely discussed. An exception is noted as early as 1908 when Huey suggests "natural ways" for young children to become familiar with letters, words, sentences, phrases, and the like in his chapter Learning to Read at Home.

> A few centuries ago. . . mothers baked gingerbread in the shapes of letters, and the child might eat all he could name. Perhaps even now pedagogy would not suffer so much as stomachs from this practice.... The child makes endless questionings about the names of things, as every mother knows. He is concerned also about the printed notices, signs, titles, visiting cards, etc., that come his way, and should be told what these "say" when he makes his inquiry. It is surprising how large a stock of printed or written words a child will gradually come to recognize in this way. (p. 314)

Two events in the 1960s, in conjunction with the emerging "nurture perspective" of reading readiness, began to focus educational attention on

parents and the home. The 1966 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (legislation for such programs as Head Start and Title I) asked that parents assume a more direct role in the formal education of their child (Lusthaus, Lusthaus & Gibbs, 1981; Flaxman & Inger, 1991; Herman & Yea, 1983). Also, Durkin (1966) researched children who came to school already reading, and her work represented one of the first attempts to illuminate children's literacy development prior to formal schooling (Sulzby, 1991).

As discussed in Chapter One, an impetus for parent involvement came in 1983 with The National Commission on Excellence in Education publication, *A Nation at Risk*, which examined the quality of education in our country, was predominantly negative in tone, and recognized that responsibility for educational success rested, in part, with parents. Numerous educators and researchers promote parent involvement with their child's education (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Davis & Stubbs, 1988; Gelfer, 1991; Routman, 1991; Ribas, 1992; Bell, 1993, Routman, 1996), and Berger (1991) notes a positive repercussion: "School / home collaboration helps many families in their interaction and support of children" (p. 22). Flaxman and Inger (1992) observe, "Parental involvement now is a major component of efforts to restructure or improve schools nationally" (p. 16-17).

Studies note that when parents are involved with their child's education, children have a greater chance of success, including improved test performance, enhanced attitudes and behaviors that facilitate learning, improved talent development, better attendance, and stronger cognitive skills (Plowden, 1967; Kagan & Schraft, 1983; Sloane, 1985; Topping, 1985; Rich, 1987; Weber, 1991; Darling, 1992; Hellmich, 1996). Specifically related to literacy development, Mavrogenes (1990) qualifies this involvement: "Most things that parents can do to encourage reading and writing involve time, attention, and sensitivity rather than money. All parents can learn to foster children's literacy" (p. 4). Throssell and Campbell (1993) believe that if parents were to talk, sing, rhyme and read books to their children from their birth, a greater interest in books would emerge. "Such an absorbing interest in language and the love of books would provide a sound basis for literacy to develop easily, naturally and inevitably" (p. 54).

Research of the home and family has expanded (Heath, 1983; Manning & Manning, 1984; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Studies of the home and

emergent literacy (Sulzby & Teale, 1991) indicate that,

> ... literacy is deeply embedded in the culture of the family and community, functioning primarily as an aspect of human activity rather than a set of isolated skills.... [and] ... the home plays a key role in emergent literacy. For literacy education, perhaps the most striking implication is the extreme importance of getting literacy embedded in children's social lives. It is this fundamental orientation that provides the foundation for subsequent academic growth in literacy. (p. 744-5)

Bus and IJzendoorn (1988) find that young children who get more reading instruction from their mothers score higher on emergent literacy measures. Chall (1983) states, "The home is the first teacher of reading" (p. 108), and some research indicates that families naturally involve their children in literacy events. Sulzby (1991) summarizes, "All families studied thus far take part in literacy events, and children are included in these events" (p. 276) and Taylor (1991) observes that, in families, "... at any time, multiple interpretations of literacy as part of some family activity are possible" (p. 465). Other research indicates some avenues for getting literacy embedded in children's social lives include literacy artifacts (newspapers, alphabet and other children's books, paper, pencils), experiences (checking TV schedules), events (seeing adults read), and interactions (bedtime story reading) (Friedberg, 1989; Hannon & James, 1990; Fitzgerald, Spiegel & Cunningham, 1991).

Numerous parent involvement programs have appeared, including Parent-Child Early Education Program (Aukerman, 1984); Parents as Teachers (PAT) (Caminiti, 1990); Parent Effectiveness Training (PET) and Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) (Flaxman & Inger, 1991); Parent Intervention Program (PIP) (Kiah, 1992); Beginning With Books (Friedberg, 1989); Reading Together: Make it a family tradition (Becker & Cohl, 1994), and America's Reading Challenge ("Clinton unveils," 1996). Resh and Wilson (1990) emphasize, "No other time for parent involvement is more critical than the early years of a child's educational experience when the patterns and habits of literacy are evolving and developing" (p. 51). Education Secretary Riley encourages "... parents, step-parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles to 'take a special interest in the lives of our young people' by acting as mentors or tutors. ...the two 'most powerful groups of adults' - teachers and family members - should work together" ("Families

urged," 1994, p. A8). Boyer, past president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, believes that "... an effective school absolutely has to have parents as full partners ("Thousands of schools," 1995, p. A3).

Because the parent is the child's first and foremost teacher and because literacy permeates the culture of the family, the child-parent relationship offers unlimited potential and opportunity for educational experience which may enhance literacy development. Although this simple illustration is relayed through the words of an educator and researcher, a parent who has repeatedly read to a youngster may relate to it.

> For several years, I have spent a weekly half hour with the toddlers (aged approximately 18 to 36 months) in a children's center. When I come into the room, the children run up to me shouting "Book! Book!" Sometimes they set out my chair. ... A child will seize a book, back up toward us, and, without looking, lower a well-padded bottom and settle in. (Friedberg, 1989, p. 16)

The Child-Teacher Relationship in Literacy Development

Scenario

Maintain control. Certainly one of the greatest fears of a beginning teacher is loss of classroom control. Horror stories about children jumping off desks, throwing chairs, and threatening others were discussed quietly among student teachers. Could these terrible things happen in our classroom? How would we be able to maintain control?

Teaching sixth grade in Madison, Wisconsin was my first experience. Although my worst fears were not realized, I remember occasional feelings of dread that I could lose control. A small group of boys repeatedly tested my authority. I gradually began to develop an understanding of how to relay expectations and manage various situations.

Following a variety of teaching experiences which usually involved working with small groups of children where management was not a pressing issue, I returned to the classroom where I again felt the need to maintain control. My focus was not merely obvious (the room "looks" under control) but subtle as well.

Although general classroom management was understood, my notion of control expanded to include student behavior, classroom decisions, curriculum and evaluations; essentially I expected to maintain control over everything.

Subtle messages during teacher preparation as well as specific, direct messages from my mother, a former teacher ("Don't smile until after Thanksgiving"), fostered this notion. I tended to view classroom control, obvious as well as subtle, not only as an expectation from "outside" or "above", but as my basic responsibility as a teacher. In other words, control was part of my job. Through a number of years of teaching, collaboration with other colleagues and personal reflection, I began to grow in understanding of a different role for myself as a teacher. It was, however, the children who served as my greatest resource for learning and changing my perception.

Inherent in my attitude and posture (in my autocratic classroom) was the implication that children needed control, that they were not capable of learning or functioning without it. However, as I began to allow more room for discussion with my students, for exchange on how even the simplest decision might be made, I began to realize that they usually were quite astute and logical with their input. In fact, the more responsibility I gave students, the more they could seem to handle. I slowly but gradually began to view myself as a facilitator, a guide, a support. I began to view the children as more capable. They began teaching me that they were.

Eventually my understanding of how children learned was modified. Although I had always loved and enjoyed children, I developed a genuine appreciation and respect for their individual needs and interests and for their family context and culture. Rather than continuing as a behaviorist teacher, I grew to become a constructivist teacher. Reflective of this change was my approach to curriculum. As a behaviorist teacher I relied on the opinions of superiors or experts to set curriculum; rarely did I rely on my own judgment. As a constructivist teacher I began to ask and listen. A pivotal moment is recalled: As I read a fictional account of a polar bear family, a child shared a fact learned from a television special about them. I asked, "Would you like to learn more about polar bears?" "Yes!!!" was the enthusiastic reply. Nearly 18 years of teaching had passed before I asked that simple question, and following it, my teaching has never been the same. I attacked the nonfiction section of the media center for

the first time and, although most first graders could not read the polar bear books, their interest and comprehension of information I shared was obvious. In a sense, they appeared to be hungry to learn about life! I was astounded at their interest, curiosity, understanding, and recall as we researched polar bears.

This is not to say that I relinquished all control. There are some aspects of classroom management which may remain autocratic. At times, a quick decision must be made by the teacher; a fire drill interrupts the schedule and adjustments are made. Some decisions are inappropriate for students to address; a particular relationship between two elementary girls appears to be detrimental to one student so they are placed in different classrooms during the following school year. There are a few rules (basically related to responsible behavior and thoughtfulness toward others) which I believe are necessary for optimal classroom functioning.

Essentially, however, I have learned that a classroom can function within a democratic framework, and that a democratic environment encourages positive student self-esteem. Decision making is a powerful learning tool. Self-concept flourishes as children learn they are capable decision makers and problem solvers. Children should have the opportunity to learn and grow at their own rate and with the support of each other. A democratic classroom, where children are empowered to make decisions about their education, offers a supportive, positive environment to capable, problem solving individuals.

The Autocratic Classroom

Within the public school system there exists a hierarchical structure of power. The county board of supervisors maintains control of the flow of educational funds, and, until recently, appointed our school board members. The county school board grants approval of personnel, policy, curriculum, schedules, extra-curricular activities and the like, and is accountable to the board of supervisors. Within the personnel system, the chain of command begins with the school board, continues to the superintendent, and progresses downward through assorted directors, principals, teachers, and support staff. Traditionally this chain of command has had little flux of power except "top-down"; generally, power has rested with the few near the top. One manifestation of this power is

routine supervision of others; judgments, assessments, and recommendations have been made by individuals or groups "above" those usually affected by their actions.

An autocratic classroom may be reflective of the hierarchical structure of power typically found in the educational system. By definition, autocracy is "uncontrolled or unlimited authority over others, invested in a single person" (Webster, 1989, p. 100). Students may be supervised, monitored, judged, evaluated, grouped, regrouped, organized, tracked, and arranged according to teacher judgment, assessment and recommendation. Foucault (1979) describes the use of surveillance in the

> reorganization of elementary teaching: the details of surveillance were specified and it was integrated into the teaching relationship. ... A relation of surveillance, defined and regulated, is inscribed at the heart of the practice of teaching, not as an additional or adjacent part, but as a mechanism that is inherent to it and which increases its efficiency. ... The power of hierarchized surveillance ... functions like a piece of machinery. (pp. 175-6)

A parallel to the surveillance machinery typically found in the educational system can be found in organizational management terms (Webb et al, 1987). Managers supportive of Theory X believe that workers are basically lazy, will work only when coerced, need external motivation, require constant supervision, and need to be evaluated by a superior. Also, the behaviorist theory of learning, something done to students who enter schools with blank slates may overlap with characteristics of Theory X.

On the surface, surveillance may appear to increase the efficiency of the system; numerous surveillance procedures exist for the purpose of providing a basis of evaluation toward the betterment of the educational process. Teachers supervise students, principals supervise teachers, directors and assistants supervise principals, and school board members supervise the superintendent.

However, the machinery of surveillance, where power has usually rested with the few (reflective of an autocratic classroom) can take on negative features and connotations. The definition of surveillance describes the supervision of a "suspected" person: "watch or guard kept over a person, etc., especially over a suspected person, a prisoner, or the like; often, spying, supervision" (Simpson &

Weiner, 1989, p. 309). (It is interesting to note that the definition of surveillant includes "a superintendent" p. 309). A negative repercussion of surveillance may be that student understanding of their capability is undermined. As teachers supervise, assess, evaluate and judge students from above, is a message of "need" implied? You need to be judged; therefore, I judge you. An autocratic teacher can undermine students' sense of capability. The student may begin to translate judgment from above as something they need: I am not capable of making this judgment; you do it for me. Student comments such as, "Is it good enough yet" or "Am I finished yet" or "How much do I have to do" are reflective of a passing of judgment from student to teacher.

Related to literacy development, Johnson (1993) notes:

> Teachers constructions of literacy and of children focus their evaluative and instructional responses to students' literate efforts. Thus they are a crucial part of students' constructions of themselves as literate beings, and hence of their self-assessment. (p. 18)

Rose (1989), who left the remedial, illiterate ghetto world of his childhood, writes: "It is an unfortunate fact of our psychic lives that the images that surround us as we grow up - no matter how much we may scorn them later - give shape to our deepest needs and longings" (p. 44). Educators should be aware of potentially negative repercussions of teacher assessment and evaluation.

Additionally, as teaching, assessment, evaluation, and judgment occur, the teacher may be considered the fountain of knowledge while the children are the black slates who have education "done to them". Shor (1992) speaks eloquently to results of this approach: "Pouring information into students is an alienating method. It makes students resentful and it silences them" (p. 74).

On the other hand, Wigginton (1985) offers a compassionate and powerful perspective to the educator's task and the student-teacher relationship.

> The best teachers never make negative assumptions about the potential of their students. Unfortunately, the atmosphere of too many of our schools almost forces us into this counterproductive posture. We build schools on the disease model ("Your students have the following defects and deficiencies, and it is your job this year to remediate these") rather than on the more subtle but immensely more powerful strength model ("Your students have the following strengths and abilities, and it is your job to

> begin there, and build on those, and take advantage of them, and in the process turn areas of weakness around"). (p. 223)

The Democratic Classroom: A Community of Learners

Wigginton (1985) sheds light on the value and importance of the child-teacher relationship: "...it's the quality of the interaction between us that carries the day. All else is icing, nice, but nonessential" (p. 184). As the child-teacher relationship is valued, a respect for the individuals within the relationship emerges. Specifically, the diversity of children should be recognized, appreciated, and respected. As diverse children join with a constructivist teacher, a community of learners may form. Wehmiller (1992) offers a description of his childhood experience.

> There were no walls around the school. The school was for all of us. We were a colorful parade of people with our names, our histories, our temperaments, our looks, our fears, our smells, our haves and have nots, our novice politics, our baseball teams, and our futures, whatever they were to be. (p. 375)

Indeed, a colorful parade of children enter classrooms throughout the land. How does a teacher address the varying needs, interests, backgrounds, idiosyncrasies, concerns, problems, conflicts, and dreams of them all? A democratic, supportive, constructive, positive environment may offer a possible solution.

Democracy is defined as "government by the people...a state of society characterized by formal equality of rights and privileges" (Webster, 1989, p. 384). A definition of equity may further describe a democratic community of learners, "the quality of being equal or fair; fairness, impartiality, evenhanded dealing" (Simpson & Weiner, 1989, p. 358). Democratic teachers should strive for equity as a main objective in their work with others. For example, is it fair to track children in remedial classes? Rose (1989) eloquently implies otherwise.

> ...in those so-called remedial classes. ... [the students] open their textbooks and see once again the familiar and impenetrable formulas and diagrams and terms that have stumped them for years. There is no excitement here. *No* excitement. Regardless of what the teacher says,

this is not a new challenge. There is, rather, embarrassment and frustration and, not surprisingly, some anger in being reminded once again of long-standing inadequacies. (p. 31)

When Bettelheim and Zelan (1982) asked elementary children about the books they had been required to read, "without exception, the children complained about how stupid the stories in their basic readers had been, and said how much they had hated having to read them" (p. 14). Combine this observation with the prominence of the basal reader: "Before 1900, the McGuffey reader was in wide use as the forerunner of the basal reader, which has since dominated reading instruction in this country" (Farr, 1981, p. 14). With democracy defined as equity of rights and privileges, a democratic teacher may ask, where were these children's rights and privileges?

For too long we have neglected to talk with children about their learning. We need to ask children about their educational experience. Questions emerge: What would you like to learn? What are you interested in? What would you like to learn more about? Do you have some stories about your family or friends you'd like to share? What would you like to share about your hopes and dreams? As Ayers (1993) indicates, "the strongest source of knowledge about the student remains the student herself, and tapping into that knowledge is not so difficult. Kids love to tell us about themselves, and we can structure multiple opportunities for them to do so" (p. 42). Green (1988) challenges educators: "My focal point is in human freedom, in the capacity to surpass the given and look at things as if they could be otherwise" (p. 3). While the autocratic teacher may "do" education to children, the democratic teacher shares the educational experience with children; the act of teaching becomes the art of teaching.

Dewey (1916) opposes practices which treat learning as a passive process of absorbing information: "[Education] is that reconstructing or reorganizing of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience" (pp. 89-90). Moll (1990) describes Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, a perspective consistent with a democratic classroom, where learners are supported and encouraged by a thoughtful, fair teacher and by each other: "...what children can perform collaboratively or with assistance today they can perform independently and competently tomorrow" (p. 3). An additional Vygotsky consideration aligns with

inquiry based curriculum (rather than curriculum set by some expert or supervisor): a reductionist approach to teaching (reducing the topic of interest into separate elements which are studied in isolation) should be replaced with a holistic approach (topics are studied in their complexity and without artificial divisions). Rose (1989) offers insight: "I wrote very little during my childhood. ... The more an assignment was related to real reading, the better I did; the more analytic, self-contained, and divorced from context, the lousier I performed" (p. 224).

Child-teacher interactions of any kind should be done respectfully and thoughtfully by the teacher involved as children and teacher construct their understanding and knowledge. Respectful interpersonal relationships will enhance the growth and learning of all involved in education and are part of a democratic environment. Wirth (1983) lists characteristics Dewey described necessary for such an environment: " ...two essential requirements if democracy were to have a chance: (1) the need for free and full communication (2) the need to counter emerging depersonalization by nurturing the vitality of face-to-face community" (p. 88). To summarize, "the rapport between teacher and student - is the engine of educational progress" (Back to the Classroom, 1991, p. 20).

The Parent-Teacher Relationship in Literacy Development

There is evidence that an uncomfortable relationship can exist between parents and teachers. The strength of this premise can be best observed via direct comment:

The fact seems to be that parents and teachers are natural enemies, predestined for the discomfiture of the other. (Waller, 1965, p. 68)

...it is natural that middle-class parents in this country exhibit anxieties about what teachers do to their children. (Corwin, 1965, p. 82)

Each was hostile toward the other, with the teacher believing that most parents were deliberately obtuse and willfully made her job more difficult. (McPherson, 1972, p. 123)

The phenomenon of defensive attitudes by teachers toward the public is serious enough today that educators ... need to take some definite and positive steps to rectify this potentially destructive situation in our schools. (Steller & Knox, 1981, p. 28)

The ambiguous, gray areas of authority and responsibility between parents and teachers exacerbates the distrust between them. The distrust is further complicated by the fact that it is rarely articulated, but usually remains smoldering and silent. (Lightfoot, 1981, p. 57)

Examination of several comprehensive studies of the teachers' perspective points out that relationships with parents are typically characterized as distrustful and hostile. (Blase, 1987, p. 53)

Teachers tend to take defensive positions to enhance their general image and perceived performance when coming in contact with parents. (Ost, 1988, p. 170)

This talk about family involvement is good but most parents I work with don't care or follow through .... (A preschool teacher - Burton, 1992, p. 40)

For the teachers [parent involvement] can very easily become threatening and led some of them to interpret what a parent sees as 'interest' as 'interference'. ... In the primary schools more of the teachers seem to be on the defensive. They are anxious that parents may be making too many inroads into areas which they see as their province. (Morgan, Fraser, Dunn & Cairns, 1993, p. 49)

As exemplified by these comments, a conflict can be created as teachers and parents heed the call for parent involvement in education. Questions arise: How can parents and teachers develop effective and positive relationships? How is involvement initiated and by whom? What could the involvement "look like"? How can involvement be maintained over time? How do parents negotiate involvement in education with their busy lives? What does parent involvement

mean to parents and to teachers? What are characteristics of effective parent-teacher relationships?

When parents are involved with their child's education, children have a greater chance of success (Plowden, 1967; Kagan & Schraft, 1983; Sloane, 1985; Topping, 1985; Cummins, 1986; Rich, 1987; Darling, 1992; Gutloff, 1996). Foundational to effective parent involvement is teacher recognition, understanding, and appreciation that children and parents (the family) are part of the larger community (Litwak & Meyer, 1973; Lightfoot, 1978; Brandwein, 1981; Davis & Stubbs, 1988; Ost, 1988; Farnham-Diggory, 1990; Burton, 1992). Using the family community as context, teachers can attempt to build involvement (Law and Mincey, 1983; Sinclair & Ghory, 1983; Dobson, Dobson & Koetting, 1985; Davis & Stubbs, 1988; Ost, 1988; Dawson & McHugh, 1987).

Swick (1991) describes such an attempt; 92 families from 18 rural school districts, 15 elementary teachers from three school sites, and personnel from the University of South Carolina joined in the Teacher-Parent Partnership for the Enhancement of School Success Project. One goal was to increase language, mathematics, social responsibility, and expressive skills of young at-risk children by extending curriculum into the home. A second goal was to "implement a school and home-based curriculum" (p. 2) in an effort to increase such things as student achievement and opportunity, parent self-confidence, and parent-child interactions. A criterion-referenced evaluation process, used to assess the project after one year, indicated that the collaborative design was very successful. The most successful children had both parents and teachers who were highly involved with the project, including interest and enthusiasm, high attendance and participation, self-initiative, and commitment to a partnership approach. (For additional examples of parent - teacher collaboration with children's development and education, see Wolfendale, 1983 and Topping, 1986).

The responsibility for initiating parent involvement may seem to rest with the teacher (Plowden, 1967; Sinclair & Ghory, 1983; Law & Mincey, 1983; Dobson, Dobson, and Koetting, 1985). Teacher's perceptions of families and parents may "... become an extension of their philosophical and ideological perspectives on child growth" (Lightfoot, 1978, p. 215) and can affect the initiation of involvement.

> If, on the one hand, a teacher views growth as limited to the development of cognitive skills, sees children as replicas of their parents, and perceives the social structure of schools and society as "normal" and static, then she will not be inclined to explore the individual nature of the child or search out relationships with families that enhance the expression of the child's wholeness. If, on the other hand, the teacher views family and culture as powerful forces in shaping a child's nature, she will seek to develop a relationship that incorporates the child and the parents. (Lightfoot, 1978, p. 215.

Lightfoot (1981) later reiterated: "In order to fully capture family-school interactions, families need to be seen as educative environments, places where children experience their first and most profound curricular messages (p. 53).

Teacher attitude toward parent involvement also can be influential. Lusthaus, Lusthaus and Gibbs (1981) note that teacher attitude toward involvement may lean toward less involvement where "...parents...are not expected to participate actively in making decisions about their child's program" (p. 256). A patronizing attitude toward parents could negatively affect parent involvement.

> It would not be surprising if parents were reluctant to approach teachers for advice if they are likely to be urged to talk to their own children (with the implicit assumption that they do not do it enough or they do not do it properly). (Hannon & James, 1990, p. 268)

Grannis and Peer (1985) hold that the level of parent involvement is strongly influenced by attitudes the teacher has toward the parent.

If teachers do reach out to parents, the consequence may be that both learn from the other and thereby enhance student learning (consistent with constructivist theory). For example, Allen and Peinert (1987) describe a school district in Ohio where an experienced teacher may choose alternative forms of teacher evaluation including parent evaluation. Hannon (1986) notes "... how readily parents had accepted the involvement offered to them" (p. 31). Keenen, Willett & Solsken (1993) summarize: "Constructing equitable relations with parents ... requires that we acknowledge our limitations, share our vulnerabilities, and take the risk of letting them teach us about their languages and cultures" (p. 213.)

In efforts to involve parents, teachers must offer more than token participation through one-way communication (Flaxman & Inger, 1991); communication must be a two-way process (Steller & Knox, 1981; Hannon & James, 1990; Gelfer, 1991). Satisfying decision making and cooperative group action are dependent on effective two-way communication (Johnson & Johnson, 1975; Verderber, 1982). Although the task of developing partnerships between parents and schools can be difficult (Kagan & Schraft, 1983), Walberg (1984) emphasizes that "...cooperative partnerships between the home and the school can dramatically raise educational productivity" (p. 397). Aronson (1995) lends support: "Building ... partnerships with parents can create a win - win - win situation. The schools win, the parents win, and most importantly, the children win (p. 5), and Gutloff (1996) agrees: "Students tend to do better in school when their parents play an active role in their education" (p. 6). These partnerships can begin with "honest, reliable and sincere communication" (Gelfer, 1991, p. 164-165). Davis and Stubbs (1988) summarize: "... we must look to our own attitudes and ways of communicating" (p. 76) if parents seem unwilling to become involved with their child's education.

The relationship between parent and teacher in the emergent literacy process offers opportunity for enhancement of child development. Reading with their child is frequently suggested by teachers as an involvement activity (Kiah, 1992). Chall (1983) notes that women's magazines and television ads promote regular reading to preschoolers. However, Hannon and James (1990) observe that often this is unnecessary advice; in their study most parents seemed to need no prompting to read to their children. This is supported by the National Center for Education Statistics (1992) which reports that 35% of three to eight year old children are read to daily, and 58% are read to regularly but less frequently - several times per week or month.

Fitzgerald (1988) believes that teachers should attempt to give parents insight into current theory, rather than simply providing lists of things for them to do, and McMackin (1993) offers parents more in-depth suggestions, such as helping their child use picture cues and encouraging them to practice both reading and writing at home, while explaining some of the changes between traditional and current beliefs regarding the reading process. A study conducted by Hildebrand and Bader (1992) encourages parents and teachers to remain alert

for "teachable moments when the child shows interest in reading or writing. Developmentally appropriate materials and interactions are needed ... as the child's literacy interests emerge and grow" (p. 169). Finally, parent's perceptions of literacy development and understanding of their role with that development fosters successful parent-teacher partnerships, according to Spiegel, Fitzgerald and Cunningham (1993), a premise that emphasizes the benefits of interactional communication within a constructivist parent-teacher learning environment.

A parent and teacher, through effective communication, can become a powerful force in the literacy development of young people. As Sinclair & Ghory, 1983, reinforce,

> When educators can utilize the wisdom taught in families to challenge young minds, and when families can turn their considerable interpretive and screening powers to support and extend the social and academic teachings of schools, a powerful force for children's learning will have been created. (p.14)

Literacy Development of Young Children

Definitions of literacy vary considerably; Webster's (1989) definition ranges from "pertaining to or of the nature of books and writings, esp. those classed as literature [to] characterized by an excessive or affected display of learning; stilted; pedantic" (p. 836). Likewise, literate ranges from "able to read and write [to] having an education [to] characterized by skill, lucidity, polish, or the like" (p. 836). Various forms of literacy can be described, for example, a skilled mechanic may have mechanical literacy, an accomplished musician may have musical literacy, and a CPA may have mathematical literacy.

Standards for the English Language Arts (International Reading Association & National Council of Teachers of English, 1995) aims to "... ensure that *all* students develop the literacy skills they need to succeed in school, in the workplace, and in the various domains of life. ... Encouraging and enabling students to learn to use language effectively is certainly one of society's most important tasks" (p. 1). Presented in the document is a broad description of literacy, " ... one that encompasses print, oral language, and visual language and embraces the six interrelated language arts: reading, writing, speaking, listening,

viewing, and visually representing (p. 7).

Additional literacy researchers offer perspectives which often include meaning or purpose. Bettelheim and Zelan (1982) describe "true literacy - the enjoyment of reading and the meaning one gains from it that enriches one's life" (p. 47). Taylor (1989) observes that in classrooms where teachers and children work together and where children are not disenfranchised, literacy can become "a dynamic, complex, multidimensional phenomenon that is transformed through the interdependence of activity and setting" (p. 190). Gallimore and Tharp (1990) describe reading as, " ... both the condition and process of acquiring meaning" (p. 194). Chapman (1993) reiterates that a component of literacy is "to convey meaning effectively" (p. 28), and Burns and Collins (1987) find that the reading capacities of young children develop as "...they become conscious that reading / writing serves a purpose within their environment" (p. 239). The Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group (1992) further broadens understanding of the term.

> Literacy ...is a dynamic process in which what literate action means is continually being constructed and reconstructed by individuals as they become members of new social groups. ... From this perspective, we must talk of literacies and not literacy, for no one definition can capture the range of occurrence in everyday life in classrooms, the multiplicity of demands, or the ways of engaging in literacy within and across groups.

Finally, Perkins (1995) offers a meaning centered perspective: "Reading and writing, like listening and speaking, are important language experiences that help us create meaning in our lives" (p. 38).

Holdaway (1979) notes that traditionally reading and writing have been viewed as discrete subjects as if they had no relation to speaking and listening: "It is inconceivable that children could learn to talk quite separately from learning to listen, yet in school we continue to contrive barriers between related aspects of language" (p.12). Holdaway additionally offers a perspective and probing considerations of literacy which help focus the discussion.

> Learning to read and to write ought to be one of the most joyful and successful of human undertakings. Notoriously, it is not so. By contrast, most developmental tasks such as learning to walk or to talk are learned almost universally with deep personal satisfaction. What explanation can we give for the continuing difficulties experienced by so many children in

> learning the tasks of literacy? Are reading and writing intrinsically more difficult even than learning to talk? Are they artificial and unnatural in relationship to other developmental tasks? Are the methods of teaching inefficient even after so many generations of experience and research? Is the school environment unsuited in identifiable ways to the literacy undertaking? (p. 11)

Nearly 20 years later, Holdaway's thoughtful questions remain intriguing.

One component of learning may be desire. Trelease (1985) addresses this issue when questioning why some children who can read, choose not to. We must help children learn to read, but also we must support them in wanting to read: "There is the key: desire. It is the prime mover, the magic ingredient....There is no success story written today ... in which desire does not play the leading role" (p. 6). Bettelheim and Zelan (1982) emphasize that a child "should not be exposed to books and teaching methods that fail to arouse his interest in and love of reading, and so prevent him from recognizing the great merit of becoming literate" (p. 12). Miller (1963) believes in the "...importance of motivational and attitudinal factors" related to the reading process, and Guthrie and Greaney (1991) find that when children have an early experience with books they "tend to have increased interest in learning to read and begin to read early" (p. 84). Bruner (1970) theorizes: "One study after another shows that for a child to learn, he must go it on his own, operate on his own activation. It is this activation that must be supported" (p.115), and Calkins (1994) summarizes:

> The important thing for us, as parents and as teachers, to remember is that our children need to discover their own interests and passions. We cannot do this for them. Our role is to watch for the glimmers of a project and then get behind those glimmers. (p. 508)

Typically, parents naturally watch for the glimmers as their youngster learns to walk, and with enthusiasm and appreciation, support their efforts. Have you ever heard a parent say to the unsteady traveler, "No, don't walk that way"? And for the toddler, repeated falls do not seem to interfere with the goal.

Similarly, as children learn to talk, they are encouraged by supportive family members and friends; a "dada" is not corrected, rather it is praised! Perkins (1995) agrees: " No one finds it necessary to correct babies and toddlers as they approximate language, and they tend to do just fine as they refine their

language and gain control over language usage by listening and talking" (p. 39). The process of learning to speak is ripe with error as children create hypotheses about how language operates (Clay, 1972; Sulzby, 1991). Clay (1991) notes: "It does not proceed by accurate performance with the use of correct grammar. This is important because how would the brain construct self-monitoring and self-correction processes if it never made an imperfect response" (p. 40). Yet, as a child learns to read and write, correction by adults is common: "No, that's not the right word." This practice may have been influenced by the traditional method of breaking components of the reading process into discrete, isolated parts which were taught skill by skill (code emphasis) contrasted with the less common holistic or meaning emphasis approach.

Walsh, Price and Gillingham (1988, p. 109) describe the dichotomy of teaching methods as *bottom-up* and *top-down*. The bottom-up approach is local, low-level, code-driven (such as decoding), while the top-down approach is general, high-level and meaning-driven (such as testing hypotheses, inventing strategies, and summarizing). Although historically this two-way thinking about how beginners use words has prevailed (Chall, 1977; Chall, 1983; Ehri, 1991). Morrow (1983) notes that "... reading programs are so skilled oriented" (p. 227). Also, although Taylor (1983) believes "a skills approach to literacy runs counter to the natural development of reading and writing as complex cultural activities" (p. 90), she (1989) stresses that the methods of instruction dominating education dictate that youngsters are taught in a linear, orderly, hierarchical sequence of tasks and that how a child "measures up to this 'theory of instruction' becomes the benchmark of his or her early reading development" (p. 186). Skill development or the code-emphasis approach can have an affective or motivational consequence as Bettelheim and Zelan (1982) analogize:

> Mastering a technical skill such as decoding might be likened to the ability to open a door: whether one will actually open the door depends on what one believes to lie behind it. When one has received the impression that behind the door are more or less the same disagreeable things one experienced while gaining the skill to open it, there is no motivation to go on. (p. 12-13)

Moll (1990) agrees: "By focusing on isolated skills and subskills, the essence of reading and writing ... as a 'whole activity' evaporates, to use Vygotsky's

metaphor" (p. 8). Goodman and Goodman (1990) refer to Vygotsky as well: "... his belief that written language develops, as speech does, in the context of its use [indicating] holistic inclinations ... is the essence of whole language" (p. 223).

Spivey (1989) believes that "reading is a constructive process of meaning-making [and] it must have some parallels with composing, which also involves actively constructing a mental representation" (p. 11). Clay (1975) supports the meaning-emphasis approach with the notion that the "larger the chunks of printed language the child can work with, the quicker he learns, and the richer his cross-referencing system of cues will be" (p. 1).

The focus of recent research on reading acquisition does reflect increased attention on " ... what happens inside the child's mind" [rather than on what the teacher should or shouldn't do] ....when we know what and how the child learns we can better facilitate the passage to literacy" (Juel, 1991, p. 761). What then are some of the components of emergent literacy? What kind of things happen inside the child's mind? What do we know about how the child learns? As an example of current thinking, Gillet and Temple (1990, pp. 22-71) breakdown the discussion into <u>functions</u> and <u>forms</u> of print (for other examples, see Clay, 1972; Morris, 1981; Mason, 1984; Dyson, 1985; Goodman, 1986; Feitelson, 1988; Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Adams, 1990; Goodman, 1990; Ehri, 1991; Juel, 1991; Taylor, Short, Shearer & Frye, 1995; Willis, 1995). Regarding function, Gillet and Temple believe that during literacy development a child gains:

- sensitivity *to the language of written text* (often called decontextualized or disembedded language) That is, text is "a sort of frozen discourse that must come out just so every time the text is read" (p. 25),
- a perception that written language represents words and *all words are real,*
- the ability to make the *speech to print match* or the concept of word which enables a child to track properly,
- the ability to separate the sounds in words or *phonemic segmentation* , and
- children's reading of a story or *storybook reading*, which may progress from pointing at pictures and naming them, to forming stories from text (not print), to using a reading voice to tell the story from text, to refusing to tell the story because understanding comes that the print is the source of the spoken text. Finally, children are able to match spoken words with written ones.

Regarding form, Gillet and Temple (1990) believe that during literacy development a child gains:

- understanding of the *graphic principles* of print, that is, print has a linear orientation (linearity), the alphabet can be arranged in various orders (generativity), and letters can be written in different ways (flexibility),
- discovery of the *alphabetic principle*, that is, writing represents words, which may move from concrete understanding (kittens has more characters than cat because there are more kittens) to syllabic (a character to match each syllable),
- understanding of separate sounds in words, reflective of *invented spelling* or *exploring orthographic concepts*, that is, once children know some letter names and can begin to segment phonemes into spoken words, they "begin to use letters to spell words by their individual sounds" (p. 39), and
- understanding of *concepts about print*, that is, concepts about the layout of books and pages of print and the terms we use to teach reading (such as front, back, first, last, word, and letter).

Gillet and Temple summarize with a description of the phenomenal accomplishment of learning to read.

> Children reach a point when they can read their way through a line of text, then several lines of text, by reading the words. Their reading is halting at first, and they need plenty of encouragement and occasional help. Nonetheless, this word-based, relatively independent reading is a considerable achievement. ... It represents the culmination of emergent literacy, the coming together of the two strands: understanding the nature and functions of written language and the forms of print. (pp. 47-48)

It is clear that literacy development is a complex undertaking, constructed by individuals as they interact and learn from each other. It should be encouraged within a supportive, positive, respectful environment. In keeping with this study, children in my classroom will be offered a meaning-emphasis approach to literacy development and parents will be encouraged to offer a similar environment at home.

Summary

An attempt has been made to relate theory, research and literature to the study of literacy development as it concerns a child-parent-teacher partnership. Constructivist theory and ecological theory of human development have been described and related to the study. Three relationships (child-parent, child-teacher, and parent-teacher) and their influence with literacy development have been reviewed. Finally, the topic of young children's literacy development has been discussed.

Some of the major guiding ideas out of this literature for the study are:

1. Learners (children, parents, and teachers alike) construct their own knowledge in different ways depending on their understandings, experiences, perceptions, and interpretations. Each partnership which emerges during this study is unique and diverse, and each participant constructs knowledge about how the partnership is impeded or promoted.

2. An interactive, interdependent, and dynamic relationship exists between the child, the parent, and the teacher as they actively participate in the partnership. As a child enters first grade, the child, the parent, and the teacher accommodate to the change in their lives; an ecological transition occurs.
With the understanding that the parent is a child's first and foremost teacher and that literacy permeates family culture, the context and culture of each participating family is respectfully appreciated.

3. A democratic, equitable classroom environment promotes positive child-teacher relationships and student self-concept. Rather than having education "done" to students, they are empowered to make decisions about their learning. What students bring to school is where learning should begin.

4. The parent-teacher relationship has potential to become a powerful force in the literacy development of young people. Teachers may encourage manifestation of this potential by attempting to construct equitable relations with parents whereby parent and teacher can learn from each other.

5. Beginning at birth, literacy development is a complex phenomenon which is continually constructed and is generally driven by attempts to ascribe

meaning or purpose to one's environment. A meaning-emphasis approach to literacy development within the classroom and the home is encouraged.

CHAPTER III

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Introduction

This chapter positions Sally in the study as teacher, partnership participant and researcher. Three avenues of research related to the study are discussed: the "self" as meaningful research, educative research, and case study research. A time frame for the study is presented. A description of how families were invited into the study, approval for research, various levels of participation and data collection, the setting, and participants is offered. An overview of data analysis, specifically grounded theory methodology, is described. Finally a summary of data sources and analysis, and an analytical framework completes the chapter.

To review, the purpose of this study was to describe what happens when parents and children are invited to participate in a child-parent-teacher partnership which mutually supports the child's literacy development during the transition into first grade.

Sally: Teacher, Partnership Participant, and Researcher

During the month of August, 1994, I returned to the first grade classroom following two years of intense graduate studies. Resuming the role of teacher emerged naturally; I had taught first grade for 11 years. As expected, I found myself enjoying children, facing daily challenges, experiencing physical exhaustion, sharing laughter, enduring stress and frustration, consulting with parents, colleagues, and administrators, and being haunted with concern about various children and their families.

As I returned to teaching I again encouraged parents to work with their child at home in an effort to enhance their child's literacy development. I attempted to listen carefully to parental concerns, questions, and suggestions regarding involvement with their child. It was my hope that, as with Rosie and Lon, effective partnerships would emerge.

However, a unique perspective to my teaching and the emerging partnerships accompanied the experience. In keeping with the purpose of this study, I formally invited parents to participate in a child-parent-teacher partnership which mutually supported their child's literacy development during the transition into first grade.

In an effort to increase understanding of parent involvement and of the conditions under which child-parent-teacher partnerships are promoted or impeded, we explored the dimensions of our partnership together. This research design placed me in the middle of the study; simultaneously I was teacher, partnership participant, and researcher. The premise that the "self" can contribute to meaningful research is supported and encouraged; a description of this methodology may be helpful.

The "Self" as Meaningful Research

Life offers us all a perspective through our eyes only. God's gift of life is, by its very nature, unique. Each life is a "one of a kind". I am myself. My "self" is experiencing life. This experience of life is my own.

What does the self actually "know"? Do I have some "knowledge" which may be meaningful or helpful to others and vice versa? Is it possible to share knowledge which is unique to an individual? How? How is the use of self important or valuable to social science research?

Knowledge is defined as "1. acquaintance with facts, truths, or principles, as from study or investigation" (Webster, 1989, p. 793). Some knowledge seems simplistic; we "know" water is necessary for life, we live on a planet named Earth, and the earth spins on an axis in an easterly direction. The list is endless. Other knowledge seems more difficult to identify, label, or categorize. Does knowledge of the definition of faith ("confidence or trust in a person or thing" Webster, 1989, p. 511) enrich my life? Rather, I consider what faith means to me. I consider moments when faith has been important to me, stories about faith in my life. Perhaps this personal knowledge about faith, relayed through story, can have meaning for another and can enrich their life.

Listening to or reading others' stories provides a rich environment for learning. The popularity of support groups in our country is a testimony to the

power of story as meaningful to personal growth and development. To feel that I am not alone with a difficulty is a comfort. I witness others who have suffered and survived. I learn from others that there may be productive ways of coping. Likewise, the dreams, aspirations, and accomplishments of others can serve as beacons of direction, of possibility. I can use others as examples of what is possible in my life.

Cooper (1991) describes the effects of chronicling personal stories, "...stories are both instructive and transforming in the telling and the listening. These stories, these myriad voices, then serve to instruct and transform society, to add to the collective voice we call culture" (p. 111). Krieger (1991) recognizes that the self has need for expression and that the repercussions of internal growth and development can reach to others.

> One consequence of being more specific about the self is that, in the end, one becomes more general. One person's idiosyncratic experience speaks to the experience of another. People find likeness despite difference, and they find it all the more when more is said about the self. (p. 48)

Two experiences relate the meaningful connection between specific use of self and general application to others. As I sat through a Sunday morning sermon, my attention was immediately drawn to a personal story used to exemplify a message. I noticed that my teenage son seemed to focus attention during that time as well. It was the part of the sermon that we discussed on the drive home. Not only did we find the personal story interesting, it held up another's experience for us to relate to our own lives. By being specific, there was a generalizing effort over the listeners.

My husband and I watched a television documentary about mercy killing which alternately moved from personal story to panel discussion. The Netherlands is the only country in the world where doctors probably will not be prosecuted for assisting in their patient's death. Throughout the documentary, our attention was intensely focused during the personal stories of doctors and patients from the Netherlands. Our attention wavered, however, during the panel discussion. Debate seemed to move too rapidly to internalize. Following the film, our discussion centered on the personal stories. Again, through the specific story of self, we were able to relate and generalize to our own lives.

Social science researchers study our personal and social lives and traditionally the use of self has been ignored as a valuable resource of knowledge. On the contrary, Krieger (1991) believes that, instead of viewing "...the self of the social scientific observer as a contaminant" which results in social scientists learning to "become invisible authors" (p. 1), the inner, individual view is important and should be developed in social science research. It is through others' sharing of personal experience and viewpoint that my experience and viewpoint may be enhanced. Likewise, it is through my sharing of personal experience and viewpoint that others' experience and viewpoint may be enhanced.

The key to the use of self in social science research is that it offers a personal perspective from which the recipient can take "useful" parts of the story. Cherryholmes (1993) states:

> Research findings tell stories .... and social science and educational research is useful ... in interpreting other people to us, and thus enlarging and deepening our sense of community. They are more or less useful in helping us to understand our social world as we navigate our way through it. (p. 2)

Grumet (1991) asks a number of questions which may seem humorous but which demonstrate the relationship of others' stories to personal lives.

> How many of you would like to get your own story back from a certain person? Do you remember how her eyes were glazed, how she didn't really listen, only waited for you to finish so her own turn to tell would come? Do you remember how she asked the wrong questions, appropriating only those parts of the story that she could use, ignoring the part that really mattered to you? ... And those are our friends, our confidantes. (p. 69)

It is natural to take from another's story that which is personally useful or meaningful.

Use of the specific story of self is a thoughtful approach to social science research, relaxed and open in anticipation toward understanding, rather than toward some "packaged" knowledge. There is no "one right way" to use self in research; rather it is an attitude toward study which respects the social scientist's self as a valuable resource. This attitude is enhanced and expanded in the

methodology of educative research.

Educative Research

According to Gitlin, Bringhurst, Burns, Cooley, Myers, Price, Russell and Tiess (1992) educative research differs from common notions of research.

> We are using the term educative to refer to a process that, in the ideal, brings individuals together in such a fashion that all participants have a say in setting the agenda or topic and all have the potential to benefit and learn from the experience. When looked at from this point of view, it is clear that most research is anything but educative. (p. 7)

Rarely do participants have a say in setting the agenda or learning from a research project; generally they maintain a silent role (Gitlin et al., 1992). For example, a common research methodology, quantitative, has been described by Snyder (1992) as "...structured, predetermined, formal, and specific" (p. 45). Typically hypothesis testing is characteristic of quantitative research (Gilgun, 1992) and Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh (1985) describe the hypothesis as a method of scientific inquiry which "... has united experience and reason to produce a powerful tool for seeking truth ... precisely defined as a tentative proposition suggested as a solution to a problem or as an explanation of some phenomenon" (p. 75). In a structured, predetermined, formal and specific manner, a research hypothesis is generated, a proposition which the researcher hopes to verify. A framework is created; should analysis of collected data fall within the framework, the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypotheses fails to be rejected (never "proved"). Participants with this type of methodology are subject to the predetermined research design of the project.

Rather than seeking truth, the aim of qualitative research is seeking meaning (Gilgun, 1992; Handel, 1992; Snyder, 1992), or as Strauss and Corbin (1990) state: "Qualitative methods can be used to uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is yet known" (p. 19). The focus of qualitative research is to develop meaning and understanding, to look beyond the predetermined in an effort to develop concepts or theory. By conducting qualitative research in the classroom, Pytlik (1997) holds that "classroom teachers are uniquely positioned to contribute substantially to the body of

research related to their field of expertise" (p. 20).

The purpose of this study was closely aligned with the aims of qualitative research, to develop meaning and understanding of what happens when parents and children are invited to participate in a child-parent-teacher partnership which mutually supports a child's literacy development during transition into first grade. However, Gitlin et al. (1992) note that traditionally the qualitative researcher

> is urged to influence the research context as little as possible. ... Instead, the researcher forms the questions, and analyzes the data without considering the subjects' impressions, beliefs, and understandings. The researcher is still the expert, still the producer of knowledge and the subject is still silenced. ... Because Educative Research tries to establish a less alienating relationship between researcher and 'subject' as well as one that is likely to foster school change, those who are normally silenced and removed from knowledge production, namely teachers, parents, and students, are invited to participate in the research process. (pp. 19-20)

Eight interested and willing families participated in this research project. In keeping with the process of educative research, they were empowered to make decisions and modifications about their involvement as the study progressed. Their impressions, beliefs, and understandings during their participation were acknowledged, appreciated, and respected. Together we constructed learning and knowledge about our ecological relationship. The stories of our relationships are related through the methodology of case study.

Case Study Research

"The case-study method was introduced at Harvard Law School by its first dean ... in 1870" (White, 1992. p. 98). Well over one hundred years later, Jarrett (1992) holds that case studies which "rely upon qualitative methods are desirable when researchers seek firsthand knowledge of real-life situations and processes within naturalistic settings" (p. 176). Merriam (1988) supports qualitative case study as an excellent avenue for research in the educational setting, and describes it as,

> ... an ideal design for understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomena ... research focused on discovery, insights and

> understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contribution to the knowledge base and practice of education. (pp. 2-3)

Cronbach (1975) notes, "An observer collecting data in one particular situation is in a position to appraise a practice ... in that setting, observing effects in context (p. 124), and Yin (1989) characterizes case study as providing "an opportunity to take an in-depth look at an experience and the thinking and perceptions within it" (p. 57).

Especially significant to this study was the premise that participants were empowered to make decisions and choices regarding their involvement, or as Gitlin et at. (1992) support, participants had a say. When research participants are empowered, the various avenues and detours the study may take are unknown. This should not be construed as a weakness of the research; rather, as Ragin (1992) notes, "The less sure that researchers are of their answers, the better their research may be" (p. 6).

As later described in this chapter (Levels of Participation and Data Collection), three levels of involvement were offered to families interested in participating with the study. Because participants' level of involvement varied, the amount of data collected from families varied; therefore, case study descriptions vary according to available data.

Time Frame

Transition is defined as "a passing or passage from one condition, action, or place, to another; change" (Simpson & Weiner, 1989, p. 406). As previously discussed, "an ecological transition occurs whenever a person's position in the ecological environment is altered as the result of a change in role, setting, or both" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26). As a child enters first grade, the child, the parent, and the teacher accommodate to the change in their lives. Kutner (1993) describes this crucial transition for the child.

> We imbue the first grade with special significance in a child's education. It is the first year of "real" school, a far cry from kindergarten. Like high school or college entry, the transition represents a more profound shift than one between grades. (p. E1)

Typically, during the early months of first grade, the child begins conventional reading and writing, and to reiterate Juel's (1991) comment: "We know surprisingly little about the transition from what has been termed *emergent literacy* to beginning reading" (p. 759). There is a need to increase knowledge about the transition from emergent literacy to beginning reading and writing during the early months of first grade and about how this transition may be supported by a child- parent- teacher partnership.

For purposes of this study, the transition period included the first fifteen weeks of the first grade experience, a time period which may be especially ripe with change for the child; the child assumes a new role as a first grader, attends school in a new setting, meets new classmates, and generally begins the magic of learning to "read and write conventionally" (Sulzby & Teale, 1991, p. 728). Changes in understanding, expectation, and behavior for child, parent, and teacher relative to literacy development can be rapid and complex: "I knew Rosie would learn to read this year, but I didn't know it would be like this!"

In an effort to understand how partnership participants related to the child's literacy development as the first grade experience began, and how or if their relationship to literacy development changed during the fifteen weeks, the transition period was separated into three phases: initial (about the first month of school), middle (about the second month of school), and final (about the third month of school). Based on the 1994-95 school calendar, the following dates encompassed each phase of study:

Initial Phase	August 28 - October 8	42 days	(6 weeks)
Middle Phase	October 9 - November 5	28 days	(4 weeks)
Final Phase	November 6 - December 2	35 days	(5 weeks)

Three different phases of study, or three different "looks", helped facilitate understanding of the possibly emerging child-parent-teacher partnerships.

It should be noted, however, that contact with the children and their families naturally occurred during the remaining months of first grade. Although formal study participation concluded in early December, additional reading and writing samples were collected, student observations and assessments were made, and formal and informal child-parent-teacher correspondences continued throughout the school year.

Invitation

An invitational letter was sent to the 18 children and their families assigned to my first grade class (Appendix A). This letter fulfilled the following objectives:

- briefly introduced myself to the family,
- presented the concept of parent involvement as a feature of my teaching,
- noted the call for parent involvement by many educators, family researchers, politicians, and others,
- stated my interest in learning about child-parent-teacher partnerships from children and parents,
- personalized the concept of partnership by indicating interest in "how the idea of partnership works for you in your family",
- proposed the notion that we (child-parent-teacher) may learn from each other about how families and teachers can work together,
- casually invited children and parents to visit with me about partnership ("Perhaps you and your child would be interested and willing...."), and
- provided an avenue for child and parent response.

Approval for Research

Approval for the study was secured from the Virginia Tech Associate Provost for Research (Appendix B), and the assistant superintendent. In order to maintain anonymity of the school and school district, the second approval is not included in the appendix.

Levels of Participation and Data Collection

Due to the possible variability of interest and willingness to participate in the study, three levels of participation (Level A - low involvement; Level B - medium involvement, and Level C - high involvement) were offered to the eight (42%) families who responded to the invitational letter (Appendix A). This offer

was made through a follow-up letter (Appendix C).

During the study, three families participated at Level A, four families at Level B, and one family at Level C.

Level A Participation and Data Collection

Level A participation (Appendix D) involved minimal time and effort by the three families. Participants were encouraged to complete three family surveys, one during each phase of the study, (Appendixes G, H and I). Surveys were designed to encourage a sharing of participant's experiences with and understanding of literacy, their expectations of first grade literacy development, what they would like to see happen with literacy development in first grade, their involvement with their child's literacy at home, changes regarding aspects of literacy development which occurred during the transition period, and parent understanding of things which helped promote a child-parent-teacher partnership. The family surveys are described in more detail in Summary of Data Sources and Analysis in this chapter.

Level B Participation and Data Collection

Level B participation (Appendix E) involved increased time and effort by the four families. In addition to encouraging the parent and child to complete the three family surveys, parents were encouraged to keep a journal of their child's literacy development during the first three months of first grade. The journal could contain reading and writing samples, observations, involvements and evaluations of the literacy process, and other relevant information. The child was also encouraged to keep a personal journal, if they desired. Family members could select parts (or all) of the journals to share with me.

Level C Participation and Data Collection

Level C participation (Appendix F) involved the most amount of time for the one family. In addition to encouraging them to complete the three family surveys and maintain journals, they were encouraged to participate in three unstructured interviews (one during each phase of the study), and audio tape three at home "work sessions" with their child (again, one during each phase of the study).

The Setting: Central Elementary - A New School Community

It was my good fortune to conduct research within the Central Elementary School community, an evolving, developing community which opened its doors to students the same fall my research took place. Although four area elementary schools had been sufficient for over a decade, following recognition and acceptance of the need for an additional school by county residents and representatives, the new school was built.

Coinciding with the actual construction, an accompanying array of educational decisions and adjustments took place: attendance lines were reorganized, faculty and staff were selected from within the educational community, the monumental task of material and supply selection began, and, amid conflict and controversy, an acceptable name for the school was approved.

A unique characteristic of the project was the partnership created between the school and the community; the community would establish and maintain the grounds, and the school would be available for community use after school hours and on weekends. It is not unusual to find the parking lot littered with vehicles in the late afternoons, evenings, and on weekends, as community members frequented the place, especially the gymnasium, lunchroom, and art room for community recreation and meeting.

During a pre-school workshop, as our newly formed faculty met and began working together, we generally and quite easily agreed that the term "Community" would serve as an umbrella for our first year's focus and effort. However, students, parents, teachers, and staff from four different schools united under one roof does not necessarily constitute community. Rather, community may be defined as "a social group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality,

share government, *and* [italics added] have a common cultural and historical heritage" (Webster, 1989, p. 298).

It could be argued that, in a sense, the administrator, students, parents, faculty and staff entering the new school did share "a common cultural and historical heritage" simply by being members of the broader community. However, characteristics unique to a school can usually be identified; perhaps a school is "known" for its dedicated faculty, attractive, well-maintained facility and grounds, personable principal, high academic standards, or safety record; or perhaps, its reputation is more negative in perception.

As a new school opens its doors to students, its unique characteristics may be unformed, unknown or unidentified. Our initial goal was to focus on the importance of developing a sense of community; we would strive to help students, parents, surrounding businesses and others grow in a sense of becoming members of the Central community. Developing a sense of community may have set the stage for development of our unique characteristics; indeed, the school - community partnership previously described may have laid some foundation toward this goal. How was this focus addressed?

Initially, developing a sense of community seemed to take secondary focus to the more pressing, obvious, and seemingly never-ending needs and challenges which faced us as the new year began. As the opening of the school year neared, overtime consumed nearly all members of the faculty, staff, and construction crew. Attendance to last minute details, including adjusting clocks, mounting pencil sharpeners, hanging mini blinds, locating supplies and materials, and anticipating the arrival of student chairs (which did arrive on time!), seemed to dominate the thoughts and actions of everyone. Although I had started school 21 times before, the phrase "getting ready" took on new meaning for me. Typically the machinery ("any system by which action is maintained" Webster, p. 859) of a school is in motion before the students arrive; that is, generally, the activities requiring attention from faculty and staff are clearly defined, and the process for completing those activities is well established. A school may have, in a sense, a culture and heritage, a "way we do things here."

During our first year, the Central administration, faculty and staff strove to determine just how *do* we want to do things here? We were faced with a continuous stream of opportunities for decision making, for example: What should

our Open House entail? Our Dedication Ceremony? What opportunities do we want to offer during Reading Month? How do we celebrate International Day? How and how often should students be involved in PTA presentations? How do we involve parents and other members of the community? What climate do we want in our cafeteria, and how do we attempt to achieve that?

Each decision seemed to further the development of our Central community. It may be fair to conclude that the process of developing a common cultural and historical heritage began during our first year, and continues. We may be known in some ways: the outstanding facility and grounds have won architectural and beautification awards respectively, an Odyssey of the Mind team progressed to state competition, members of our Chess Club have returned home with trophies, and a few people have heard that "the Central faculty was very friendly, helpful, and easy to work with". The process of community development continues to evolve.

Participants

Participants of the study included one first grade classroom teacher (myself) and eight volunteer families enrolled during the 1994-95 school year. All families volunteered for participation following the Invitation to Participate Letter (Appendix A).

During preparation for the study, my principal mentioned that a large number of families from the class might indicate an interest in participation. Therefore, parameters were considered which could be established in the event that interest was overwhelming. For example, due to increased intensity of involvement, Level B would be limited to five families, and Level C limited to three families. If necessary, selection would be based on the following criteria: diversity of families (such as a mix of boys / girls or mothers who work outside / inside the home), apparent interest in the study, willingness to devote time to the study, willingness to allow me to enter the home for interview, willingness to conduct audio taping, and appreciation for the study's value. I would self select final participants, if necessary.

However, the number and type of participants at various levels of the study did not need to be limited or selected. Concern regarding an overload of

participants did not occur; families volunteered and participated at their level of interest which created a mix of involvement (Levels A - B - C with 3 - 4 - 1 families respectfully). A balance of gender also occurred: 4 girls and 4 boys. Mothers working inside and outside the home balanced as well: 4 mothers did not work outside the home, and 4 mothers did. It is interesting to note that all participation families consisted of two parents, none of whom had been divorced, and that all families' parents were college graduates; ten held bachelor degrees, three held masters degrees, and three held doctoral degrees.

It should be noted that pseudonyms have been used for all participants referenced in this document.

Additional Data Collection

In addition to the methods of data collection previously described (family surveys, family journals, unstructured interviews, and audio taping of at home work sessions) three additional forms of data collection occurred: (1) a researcher's folio related to each of the children and their family; (2) information from school records; and (3) formal and informal (written and verbal) correspondence between the partnership participants.

As supported by Gitlin et al (1992), participants in educative research should "...have a say in setting the agenda or topic and all have the potential to benefit and learn from the experience" (p. 7). Participants at all levels of involvement in this study were empowered to make decisions about their participation, including types and forms of data collection, time and location of that collection, and types of activities they engaged in with their child.

Data Analysis - Grounded Theory Methodology

An Analogous Perspective

A design of research which is consistent with the purpose of this study is grounded theory methodology. Understanding of this methodology may be enhanced through an analogy of ground and plant growth to data and grounded theory.

As a midwesterner, I grew accustomed to the rich, black soil which supported the growth of corn, wheat, soy beans, peas, alfalfa, and sunflowers. Taking the color of the earth for granted was an understatement. The assumption was not only that the earth *was* that color, but that black soil or ground was necessary for fruitful growth.

What a surprise to see red soil in Georgia sprouting abundant rhododendron, dogwood, and azalea during a spring visit. A small jar of red earth accompanied me home; a visual reminder that, indeed, the ground is intensely different in color yet still supports a plethora of lush growth. A sense of amazement still surfaces each time I dig to plant spring flowers and vegetables in the Blue Ridge Mountains where the soil is reddish-brown.

Ground is defined initially as a noun ("1. the solid surface of the earth; firm and dry land; 2. earth or soil" Webster, 1989, p. 624) and later as a verb ("35. to place on a foundation; found, fix firmly, settle or establish; 36. to instruct in elements or first principles"). Matocha's (1992) use of the verb is noted when grounded theory development is described as a process of generating concepts "grounded in data" (p. 67).

The analogy of ground and plant growth to data and grounded theory clarifies: growth produced from the earth is dependent on the type of soil which supports that growth. In other words, ground or soil support growth, and the type of growth is dependent on the type of ground. Likewise, during the process of grounded theory development, data support theory and the type of theory is dependent on the type of data. Gilgun (1992) supports this analogy: "Grounded theory by definition is rooted in data..." (p. 30).

The analogy continues when comparing climate and context. Environment or climate surrounding plant growth cannot be overlooked. Varying degrees and amounts of sunlight, water, and temperature can have a profound effect on the plant. Likewise, the process of grounded theory development occurs within an environment, a context. To continue Gilgun's definition: "Grounded theory by definition is rooted in data, which in turn is rooted in time and place" (p. 30). The empirical situation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) or the "context of everyday life" (Snyder, 1992, p. 61) must be a consideration of grounded theory development.

Thus, grounded theory methodology is a process of developing theory from data with consideration of context. The researcher is open and receptive to the

data and context (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Gilgun, 1992; Matocha, 1992; Murphy, 1992). Strauss and Corbin (1990) summarize the grounded theory approach: "One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge" (p. 23).

Personal Reflection

The task of data analysis appeared daunting for some time. Each of the eight families' materials (including surveys, researcher's folio, correspondence, school record information, samples of writing using a computer program, school journals, and for families participating at Levels B or C, family journals and interview and work session transcriptions), were organized into individual three ring notebooks, many of which bulged with data and continued to grow beyond the designated study period. Additional reading and writing samples, student assessments, and formal and informal child-parent-teacher correspondences were added throughout the school year.

A ninth notebook housed general information from the study period and beyond, including the school year calendar, class grades, classroom management data, attendance information and copies of general letters sent to all parents. Finally, a tenth notebook housed copies of the 21 family surveys; seven families completed each of the three surveys. Although one family returned no surveys, it was involved at Level C participation which offered data collection via family interviews and work sessions. The survey notebook was organized by phase (all surveys from phase one, two and three), and by family (all three surveys from one family together) in order to facilitate an overview of group and family response.

During organization of data and transcription of interviews and work sessions, concern regarding how all this information could be analyzed and synthesized into something meaningful evolved. Becker (1992) characterizes the dilemma: "The problems associated with doing and understanding case studies involve, apparently necessarily, the question of explanation or description, which might be translated as the problem of what we can say about what we've found out in our research" (p. 205). Strauss and Corbin (1990) accurately describe my developing apprehension, anxiety, and intimidation.

... there comes a time when the data must be analyzed. Often researchers

> are perplexed by this necessary task. They are dismayed not only by the ... mountains of data ... now confronting them, but are often troubled by the following questions. How can I make sense out of all of this material? How can I have a theoretical interpretation while still grounding it in the empirical reality reflected by my materials? How can I make sure that my data and interpretations are valid and reliable? How do I break through the inevitable biases, prejudices, and stereotypical perspectives that I bring with me to the analytic situation? How do I pull all of my analysis together to create a concise theoretical formulation of the area under study? (p. 7)

After two years of very hard graduate work, and nearly a third year of challenging teaching and researching, I seemed to find myself at the foot of a looming obstacle. Where and how do I begin?

About this time, my family and I decided to move. In much the same way a mother bird hovers over and protects her babies, I kept a vigilant watch over my materials, which were transported like the crown jewels. After living in close quarters for six years, we were thrilled with our new accomodations, and I enjoyed spending some time away from my studies, unpacking items which had been in storage for many years and decorating our new home.

Our pleasure was short lived, however. My family was confronted with an unfortunate circumstance; my mother was diagnosed with a terminal cancer. With support from my elementary principal and doctoral advisor, I was able to bring my relationship with my mother to the forefront. I arranged just over a year of my life to spend as much time with her as possible, time which has afforded me dear and precious memories, and comfort and solace in my grief.

Eventually, I was able to return to my study. Again, where and how to begin? In an effort to develop continuity and momentum, I revisited the introductory work, review of the literature, and design of the study, updating and editing as I moved along. Nearing the inevitable shelf of notebooks, I gravitated to the surveys. Housed within were mini scenarios of seven of the eight families, scenarios which could refresh my memories. It was with relief that I actually began reading and organizing research notes on each family and each phase of the study.

Becoming "intimately familiar" with the data began to consume my time. Gradually I moved from the survey notebook to individual family notebooks,

reading and rereading, and taking research notes. One evening, while working with one family's notebook, the thought occurred to me: I "survived" my experience with this mother and child. Although the mother indicated an interest in study involvement at Level A participation (complete three surveys), our relationship seemed to naturally focus more on her child's behavior than on his literacy development. He cried almost daily at school, frequently many times.

Not only did the hoped for and anticipated partnership not develop, but I found the relationship with both the mother and child to be quite stressful. It was with a sense of relief that they "left my room" and "left my life" at the conclusion of the school year; since that closure, although we have seen each other occasionally and may greet in passing, at present I would describe my relationship with them as mildly amiable. Once in a while a child or parent will affect me in this way; fortunately it is a rare occasion.

During most of my 24 years in the profession, I believed, in my role as teacher, I was totally or singularly responsible for "making relationships work". It naturally followed that a consequence for a failed teaching or learning relationship was quilt; perhaps if I had been more compassionate, understanding, forgiving, or tolerant, if I had listened better, or been more creative, the outcome might have been more positive. Surely there was something I could have done to remedy the situation!

On this evening, however, I felt little guilt for consideration of these two relationships as ones I did not enjoy. I believe I have grown in understanding that I am not solely responsible for the success or failure of a relationship related to the teaching - learning environment. One component of building a relationship is interaction (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Fisher & Brown, 1988; Duck, 1994); responsibility for relationship building involves its participants. In this family, the child-teacher and parent-teacher relationships struggled, and no partnership emerged.

Consideration of the family in this way lead me to a almost instantaneous conceptualization of the child-parent-teacher relationships with the remaining seven families. I glanced at each child's name labeled on the outside edge of the family notebooks and made a rapid, comparative assessment; in a sense, I began moving from descriptive analysis to concept development, "... placing interpretations on the data" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 29). My thoughts

ricocheted. A resounding "yes" to three cases; we developed partnerships and friendships. How did the other four compare with those? Three were less friendly, but effective.

And what about that one? The daughter and I seemed to have a positive relationship, and her literacy skills blossomed throughout the year. But due to circumstances unrelated to literacy development, the personal relationship between her mother and me became strained. What is the interpretation and conceptualization of this mix? Where does it fit?

Recalling two of the more unsavory relationships, the child and mother in one case and the mother in the second, helped me revisit our time together. Some of my thoughts from over two years past were clear in my mind, for example: "This part of our relationship isn't really related to the study; I can ignore it." or "This is only one negative response on a survey. Compared to the multitude of responses, it almost will be lost. Don't worry." It was difficult for me to assimilate anything not positively related to the anticipated developing partnerships.

Perhaps the time away from the study during my mother's illness influenced my present perspective. Analysis during the spring and summer of 1995, two years past but consistent with the research, might have offered a different focus. Grounded theory methodology, a process of developing theory from data with consideration of context, may include the researcher's context as well.

For over a year and a half, most of my life centered on my mother and her illness. I read voraciously about dying and death, and lived the experience with my husband, son, father, sister, brothers, aunt, uncle, hospice nurses, doctors, clergy, and friends. I believe this was a transforming experience for me; I am more relaxed and at peace with my life.

This experience may have helped bring me to the place where I am better able to examine the more unpalatable components of the study. I have grown in understanding and acceptance of life's difficulties, and am less fearful of "taking a look" at them; life's difficulties may provide opportunities for personal growth. Now it is easier for me to address the more unsavory, yet authentic and honest, aspects of the research.

A Practical Application

The purpose of this study was to describe what happens when parents are invited to participate in a child-parent-teacher partnership which mutually supports their child's literacy development during transition into first grade. The key phrase "describe what happens" guides the methodology of data analysis toward grounded theory. I began with an area of study, and allowed what was relevant to emerge; by describing what happened, theory blossomed from data.

While I presented a framework as an organizer for initial entry into the field (Figure I), this was not considered a fixed entity. I expected to glean new features and identify new processes and relationships that warranted recognition and exploration. As a point of departure, data analysis focused on the family surveys where a brief scenario of the child-parent-teacher relationship was offered.

During survey analysis, various categories emerged (Appendix J), for example: seven parents indicated they were involved with reading to their child or having their child read to them; five indicated their understanding of literacy development had changed during the study period; and five indicated their expectations regarding literacy development had changed. Although this information was interesting, it left me thinking, "So what? How do I proceed? Should I attempt to incorporate information from individual families into these categories, and if so, how?"

An additional dilemma surfaced; parents completed the surveys with varying degrees of response. Because one parent wrote at length about the family's involvement with literacy and cited numerous examples, should that information "weigh more" than the information from a family member who offered concise, simple responses and few, if any, examples?

At this point, I was wisely advised to delve thoughtfully and thoroughly into the data housed in the individual notebooks. Careful reading, rereading and taking research notes began to help focus categories for individual families. Three child-parent-teacher partnerships developed which were especially positive and friendly. Three additional partnerships were very productive. One mother-teacher relationship was strained, yet a productive partnership was formed. Finally, one relationship did not develop into a child-parent-teacher

partnership.

During grounded theory development, analysis can move beyond description, where data are organized by theme, to concept and the use of conceptual labels (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Conceptual labels for the child-parent-teacher partnerships began to take root; beginning with "yes", "no", "yes and no", labels progressively became more or less prosaic, poetic or lengthy, yet enigmatic (for example, cherished, bonded, golden, rich, lovingly connected, productive, enjoyed, survived, lived, shared, educational, relationships which developed into partnerships, relationships which did not develop into partnerships).

Returning to my earlier analogy of grounded theory to plant growth eventually seemed to offer fitting terminology, and the categories Fruitful (describing the six productive partnerships), Paradoxical (describing the strained mother-teacher relationship yet productive child-parent-teacher partnership), and Barren (describing the child-parent-teacher relationship which did not develop into partnership) were selected. Strauss and Corbin (1990) support this position, "... most names come from - YOU! The name you choose is usually the one that seems most logically related to the data it represents, and should be graphic enough to remind you quickly of its referent" (p. 67).

Developing theory began to emerge from the concepts: every family was different, every child-parent-teacher relationship was different; the way parents were involved with their child was different; what seemed to work for the partnership in one family did not work in another. There was a uniqueness to each family and each child-parent-teacher relationship; analysis could (and perhaps, should) proceed with a telling of each story. This avenue was pursued and the next phase of analysis consisted of writing eight case studies. Becker (1992) supports this procedure: "A process or narrative analysis has a story to tell. ...the thing to be explained, as something that comes about through a series of steps" (p. 208).

Following this task, new questions arose, for example: What are the features or criteria for these cases? Do all cases have these features? Why or why not? Are data available but not included? Are data unavailable?

A features list or "Criteria for Cases" was written (Appendix K) which consisted of eight main categories; three of the categories included

subcategorizes. In conjunction with this task, an audit of each case was made. Refinement of the features list occurred during the audit as understandings or examples were described in the cases but were not included on the features list. In other words, the Criteria for Cases and the audit were mutually interdependent; there was a give and take of information between the two as analysis continued.

Characteristics of the child were described in the cases, for example, the child's literacy development assessment, their entry writing, their conduct toward the learning process, and changes in their literacy development during the study period and beyond. The family was described, including its structure, ethnicity, parent understanding of their child's literacy process and literacy development, parent expectations related to literacy development, opportunity, involvement and support with literacy at home, and changes in parent understanding, expectations, and involvement with literacy. Individualization of materials and strategies which seemed to support or promote partnership and literacy development were described.

Relationships related to literacy involvement were described, including the paired relationships of child-parent, child-teacher, parent-teacher, and child-child (how the child interacted with other children in the classroom). The triad partnership, where applicable, was described, including observations, interactions, and evaluations by participants. The relationship between the parent and teacher was frequently foregrounded in the cases; it is this relationship which may facilitate increased parent involvement with the child's literacy development. Description of this relationship highlighted such things as communication and negotiation strategies, evaluation of the relationship, and conditions which promoted or impeded partnership development.

The final phase of analysis, theory development, was as arduous as any thorough academic undertaking yet experienced. Frequently I could see the trees, but not the forest. Continual steps backward, attempting to understand the larger picture, eventually offered a thoughtful condensation. Throughout this journey, I recalled helping my mother make applesauce; after picking, cleaning, deworming, coring, chunking, and cooking the apples, we pushed and pressed them through the sieve. Following the addition of cinnamon and sugar, the taste treat was indescribably delicious.

The data have been pushed and pressed. May the taste seem palatable, dear reader!

Summary of Data Sources and Analysis

Data were gathered from numerous sources: family surveys, family journals, unstructured interviews, audio taping of family work sessions, researcher folios, school records, and correspondences. A description of each data source and methodology of analysis may be helpful.

Family Surveys

Participants at all levels of involvement were encouraged to complete three family surveys, each of which corresponded to the three phases of the study (Appendix G - Family Survey 1; Appendix H - Family Survey 2; Appendix I - Family Survey 3).

Family Survey 1 (Appendix G): Families were encouraged to share information about their understanding of literacy development, their expectations of literacy development in first grade, their desires for literacy development during the first grade experience, and their involvement with literacy at home.

Family Survey 2 (Appendix H): Families were encouraged to share information about any changes in their understanding of literacy development, changes of their expectations of literacy development during first grade, changes they would like to see happen with literacy development in first grade, and changes in their involvement with literacy at home since first grade began.

Family Survey 3 (Appendix I): Families were encouraged to share information about things which helped promote the child-parent-teacher partnership, changes they would make in the literacy development process of first grade thus far, and ways their understanding, expectations, and / or involvement with their child's literacy changed during the first three months of first grade.

Seven families returned all three surveys. During data analysis, surveys were read through holistically three times in an effort to identify concepts. Then, using a page numbering and lettering system, concepts were categorized and analyzed, comparisons of similarities and differences were made, questions about the phenomena were asked, and connections between categories were attempted in an effort to select a core category or categories.

A major difficulty arose: one parent might mention one concept one time, while another parent might offer a lengthy commentary on the same topic. Weighting of response seemed appropriate, and charts were constructed which indicated both the number of parents responding and the number of responses related to a concept. Using a point system, the "Top 17" core categories (Appendix J) were identified; this was based on the number of parents responding rather than on the type of description made (for example, concise vs rich in description).

This strategy seemed to offer an overall "picture" of the families, yet failed to describe our relationships or partnerships. For example, knowledge that five parents believed their understanding of literacy development changed during the study period, or that seven parents reported they were involved with books and reading with their child at home did not seem to offer understanding about the relationships.

The survey notebook was put aside. Time spend on it was not in vain; I had grown intensely familiar with the information within. A through and careful review of individual notebooks began, and the focus for analysis began to take shape. Understanding of our relationships and partnerships could be attempted through the telling of each family's story. Eight case studies were written, which incorporated information from the surveys and remaining data sources.

Family Journals

Each family who participated in Level B (four families) and C (one family) of the study were provided two spiral notebooks for journal writing (one each for the parents and the child). As stated previously, the journal could contain reading and writing samples, observations, involvements, evaluations of the literacy process, and other data which family members wished to record.

In an effort to further introduce and describe the process of journal writing to the families participating in Levels B and C, a letter (Appendix L) accompanied the two journals sent to each family. The letter and two journals were sent home in a large, clearly marked envelope to help ensure delivery. The notion of establishing a "dialogue journal", whereby the journal could travel to and from school with continuous communication between parent and teacher, was introduced in this letter. No family choose to participate in the dialogue form of journaling.

At the conclusion of the study period, a letter was sent home which informed the family that the research project was drawing to a close (Appendix M); it was time to return the journals to school. Appreciation for their efforts was expressed.

One family found it impossible to maintain the journal at all; "I humbly apologize for the lack of a journal.... I love to write and the thought of a journal is delicious. But I'm never quite realistic enough about the lifestyle we've chosen, how much demand there is on our resources, and how much it takes to get through."

Data analysis consisted of a three fold holistic reading of the journal entries, and the taking of research notes to develop concept and category.

Unstructured Interviews

The three interviews with the mother and child participating at Level C occurred in our first grade classroom; the mother volunteered in our school office, and found this location easily accommodated her schedule. The initial interview centered on topics similar to those stated in the first family survey; participants were encouraged to share information about their understanding of literacy development, their expectations of literacy development in first grade, their desires for literacy development during the first grade experience, and their involvement with literacy at home.

During the unstructured interviews and conversations, the family survey topics were expanded upon and enriched. It should be noted, however, that when the family had additional topics of concern or consideration, those were addressed. Subsequent interviews followed the remaining two survey's format,

but were more naturally representative of the individual family and usually began with a review of our previous discussion.

Data analysis consisted of transcription of the interviews, a three fold holistic reading of the transcriptions, and a page number and letter coding procedure which facilitated organization of concept and category.

Audio Taping of Family "Work Sessions"

The family participating at Level C involvement provided audio tapes of family reading "work sessions". I provided blank tapes (the family had a tape recorder); three tapings of work sessions were returned. Data analysis consisted of transcription of the work sessions, a three fold holistic reading of the transcriptions, and a page number and letter coding procedure which facilitated organization of concept and category.

Researcher Folios

I kept a folio for each of the families participating in the study. These folios provided a place to store samples of student's reading and writing, record observations, thoughts, concerns, ideas, descriptions, and the like related to each child's literacy development and to my understandings, efforts at communication and negotiation, and other information related to the child-parent-teacher relationship.

Data analysis consisted of a three fold holistic reading of the folio entries, and the taking of research notes to develop concept and category.

School Records

An examination of each child's school records occurred, which included test scores, health records, grades, and teacher comments. These data were analyzed for theme or category. During analysis, comparisons were made from year to year, and relevant or meaningful changes were described.

Correspondence

Formal and informal (verbal and written) correspondence from each participant was documented and recorded in the researcher's folio. This information provided insight into how the partnership dialogued and negotiated. Data analysis consisted of a three fold holistic reading of the correspondence, and the taking of research notes to develop concept and category.

Analytical Framework

Eight families participated in this research project. Every family was different, and every child-parent-teacher relationship was different. The way parents were involved with their child was different. What seemed to work for the relationship in one family did not work in another. There was a uniqueness to each family and each child-parent-teacher relationship.

Six of the relationships are described in the section, *Fruitful Partnerships* . Generally, these partnerships were productive, effective, pleasant, enjoyable, and respectful. Additional components of three of the partnerships were the close friendships that developed.

In a seventh partnership, it eventually became clear that, although the mother and I did not share a friendly interpersonal relationship, an effective child-parent-teacher partnership did develop; the mother and daughter worked together consistently and diligently at home using materials and suggestions sent from school. A surprising notion was that a child-parent-teacher partnership could develop without a positive parent-teacher relationship. This unusual case may offer an opportunity to grow in understanding about how partnership can develop in spite of unfriendly circumstances. A description of it is found in the section, *A Paradoxical Partnership* .

Finally, an eighth child-parent-teacher relationship did not develop into partnership. This relationship may offer an opportunity for growth in understanding about how partnerships fail to develop, and the conditions which seemed to impede the growth and development of the partnership. A description of it is found in the section, *A Barren Relationship* .

A summary of the analytical framework follows:

1. Aligned with the study's purpose and research questions, analysis focused on if or how child-parent-teacher partnerships developed, and the conditions under which partnerships were promoted or impeded. The thread of literacy development and changes in that development traverses the partnership analysis.

2. In keeping with case study research and the value placed on the self as meaningful research, I "tell my story" of an experience with eight families who indicated an interest in exploring the idea of child-parent-teacher partnership which mutually supported their child's literacy development during transition into first grade.

3. Consistent with the study's Organizational Framework (Figure 1), three dyad relationships (child-parent, child-teacher, and parent-teacher) *may* take on the characteristic of a triad child-parent-teacher partnership when parents and children willingly agree to work with the teacher in order to enhance the child's literacy development. Such partnerships developed with six of the families participating in the study, and are described in the section, *Fruitful Partnerships*

4. A child-parent-teacher partnership did develop with one family involved in the study where the parent-teacher relationship was strained and unfriendly. This partnership is described in the section, *A Paradoxical Partnership*.

5. No partnership developed with one family involved in the study. This relationship is described in the section, *A Barren Relationship* .

6. It should be noted that, throughout the analysis, the corrected version of children's spelling is offered. In this way, emphasis is placed on the meaning of the written word, rather than on the technicalities of writing (Perkins, 1995).

7. The ethnicity of parents and children participating in the study is assumed to be Caucasian unless otherwise indicated.

Summary

The design of the study positioned me as teacher, partnership participant, and researcher. Families from my classroom were encouraged to participate at one of three levels of increasing involvement; eight families participated with mixed involvement. Qualitative case study using an educative research perspective was used, and data analysis followed grounded theory methodology. Data collection consisted of family surveys, family journals, unstructured interviews, audio taped family work sessions, researcher folios, school records, and formal and informal correspondences. The study was intended to contribute to first grade educators' understanding of literacy development and provide insight into and guidance for practitioners' practice.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY

We don't see things as they are,
we see them as we are.
-Anais Nin

Introduction

Eight families participated in this research project. Every family was different, and every child-parent-teacher relationship was different. The way parents were involved with their child was different. What seemed to work for the relationship in one family did not work in another. There was a uniqueness to each family and each child-parent-teacher relationship.

Six of the relationships are described in the section, *Fruitful Partnerships* . An unusual case, where a partnership developed in spite of unfriendly circumstances, is described in the section, *A Paradoxical Partnership* . Finally, an eighth child-parent-teacher relationship did not develop into partnership. It is described in the section, *A Barren Relationship* .

Fruitful Partnerships

Eva

"Mrs. Jeffrey! Eva's back"!

Indeed, Eva was entering the classroom, but was she the same little blond girl who left a week earlier? Her disposition, attitude, and demeanor remarkably had been altered.

Without words, she warmly greeted her girl friends. Smiles, tugs of affection, and hugs abounded. Eva appeared delighted to be returning to us. What on earth had happened?

Her mother's expression simultaneously was perplexed and exhilarated. The weeks of struggle seemed to have melted away, and we were presented this bouncing, happy package of energy and enthusiasm.

Miracles happen every day.

MaMa, MaMa

Five weeks earlier, Eva had arrived at my door with her mother, father and younger sister, her small hand tenaciously clutching the security her mother's hand provided. She was terrified. The look in her eye belied any variance from that word. I had never witnessed such fundamental apprehension and trepidation toward the first day of school.

The petite, blond haired, blue eyed, six year old Scandinavian had stepped off the plane from her home country only five days before our meeting. She spoke no English, and, although her parents were unsure how much English she understood, they assumed it was very little. The family would be living in Virginia for one year, and would return to their Scandinavian home the following summer.

On this late August morning, Eva's older sister had already been escorted to fourth grade, and entered her new world with little hesitation. In fact, her mother reported that their oldest daughter eagerly approached her new experience. On the other hand, Eva's younger sister would have the luxury of returning to the safer environs of home and mother. Albeit a new home, it surely would be better than this place! When the time approached for the family to part ways, there was little doubt which direction Eva longed to go. The picture of her leaning to the right, arm extended in a desperate attempt to remain connected with her dear "MaMa", as she so plaintively repeated through her tears, remains with me still.

The tears flowed and flowed; she must have cried a small river during the first month of school. Each morning began as the previous, tears and more tears, accompanied by the plaintive "MaMa" as she reached out to clutch her mother's hand, blouse, skirt, pants, or pocketbook, anything to maintain contact with her. It was heartbreaking for all of us, the parents, myself, the other children, and of course, Eva. With abiding courage, her mother would turn from our doorway and walk away, as we gently but unfailingly wooed Eva into the classroom where her crying usually escalated. I can only imagine how difficult that sound must have

been for her mother.

Various strategies to relax and calm her were of inconsistent consequence. Usually I held her on my lap while sitting in the rocking chair; we were fortunate that Eva allowed me to connect with her in this way. We rocked back and forth, and I rubbed her back. In an effort to soften the environment, I generally kept the lights turned off, save for a soft glow over the sink. There was little anyone could say; "It's OK." was the most frequently used expression by us all. The other children, especially a few of the girls, would stoke her hair, arm, hand, cheek, or knee, whatever seemed to soothe her for the moment. Eventually, Eva would "let" me move her to a place off my lap, usually near another child who could continue the back stroking, and we would begin our "Morning Opening". The tears might lessen, but were usually ever present.

I sought out any morsels of hope or progress and relayed them to her parents. On the second day of school, this note accompanied Eva home: "I think we had a great afternoon! (I'm not sure what Eva thinks!) After a teary AM, Eva seemed much happier. She giggled and sat on my lap! Love, Mrs. J." By the fourth day, I was able to report: "Things seemed to 'click' with some of the girls today - They are quite 'taken' with Eva, and she with them, especially Ann, Nancy, and Mary." These minor breakthroughs did not seem to subside the following morning's procedure however; we began each day with an extremely difficult mother-daughter parting and an extended period of crying.

Two conditions turned the tide. The first generated a gradual change in disposition but required daily repetition for desired results; the second produced a complete transformation. A description of the first condition follows.

One of the other students in the class was labeled "Special Needs" and seemed to respond well to an outside morning recess period, a break I am unfamiliar taking with first graders. I tenaciously hold on to the morning for our language arts curriculum, trying to engage the children in reading, writing, speaking and listening early in the day when they generally seem to be more rested and focused. Taking time from the morning for a recess break was not a comfortable plan, and I would not have done it, save for my special needs student.

It was during our morning recess, however, that a slow, gradual, but definite transformation began to take place in Eva. Although she held back initially, usually with tissue still in hand and tears falling, once in a while she began to

interact with others, probably as a result of a few girls' persistent and gentle persuasiveness. What started as a short walk with others slowly grew into actual play, complete with smiles, laughter, giggles and the natural physical activity of first graders, including running, jumping, sliding, swinging, and ball bouncing, activities where language is not a prerequisite. Examination of the flora around the campus was of keen interest to Eva as well, and she and others would bring me samples of this or that for our science center.

Watching Eva become happily engaged gave me pause to consider whether we should begin each day with recess! Certainly on some days, if she was having an especially difficult time, we did venture outside earlier than others. As if on cue, when we entered the out of doors, Eva seemed to find a place of comfort and familiarity, and she obviously began to feel better. A sweet, positive repercussion was that when she returned to the classroom, the remainder of the day was typically more relaxed, calm, tear-free, settled, and pleasant for her. We missed our morning outing only if weather or a special event interfered, and attempted to replace it with a room break, which gradually did suffice.

Her mother and I visited each morning, usually discussing the previous school day and evening; we were hopeful that the morning recess period followed by a more relaxed and comfortable remainder of the day was helping Eva adjust to the monumental transition in her life. Yet, the days turned into weeks and the morning distress continued; our hopes were dashed as each new day began. We wondered when or if Eva's apprehension and anxiety would be relieved.

Although her early weeks in the classroom were stressful, Eva seemed to develop strategies for coping. Especially enjoyable were the small motor tasks of handwriting practice, cutting and coloring. Working side by side with any number of other students, she produced colorful, thorough, and thoughtful products, frequently demonstrating a special knack for using color to highlight or emphasize her work. With a proud smile, she would present her artifacts to her classmates and me, and our round of applause typically brought an even brighter smile to her face. Also, Fridays were "Sharing Day" and Eva frequently brought a favorite doll; she seemed to enjoy playing with it and sharing it with others.

Although Eva spoke little English during these early weeks, she was working on speaking, reading and writing it at home. Her mother and I established an educational partnership which supported Eva's fledging attempts at learning the

new language surrounding her. Simple English books, which were sequential and spiral in design and emphasized short vowel words, were sent home on a slow but regular basis. Simple text stories, taken from a preprimer reading series, combined with rhyming word sheets using short and long vowels, accompanied the English books; Eva began writing simple sentences using the rhyming words. Her mother's initials or signature indicated that Eva could read the materials, and indeed, she proudly did so when requested, demonstrating developing understanding of the functions and forms of print (Gillet & Temple, 1990). Reading these simple, early English sentences and short stories, practiced diligently at home, regularly offered Eva and me an opportunity to share in her learning of and developing enthusiasm for the language. In spite of her continued anxiety, it appeared that she was learning to speak, read, and write English.

Her confidence in this ability was demonstrated during the school day as she gradually began to speak a few words or read one of her accomplished books to others. It became increasingly obvious that Eva and her mother worked together at home using materials and strategies suggested from school; a child-parent-teacher partnership was developing.

During the middle of September, Eva had the opportunity to work for 45 minutes twice a week with a volunteer tutor arranged through the YMCA and the school system's English as a Second Language (ESL) coordinator. This was impossible for Eva to do alone; she simply refused to leave the room with the tutor unless her fourth grade sister accompanied her. The tutor visited with me about this; she was concerned because Eva frequently was silent during their lessons, allowing her sister to "do all the work". However, throughout the tutoring experience which continued into the spring, Eva remained attached to her sister; various attempts to separate the girls were met with unquestioning resistance from Eva.

An additional connection with her sister occurred. During our pre-school workshop, a fourth grade teacher and I decided to "partner" our classes, that is, once a week we would gather the two classes, pair the students, and have them read and write together. It happened that Eva's older sister was enrolled in that particular class. Therefore, once a week they were able to spend additional time together. Eva's sister helped her translate simple books and write simple stories while a third member of the team, an additional fourth grader, served as the

English interpreter. This arrangement worked well throughout the year and all three girls seemed to enjoy and learn from their time together.

The Transformation

Our mornings of distress continued until near the end of September when the second condition occurred; Eva got the flu. When she was absent during the fourth week of school, a Tuesday, I was concerned. Perhaps her mother had decided to keep her home. She returned the following day; mom indicated that although Eva had complained of not feeling well the previous day, she had been up and about without a fever. I wondered, was this the beginning of the end? When she missed that Thursday and Friday, my fear escalated that an adjustment for Eva may be out of our grasp. She did return on the following Monday, but seemed very lethargic. It had been the beginning stages of the flu all along and she missed the rest of school that week.

When Eva returned to us on the following Monday (she had been in school for only three days during the previous two week period), she entered our classroom as if she were returning to a place she enjoyed! "Eva's back!" was the refrain, but 'Eva's Here' could have been the headline of the day. For the first time, she was 'here' in body and spirit! Save for a brief, soulful glance toward her mother, Eva was ours for the day, happy, relaxed, and comfortable in our classroom. And from that day on, Eva had an enjoyable and amazingly productive first grade experience.

Her mother and I were astounded at the transformation. Each morning we were pleasantly surprised to watch the happy little girl say good bye to her mother and enter the stream of life in the classroom. When we discussed it at our parent-teacher conference 10 days later, Eva's mother attributed the change to the notion that Eva got what she wanted, that is, to stay at home, and while there, discovered it was not that much fun for her! She actually began to say to her mother, in her native language, "I like school!" and "I want to go to school."

Our Supportive Partnership

When Eva's mother completed the first survey in October, she did not mention the difficulty of Eva's adjustment. Rather, she indicated that, because they were in a special situation (from a Scandinavian country), "our expectations for our child are not very high. ... It would be fine if our child could learn the language. That she could understand what was said in the classroom, and that she would be able to read simple books. It would also be fine if our child could be able to write simple English."

By the middle of October, Eva was already making great progress toward this expectation. She had read many simple books, written some very simple, repetitive sentences (such as, Look at the dog. Look at the cat. Look at the fish.), identified 38 of the 52 letters of the alphabet, and offered the sounds of 37 letters, (in some cases she could tell the name of the letter but not the corresponding sound, in other cases, the reverse was true).

Regarding ways they are involved with literacy at home, her mother mentioned the books and other homework sent from school. "Our child likes to read books we borrow at the school. We read them for her and translate. She also likes to read by herself. Our child likes to do her homework, especially if she additionally can color something." The very simple English books sent home from school for Eva to practice with the help of her parents, and the additional reading and writing activities, seemed to be contributing toward her parent's expectation that she learn to understand, speak, read, and write simple English.

By the middle of November, a great change had occurred in Eva. On the middle survey, her mother referenced the transformation: "Eva was very reserved in the beginning, and she did not want to go to school. She did not speak, write, or read any English, but she was listening as good as she was able to in the classes. Now, Eva speaks a little English, also she reads a little, and she even writes some. Eva is much more happy now, and she does like being in school. For us, as parents, the change is great."

Additionally, her mother recognized changes in their understanding of Eva's literacy development. They realized that Eva "learns much faster than they had expected. Last time I wrote that we expected her to read simple books in English at the end of the school year. This she does already. After 2 months, her

eagerness to learn is great." She noted that while writing simple sentences was still difficult, "some assignments are as fun as playing."

Similarly, Eva's eagerness to read books was apparent in school, and her writing skills were developing quickly. She wrote, with the help and support of classmates, "Once there was a fat little turkey who did nothing but sleep." and "1 little rabbit hopped in the grass. The rabbit is white."

Eva's understanding and mastery of the English language continued to make excellent progress. Examples of her writing include, "I like my Christmas tree. This is nice. I have a lot of presents." (and) "I like to sled in the snow. Wwwwaaaaa!!! This is fun because I get a lot of snow on me. And my dog is funny!" (and) I like chocolate chip cookies." (and) "I like to write in my book."

On the final survey, her parents expressed the importance of parental involvement, adult patience, and parent-teacher cooperation with their child's literacy development.

> It is important that parents take part in the children's schoolwork. Parents must also show interest in the children's homework. The teacher has to put effort in making the school work fun and exciting for the children. The children are still small, and they need a smooth and gradual habitation to school and homework. Also, it is important for a child to feel that parents and teacher cooperate. The children will be more confident and feel more safe in their new situation. If the cooperation is functioning, it will take a shorter time for a child to get used to the new situation. It will be easier to motivate a child to read and write. As time went by, literacy development may even feel fun and exciting. ... What is interesting is that Eva seems to read English almost at the same level as she reads [her native language].

Our Flower

Once Eva began to blossom, she demonstrated continual growth in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. As our study concluded, she affectionately wrote, "I love Ann and I love Nancy and Mary." Eva had become a happy, contributing, well liked member of our class! Her eagerness to learn was demonstrated by her voluntarily writing a five chapter book, *After School*. It was 97 words in length and contained sentences such as, "When I come home from

school I play with my new barbie. Her name is Rosy. Before I go to bed I take a bath. I like it. I get my barbies in the bathtub. I like to play with them." Everyone cheered for her effort and delightful piece of work!

Her happy adjustment was also evident in a short story she wrote on a computer program: *At School* . "One day I was going to go to school. I was excited. I was jumping around the room. I said YEA!!! I was so glad I could almost not wait. I was so excited. Then I got my back pack, and my coat. Then I went to school. I said YEA."

In a May edition of a school sponsored publication, Eva shared her excitement about a rabbit; "One day I went outside. I saw a rabbit. I asked my Mom if I could take it inside. She said yes. I was glad. I took her inside. I gave her food." Also in May, her exceptional reading progress was recorded; on one graduated vocabulary list assessment (Slosson, 1963), she scored third grade, second month (3.2) grade equivalent. At that time and according to that assessment, Eva was the fourth strongest reader in the class!

Near the end of the year, Eva and her mother treated our class to a special presentation about their country. Eva was dressed in her Scandinavian costume, and following the presentation, a delicious Scandinavian sweet bread was served, and I was given a lovely book about their homeland. Following the presentation and as we watched Eva happily enjoying her friends and conversing in English, I learned from her mother that she and her husband had very seriously considered removing Eva from the classroom during that difficult month of September. She mentioned that transitions for Eva had frequently been difficult, such as attending preschool or Sunday school. They were so delighted they had waited; the results were a wonder and a joy!

The fourth grade teacher and I were invited to the family's home in the spring to celebrate a Scandinavian national holiday. A delicious meal and dessert were shared, and we were given beautifully hand painted, personally inscribed Scandinavian breadboards. Mine is on display in our kitchen where I am daily reminded of Eva's struggle and the sweet success of our partnership.

Eva's mother and I have maintained correspondence since our time together, and she has sent lovely photos of Eva and the family. One postcard was especially noteworthy as it referenced her metamorphosis: "Eva is the same happy girl as she was after the flu in your class."

Todd

"Mrs. Jeffrey, I can read this book!"

Todd had entered the classroom with a keen look of determination. It was apparent that something was different this mid - September morning; he had a mission. Rather than stop by his cubby to "unload", with our eye contact maintained, he marched toward me. Upon arrival, and while setting his backpack down and retrieving the treasure inside, he made his announcement.

Perhaps the sweetest words a first grade teacher can hear are these. They carry the sound of accomplishment, confidence, achievement, ability, mastery, independence, affirmation, success, assurance, growth, and timeliness. The more subtle sounds of gratitude and praise ring in my heart as well, for I have grown to appreciate the magic and core of mystery which underlies the task of learning to read.

His sweet words, awakening the day, drew me to a nearby child's chair. Eye level with the proud, dark-eyed, beaming boy, I nestled him into the warmth and comfort of an encircling arm, and savored the moment. Disregarding the room's increased activity, Todd immediately began reading his treasure, Drummer Hoff , a delightful children's story about the myriad of military men required to set off a cannon, men such as Corporal Ferrell who brought the barrel, Sergeant Chowder who brought the powder, and General Border who gave the order, but, as we are repeatedly informed, "Drummer Hoff fired it off."

The book has been a favorite of mine for some time, perhaps because many first graders have enjoyed it. Recently the students had been introduced to a number of classroom books, and Drummer Hoff's appeal had been described. Todd had chosen to check it out from our classroom library, worked on it with his parents, and returned for his victory celebration.

This was Todd's moment to share his new found joy. As he read to the class following our Morning Opening, his confidence and pride were palpable. Throughout the day, others sat with him in the rocker while he shared some of his most recent understandings of reading: "See, chowder rhymes with powder, so you can figure it out that way."

The post-it note from this mother, placed carefully inside the front cover of the book, relayed the importance of this moment in time: "We are so proud of

Todd for reading his first book to us. He sounded out all of the words and enjoyed the story! Thanks - " On a survey, she warmly described a similar remembrance: " My first book completion was Mrs. Wiggs' Cabbage Patch . I recall reading to my Mom as she cleared the dishes in our cozy kitchen. "

Reading one's first book is cause for celebration, and the family, which included his Caucasian mother, Indonesian father, and four year old sister, and I shared our joy that evening following a school wide parent orientation meeting. As part of the meeting, parents were asked to write what things they would like me to know about their child and Todd's mother responded: "We are so happy with Todd's reading progress. He loves all types of books and has found freedom and a sense of determination as a result of his progress." It seemed we were off to a great start!

Our Partnership Emerges

Although Todd's mother managed a local ice cream business and did volunteer work, she found time to regularly share with Todd and his younger sister.

> We have quiet reading time as a family generally three - four times a week. Selections for books or poems are made by everyone either from our collection or from the library. We spend lots of time with picture books and enjoy the "Ranger Rick" series of magazines. We enjoy music and encourage dancing and singing or acting out parts of songs or movies. Todd has a very wild and vivid imagination, so we hear lots of great stories.

Time spent with Todd afforded his mother some understanding of his learning style, which was reflected on the first survey regarding expectations for literacy development. A thoughtful, patient yet hopeful perspective was offered.

> We expect Todd to learn at his own pace in reading and writing. He is hesitant to sound out words on his own and tends to be a perfectionist at his reading and doesn't like the challenge of new words. We hope that some of this will become easier for him to handle. ... We hope for non-stressful writing techniques and we are thrilled with Writing to Read [a computer based writing - reading program] as a superior learning tool. ... We wish for quiet reading time as a group and later encouragement for children to read to the class and spend time explaining their own drawings

and writings. Book reports were something that I always loved as a student and these helped with speaking in front of others.

Parental expectations aligned closely with mine; for example, I support the theory that learning is constructive, and students' literacy development should be encouraged to progress at their own pace. I strive to offer literacy information, such as comparing and contrasting sounds and spellings of relevant words, demonstrating patterning in words, and sharing how common phrases are used, in a stress free yet challenging environment. A quiet reading time titled Drop Everything And Read (DEAR) is part of our daily schedule. Finally, children are strongly encouraged to share their writing and illustrations with classmates; the young author sits, generally with pride, in the rocker as fellow students gather round, and, as the literacy skill of listening is reinforced in the audience, our writer proceeds to share. An exchange of ideas frequently follows; listeners identify aspects of the work they particularly enjoyed, and questions regarding the work can be asked, such as "How did you come up with your idea for the story?"

Perhaps because parental and educator literacy expectations were similar, our child-parent-teacher partnership seemed to form almost effortlessly. Todd and his mother worked consistently at home on various reading and writing projects and books sent from school, and he demonstrated steady progress and a positive attitude toward his developing literacy. Proudly returning materials to school, where we had ample opportunity to share and rejoice in his learning, was a regular occurrence. Hugs abounded!

A few weeks later, during our parent-teacher conference early in October, I described how Todd had performed on several assorted literacy assessments conducted early in the school year, examining such skills as letter and sound recognition, reading color words, and number identification (Appendix N); beginning consonant sound identification (Appendix O) and recalling and writing sounds, words, and punctuation without the aide of visual support (Appendix P). His accumulated scores placed him in the high average range (87%). It has been my experience that students with this type of score typically do not have difficulty learning to read and write conventionally, and if they do, unidentified variables may be influential, such as a learning disability or attention disorder.

During our conference, Todd's mother and I shared observations about his first five weeks of school. Friends and family remained delighted with his reading.

This was supported by survey comments: "We have been overwhelmed with joy as Todd begins reading and writing so many new words as quickly as he does. He loves to write us notes about sports, numbers, special love letters and he always compliments them with special photographs." Long time friends were "happily surprised at his reading skills and noted that three weeks earlier he had little or no interest in reading."

Indeed, it appeared that Todd was learning to read very quickly. Early in the school year, when I checked his reading on a vocabulary list (Slosson, 1963), he read only the word, "look", a word we had practiced. Spot checking of his reading since then indicated his reading skills were developing, but it was possible he was memorizing the story line auditorily for some of the books sent home for reading practice. For example, although he could read sentences such as, "Drip Drop is a drop" (and) "Drip Drop spins and spins", he often struggled when asked to read the same words from the word list at the end of the book; out of context, some of the words were difficult for him to read. This was a concern because one area of focus with the books was developing the ability to separate the sounds in words or *phonemic segmentation* (Gillet & Temple, 1990); a goal for Todd was to begin discriminating such words as drip and drop.

I shared this information with his mother and inquired about Todd's ability to memorize; she indicated that he had an excellent memory. Later, in the family journal, an exemplary story was shared: In need of an answer to a question related to his piano lesson, Todd asked if he could call his teacher. His parents were shocked as he "walked to the phone and dialed her number from memory. He has only called her maybe two other times and that had been several months ago. We quizzed him about other numbers and he knew many others!"

It seemed we would need to remain alert to Todd's memorization capabilities as he continued learning to read. One strategy we discussed was that of writing him notes regarding miscellaneous events or activities in his day. In this way, he would be encouraged to engage in meaningful reading which was not previously memorized. His mother enlisted this strategy: "We have had a busy week and I've enjoyed writing notes to Todd so he can keep up with plans. He likes being able to read these himself." We also visited about the idea of spending time on the word lists at the end of the little books, helping ensure that he could read the words, in varying order, before returning the books to school. His mother

did engage this strategy which slowed the pace of book exchange but which encouraged Todd's understanding of sounds within words.

An additional topic discussed during our conference was frustration. Three features of Todd's work prompted me to address this issue. First, some of his written work demonstrated signs of possible frustration, such as crossing-out work with very dark "x"s, or placing "x"s over much of the work. Second, some of his work did not reflect attention to detail or was carelessly accomplished, and third, occasionally his work was incomplete. His mother agreed that he did get frustrated occasionally. She described it on a survey: "We have seen frustration at times when he could not find things that he was asked to find around the house. We are working on clear, concise directions for these tasks." We agreed to keep a watchful eye for indicators of frustration, attempt to have Todd express any concerns he might have, and keep each other informed. This would be easy to do because Todd's mother volunteered in our office at least once a week and our paths frequently crossed. She was also our volunteer "room mother", and already we were making plans for various fall activities.

My management plan, introduced and described during parent orientation, was revisited during our parent-teacher conference. A brief description of the plan may be helpful.

Eight years ago, I developed a weekly management chart to record student behaviors or events as they occurred; it was a year which challenged my first grade management capabilities in novel ways. Warnings (noted with a check on the chart) were recorded for minor infractions of school rules, such as running in the halls or repeated inattention to the task at hand, and room breaks or recess breaks (a child would "sit out" for approximately ten minutes; noted with an X on the chart) were lost for major problems, such as hitting another child or rude behavior.

The chart was designed to hold bits of information and a weeks' worth of data. In order to note changes or progress in student behavior, a numerical value was placed on the two types of problems: warnings counted one, and a lost break counted three. This was consistent with the additional feature of the system; three warnings in one day equated to one lost break. Using this recording system, combined with the numerical value assigned to the two type of problems, enabled me to communicate information easily and effectively to anyone interested; it also

kept me informed of student behavior progress or pattern of difficulty.

Todd had a few minor difficulties following directions and, during the first five weeks of school, had received five warnings by the date of our parent-teacher conference. This information was shared with his mother, who was aware of this difficulty. In fact, during the evening of parent orientation, when asked to write things they would like me to know about their child, she had offered: "Todd sometimes has trouble following directions, but we have seen tremendous improvement in the past few months." Two strategies which can help with this difficulty were suggested: one, gain eye contact with Todd before giving directions, and two, have him repeat the directions. We agreed to try these strategies with him at home and school.

The overall ambiance of our conference had been positive and hopeful. A number of strategies supporting Todd's literacy development had been discussed, and his mother and I were delighted with the enthusiasm and energy he was bringing to the learning process.

The Rocky Road

Despite outstanding family support, student motivation, and obvious progress, difficulty was brewing beneath the surface. Our parent-teacher conference in early October took place before school on the day Todd did the most shocking thing. He hit a girl in the face during math class! As I recall, it stunned everyone in the room. This was definitely unusual behavior for Todd!

Later that week he was given a "time out" for repeatedly not following directions during physical education class, a class he loved and in which he excelled. The following week proved uneventful, to my relief, until Friday afternoon when he was openly not honest about completing a pumpkin project. A decision was made to call his mother on Monday and share the three events with her. I have learned it is better for me to share difficult news with parents after I am rested and refreshed; generally I am a better listener!

When I called his mother, she shared some of the details of Todd's kindergarten experience; I suddenly realized we had not discussed it during our parent-teacher conference. I took frantic notes, wondering if this was the same child in my classroom! In kindergarten, he really liked to "show his stuff"; the first

seven weeks of school were "horrible"; his pediatrician had been very concerned about his following directions and suspected Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD); he couldn't concentrate; when mom left him at school he acted like "the roof was going to come down"; the children switched classes which was very confusing; and music was going on which disturbed him.

His mother continued. He seems like a different child. He's having a good year; it has a lot to do with you. He needs to have the rules clear and you have done that; maybe he just needed more structure. Following directions is still a concern.

All of this news seemed a bit confusing and difficult to absorb, but I knew that, regardless of his inconsistencies, a supportive, constructive, and positive perspective toward Todd was the most fruitful approach to take. Experience had taught me that!

Our Partnership Expands

As inconsistencies in Todd's behavior grew more obvious, inconsistencies in his work, such as occasionally marking work with dark X's or not completing work, continued. Writing was a mixture of meticulous care and scribble. Completing written work was frequently difficult except on a computer program where he usually wrote about sports events, for example, "I am six. I play football. I like it. I play with my dad." (and) "Tomorrow is the big game. VA Tech vs. Va." Even with that program, his mother noticed, "... he draws or does graphics more than he writes. He draws much more at home, too." She concludes this observation with a challenging question: "When are phonics appropriate?" Because Todd seemed to be so easily frustrated with writing, it seemed we had to negotiate our efforts to guide him with phonics understanding. He was inconsistently receptive to our support.

Although the computer program seemed a more palatable avenue for Todd's writing, he continued to demonstrate little interest or motivation in hand written work. His mother noted, in reference to his journal used during our research study, "Todd never felt comfortable writing in his journal. ... He may have benefited from a journal help session. I would love to see some curriculum workshops presented during the three month period so that we might know better

what to expect from our child at this age." I don't recall if she had attended the curriculum workshop held about three weeks earlier addressing the topic of children's literacy development, which included a section on children's writing, but even if she had, it seemed that more information would have been helpful.

Attempts to address this need were made by sharing information regarding levels of writing development, supporting our combined efforts to offer assistance, guidance and information to Todd when he seemed receptive, and encouraging her to maintain a positive and expectant attitude. Whenever she or Todd seemed to feel frustration, I suggested they put the work aside and return to it later. This strategy is one I have recommended to parents for many years, and appears in a "homework" section of the fall parent letter (Appendix Q).

Frustration also surfaced in the area of spelling. His mother made reference to it many times, including the following observations: "Todd is a perfectionist speller and he gets very upset when he knows that his words are spelled wrong but doesn't know how to correct them himself." (and) "It is very confusing for him to write words that he thinks are spelled wrong. ... It seems instinctive that he is aware of incorrect spelling." (and) "He still wants to spell perfectly." This characteristic might have affected his completion of written work; attempting to spell correctly could have been frustrating and time consuming. His mother and I attempted to blend support of his attempts to spell and write with acceptance, encouragement, and praise. His inconsistencies with writing and spelling continued, usually vacillating between resistance and receptiveness to learning new sounds and words.

Likewise, his behavior remained inconsistent despite our efforts to clarify expectations and incorporate strategies which supported his understanding of following directions: gaining eye contact and having him repeat the direction. The latter strategy was easier for his mother to accomplish in the home setting; rather than draw attention to the strategy, I attempted to subtly incorporate it into our classroom routine. At school, it seemed Todd would be very cooperative for days, then have a period with many warnings for talking inappropriately, not listening or not following directions. On one occasion, after letting his mother know how well he had been cooperating at school, she indicated that "he must be saving it all for home, because it's been really hard lately."

At school and home, frustration with people or events could suddenly

appear. Three examples from school are highlighted. On one occasion, he slugged someone in the leg because of a LEGO disagreement, and on another, butted heads with a boy because of a conflict about "lining up". A third instance involving intense frustration stands out. While I was reading to the class, Todd attempted to pull off a hooded sweatshirt. Because the string around the hood had been tied and he had tried to remove the sweatshirt before untying the string, the shirt became stuck on his head. The best word to describe his reaction is panic. He made terrifying, screaming sounds as he kept tying to pull the shirt over his head; sounds which seemed to frighten us all. Coming to his aide as quickly as possible helped to some degree, but, realizing he was trapped, his fear had been almost instantaneous.

There were times when focus seemed to cause difficulty. Twice he concentrated and worked very hard on projects but did them incorrectly, while his classmates around him were demonstrating the correct procedure. On one project, he glued pieces of a project together which were to fit together with a brass fastener, and on a second occasion, he cut a project which the rest of his classmates were folding and which had been demonstrated as a folding task.

Amid the stress and concern of Todd's inconsistencies, his mother maintained a positive, energetic focus. Late in October, I realized she was more than an unusually supportive parent and volunteer who had planned and organized a Fall Festival for the entire first grade, she was my friend. As our room mother, she had access to the names and phone numbers of all the children's parents, and organized an enormous surprise birthday party for me, the likes of which I'd never experienced! The room was full of balloons, snacks, an ice cream cake, a dozen roses, numerous gifts, parents, and games for the children. It was thrilling!

During the research period and beyond, we frequently visited, generally about two to three times per month, about Todd's progress and behavior at home and school. A particular story stands out, which she shared at least three times: She would ask him to get the dishcloth from the sink, and, at times, he would do as requested; other times he would go to the sink and not see it, although it was right there. "How could he not see it?" she would ask me. "Does he forget what he's after, between the table and the sink?" We were both confused.

As food for thought and in an effort to gain insight and understanding about

Todd, early in December I shared a copy of the table of contents of our school's pre-referral manual with his mother. This is an extremely helpful guide which lists over 200 behaviors which frequently interfere with learning. Once behaviors are identified, the manual lists dozens of suggestions which support the improvement of each behavior. Perhaps we could start here in our search for answers. Todd's mother was encouraged to let me know what particular behaviors she and her husband believed Todd demonstrated, and copies of suggestions related to those behaviors could be made.

Fruits of our Labor

Through it all, regardless of events, we continually agreed to maintain a positive focus. Todd was learning and enjoying school, and his behavior had improved so much since kindergarten! He was working consistently at home on reading, and his mother believed the curriculum materials sent home and our continual communication were helpful and supportive; they seemed to further his literacy understanding and promote our child-parent-teacher partnership. In response to the question, "Thinking back over the first three months of first grade, what things helped promote a child-parent-teacher partnership to enhance your child's literacy development? Why?" she replied,

> The reading sheets that Todd brought home were wonderful for us to use in helping him learn to read. He enjoyed the small books sent home in the envelopes. We appreciate your excellent communication during this exciting first grade year! I feel that Todd's continual practice in writing letters has helped him learn to read. He seems more comfortable sounding out words than earlier in the year.

An additional area of improvement centered on the literacy skills of speaking and listening. "Todd also seems to speak much more clearly than I remember from the summer. He introduces his friends to others and loves to tell stories". (and) "I see the need for more structure in situations with Todd speaking and when all of us are listening. We are thrilled to see this structure in the classroom to allow him the opportunity to grasp the ideas and pursue more reading and writing skills." (and) "Todd has become a much better listener during his first few months of first grade."

Focus resurfaced as an area affecting Todd's development; he seemed to have grown in his ability to concentrate.

> This has been a pleasant time for our family to see Todd grow through expanded self-discipline. He has always focused on many things at one time, but has learned to calm down and concentrate on reading and speaking more clearly. We are thrilled that Todd asks many questions now. He was never a "why?" child before, but we love it now!

Although improved focus and concentration were apparent, especially related to his reading, " We love having him read to us!", he struggled with the fact that some others were reading more difficult books. "He always brought up where other students were as far as the number of small books in envelopes. I felt like he raced through some books to 'catch up' for no reason." His mother followed this observation with a helpful suggestion: "We have lots more time on weekends to do extra reading and some weekends Todd didn't bring home any papers or books. We tried not to pressure him into having something every night, but would love more weekend work." Following that advice, attempts were made to supply families with work for the weekend.

A New Road to Travel

Todd continued to demonstrate inconsistencies in work and behavior throughout the year. He was a strong reader by the end of the year, (3.1 grade equivalent on one assessment, Slosson, 1963) and enjoyed reading independently. Written work generally improved in quality, but completion was still a difficulty. Without careful monitoring, he could easily slip unfinished work into his desk and move on to more pleasant activities. On one occasion, when I helped him clean his desk, we found five incomplete assignments.

Although Todd's capability to concentrate seemed to be improving, it remained an area of concern. Two instances stand out: Once during a class lesson, while the children were gathered around the rocker and we were verbally engaged as a group, he suddenly got up, went to his desk, and pulled out some paper. When asked, "Todd, what are you doing?", he seemed surprised, as if he had forgotten that the rest of the class was otherwise engaged. When encouraged to rejoin the group, he quietly returned. Likewise, on a special occasion when a

guest reader was sharing a favorite book, he got up from the group, went to his back pack and retrieved a small piece of paper on which was written a phone number. Again he seemed somewhat startled when asked what he was doing.

Although Todd's physical aggression markedly decreased throughout the year, he continued to receive warnings, especially for not listening or not following directions. Occasionally he would receive three warnings in one day, and lose some break time. Based on the six reporting periods, which are approximately six weeks long, his totals on the management charts were 16 - 23 - 32 - 12 - 18 - 7; it is clear that Todd's reporting period totals decreased as the year progressed. Yet, by the end of the year, his total was the highest in the class: 108. By comparison, the other totals were 0 - 1 - 1 - 2 - 3 - 5 - 9 - 9 - 11 - 15 - 24 - 26 - 41 - 58 - 61 - 63 - 77 - 87 - 108 (Todd).

Due to our natural proximity, Todd's mother and I continued to regularly communicate, typically sharing reports regarding his successes or difficulties with reading, writing, listening, speaking, following directions, and concentration. We increasingly noticed that he did not seem to easily learn from his mistakes; behaviors were repeated in spite of our efforts to communicate expectations. Although his behavior did improve during the second half of the year, as evidenced by the decrease in warnings, we were both surprised by his cumulative total, which was not compiled until late April, and which was shared with his mother in early May.

This seemed to precipitate three parental responses. First, Todd was evaluated by a university's speech and hearing clinic. Although his hearing was normal, some language processing difficulties surfaced. Helpful strategies were suggested, such as maintaining Todd's eye contact during instructions, having him repeat directions, and seating him near the front of the classroom. The first two strategies we had previously enacted, and the third we put in place.

Second, Todd's parents selected 13 behaviors from the table of contents of the pre-referral manual, which I had given to his mother in December, and which they believed he demonstrated:

- Needs oral questions and directions frequently repeated
- Demonstrates difficulty with auditory memory
- Does not demonstrate an understanding of directionality
- Has difficulty concentrating

- Perseverates - does the same thing over and over
- Fails to demonstrate logical thinking
- Does not follow verbal directions
- Is unsuccessful in activities requiring listening
- Attends more successfully when close to the source of sound
- Requires eye contact in order to listen successfully
- Needs immediate rewards / reinforcement in order to demonstrate appropriate behavior
- Behaves impulsively, without self-control
- Ignores consequences of his / her behavior
- Does not follow directives from teachers or other school personnel

Copies of supportive suggestions related to each of these behaviors were made for both Todd's parents and myself. There were a total of 480 suggestions to consider!

Third, Todd's parents decided to have him evaluated by a physician who specializes in attention deficit disorder. As his classroom teacher, I was asked to complete a school questionnaire. In an effort to offer as broad and equitable a response as possible, copies of the questionnaire were distributed to his kindergarten teacher, and our physical education teacher and guidance counselor. Results from the four questionnaires were combined.

His kindergarten teacher had noted that, almost always, his "demands must be met immediately", he was "easily frustrated and easily distracted", his "severe temper outbursts, often violent, got better as the year went on", he had very strong skills with memory, such as "remembering classroom routines", and he had "strong motor skills". She wrote, "Todd was easily frustrated at the beginning of the year but made great improvement by the end of October."

His physical education teacher stated, "Listening skills need to improve for Todd to be more successful. Often Todd doesn't pay attention during changes from one task to another. I will often need to repeat instructions in order to get him on task." He also noted very strong motor skills, "Athletic ability is above average. High level motor skills (especially gross motor)."

As a new school, our staff consisted of personnel from the local school community. Our Central guidance counselor had been Todd's guidance counselor

the previous year. She wrote, "Through a social skills group and a behavior modification plan, I have worked with Todd in kindergarten on controlling his behavior in the classroom. He has improved somewhat in first grade, and he's continuing to have difficulty with the issues of which I am aware. He *intends* to behave appropriately. He has trouble doing it." Behaviors she noted as "almost always" were: easily distracted, acts before thinking, overactive, notices things that no one else does, shifts from one activity to another, fidgets (keeps doing things with hands and feet), hurries to finish work quickly rather than accurately, and gets into trouble without really meaning to.

The pediatrician's diagnosis of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) in June was made within days of their visit. The doctor was impressed that Todd had not developed a negative attitude toward school, as many children similar to him do; Todd had been excited and eager to share information about his school experiences. Perhaps our positive child-parent-teacher partnership had helped support this attitude and the success he found during the year.

The friendship between Todd's mother and myself continued to grow. Throughout the year, she showered me with lovely gifts on many special occasions. The four first grade teachers began to appreciate and respect her efforts as she organized additional grade level events, including our holiday party and spring picnic. We could determine our goals for an event, and one call to this mother would put the plan into action; she would contact the remaining three room mothers and we could rest easy. Eventually I dubbed her, *The Room Mother From Heaven* !

The next year, when learning of my mother's illness, she offered support with friendship and sympathy, and when she became violently ill and was hospitalized for some time, I returned in kind. In fact, her illness precipitated a school wide support network, providing food and cheer. She is loved and appreciated by many. And Todd and I continue to sneak in an occasional hug when we pass in the halls.

Betty

Mrs. Jeffrey, I wrote a very long story! It's about a little bird who gets lost for a while, but finally finds its mother. I worked really hard on it!"

"Betty! I'm so proud of you! Congratulations!!! Let me give you a big hug! I can't wait to hear you read it!"

Indeed, the document before me was fat! Authoring a ten page, sequentially coherent story plus illustrations is an unusual product for a fall first grader. Yet for Betty, I was not surprised. Her reading and writing skills had sky rocketed since school began.

We nestled in for a good read, finding laughter and pleasure among the pages. Delightful illustrations accompanied the sweet story, which she soon shared with her classmates. They sat spellbound, listening intently, obviously impressed as she read ...

My Book

Cheep, Cheep, Cheep Little Bird said. I am hungry for something to eat. I hope Mom will be back soon.

Cheep, Cheep. Mom is here, Little Bird said.

Mom, Little Bird said. I think I should go out and play.

Little Bird flew over the tree tops.

Little Bird went so far that he got lost.

Little Bird, stop crying. Little Bird saw a lot of birds.

Little Bird had fun with the other birds but he had to go on.

Little Bird saw some other people camping.

Little Bird flew down to get some nuts.

It was coming day time but Little Bird flew on.

Little Bird didn't know where he was going but he flew on.

Little Bird saw a house.

And Little Bird saw a girl but he still flew on.

Little Bird was almost home but he did not know it.

And Little Bird saw a boy but still flew on.

And Little Bird saw more people but still flew on.

Little Bird was tired but still flew on.

Little Bird was still going.

Little Bird saw the happiest thing. He found his mom. Little Bird's mom said, You have grown. They were happy.

The End

Applause erupted! Betty beamed with pride!
As a first grade educator, I cherish these sweet moments.

It Starts at Home

Betty's sky rocketing reading and writing boosted from an abundant family life, which overflowed with a rich variety of resources, exposures, and expectations. The value her parents placed on their only child permeated the survey responses and her mother's letter, which was sent in lieu of a family journal. Both parents were employed full time outside the home and cherished the time they could share with their daughter.

An eloquent depiction of their cozy family time after work was offered in the letter, where degrees of apprehension regarding our present day culture were voiced.

> We love our daughter intensely, and I must say that we give Betty what we have between 5:30 and 10:00 (Betty is a night owl and would never voluntarily go to sleep, so sometimes we just go with the flow so we can spend some more time with her.) We read every night to her or with her, talk to her and sit with her sharing hugs. When we're too tired to cook we

eat out. We run warm baths and play princess and prince with her in the tub with her waterlogged (and slightly mildewed) Barbies. But it has the feeling of compressed time, and it makes me relieved and sad to know that most kids today don't know how relaxing it can be to come straight home from school, eat a snack and talk calmly about how the day went, rest a while, do homework or read, play and have dinner before 7:00, bath and pajamas by 8:00, and a good night of sleep. Our "real" lives and that of virtually everyone we know are compressed within a fraction of the time needed. So we do what everyone does, we make do.

Their "making do" was not the kind of lifestyle Betty's parents had in mind.

> There is nothing much felt after school and work - no daylight, no energy, sometimes no patience, no creativity to make learning more exciting and fun, none of the strategies my Mom employed to keep me focused on learning. [Her dad] and I are both educated and intensely fervent about the concept of lifelong learning, beginning with Betty's reading for her. But, the parents I see around me, and often including me, are doing their best just to get through.

The importance of reading in Betty's life was demonstrated by her parents actions. "We've surrounded Betty with books since she was born; she must have 200 of her own. She treats bookstores like candy stores." (Mom) and, "Betty's mom has been very faithful and proactive about making sure Betty has plenty of good books and frequent exposure to them." (Dad). Likewise, writing was valued as a literacy skill: "She loves to buy paper of any kind, and spends a long time each day writing, of her own accord."

The value of personal reading and writing was also evident in both parents. Her father remarked, "I have always had a more than casual interest in knowing and using the 'right word'. I rediscovered reading for enjoyment and personal development in October 1985." He shared frustration about their inability to maintain the family journal: "The journals are quality ideas, but for us, were one more thing to deal with than we could allot time to. I honestly don't know where [ours] is." Her mother's love for reading and writing meshed with a lament about her present condition and an apology about the family journal.

> I humbly apologize for the lack of a journal. ... I love to write, and the thought of a journal is delicious. But I'm never quite realistic about the

> lifestyle we've chosen, how much demand there is on our resources, and how much it takes to get through. I'm not writing this to garner pity, I know you're a HARDworking Mom, too. I'm writing this more out of alarm for what I see happening to the parents and children around me. ... Gone are the chances to read and to just think, the time to read a few pages and let what we're read slowly settle into the pattern in our experiences. I still buy books, we have shelves of them, but it has taken on a somewhat sad and pointless tone to have them sitting there staring at me with their messages and not having even the time to dust them. ... I think we run the chance of losing the beauty of reading, the thought that life can spare us for a couple of hours while we curl up with a good book and hot tea (or an icy Dr. Pepper).

Clearly, Betty's interest in reading and writing, generally her love of learning, grew from the rich, expectant, loving home life she shared with her parents. Her mother's poignant observations reminded me of Ben Franklin's message, causing me to pause and consider how I was choosing to spend my time, professionally and personally, and how I choose to spend the time of children entrusted to my care.

Dost thou love life?
Then do not squander time,
for that's the stuff life is made of.

There were books to be dusted and read.

And Continues in School

Three months before Betty presented me with her story, *My Book* , she had arrived in our classroom with obvious, anticipatory pleasure. Her sparkling eyes, smiling face, and effervescent giggle clearly proclaimed, "I am ready for first grade! Let's get going!"

A strong literacy foundation was apparent during Betty's assessment early in the school year, examining such skills as letter and sound recognition, reading color words, number identification (Appendix N), and beginning consonant sound identification (Appendix O). She also demonstrated a capacity to recall literacy

information previously taught; on the assessment which asks students to write assorted sounds, words, and punctuation introduced during the first few days of school, she scored 18 / 20 (90%) (Appendix P). Betty's total assessment score was 94%, ranking her third in the class of eighteen.

On an additional assessment determining her present ability to read random words from graduated vocabulary lists (Slosson, 1963), she correctly read the word, "look", but attempted to read three others, reading "is" for see; "hurry" for here; and "when" for want. These attempts indicated that Betty had some understanding of two reading strategies. First, the written word should "make sense". Some students attempt to read a word, and in the process, create something foreign or strange sounding rather than offering a meaningful, closely related or familiar word. Second, Betty had a grasp of consonant sounds and applied this understanding to her reading; she clued into the "s" from see, and additionally applied the beginning consonant sounds of "h" and "w" from here and want.

Although Betty read only one word on the vocabulary list assessment, from the beginning of the year she wrote complete sentences in both her school and home journals. On the second day of school she wrote: "I love my mom and dad. I love my dog and I love my cat, too." Her first home journal entry was "I love my mom and dad. I love Mrs. Jeffrey." and later, "Look at the dog. Look at the cat." Strengths of her writing included understanding that written language progresses from left to right, words are separated with spaces, abstract words are real ("at", "the"), and there is a message component to written language. The charts she created in both journals, similar to our classroom management chart, also exemplified her understanding of the written word as meaningful.

Naturally, Betty's father and mother had high expectations for her literacy development. "I hope that Betty is constantly challenged with interesting reading material and that she receives the needed encouragement." (Dad), and "I'd like Betty to keep the voracious appetite she has to learn new things, and to build her self esteem and confidence. She needs to 'find her voice' to cope with the world she's inherited" (Mom).

It was not difficult to challenge Betty. She consistently responded positively to ideas. Suggest handwriting practice, and Betty's efforts would appear on my desk and in her journals. Casually mention writing a letter, and Betty

typically followed through. When introducing an author, suggest that the students could write books, and Betty's creative thinking became almost visible. It was after such a suggestion, followed by a parent letter explaining how stories written at home would be recognized at school (Appendix R), that *My Book* was created.

Throughout our research period and beyond, a steady stream of books and written work passed through the classroom door between home and school. A set of old, sequentially developed readers supported her quickly developing reading skills, and she checked out numerous books from both our classroom and school libraries. Story writing was augmented with sentence construction based on rhyming words, for example, cat, rat, fat, sat, flat, scat was created into the sentence, "The fat cat sat on the rat before the rat could scat." Betty and her parents seemed to be enjoying experimenting with our language.

Betty's reading skills increased more rapidly than her parents expected, which was described by her mother on the second survey. The thread of constructivist theory seems to weave through her observations.

> Betty has eagerly attacked reading, but she is catching on even faster than we were prepared for! She is sounding out much more difficult words than I thought possible. It's as if she learned the 'pieces' over several years (letters, sounds, writing) and suddenly it all clicks together and becomes one, all at once. It also strikes me how she uses pictures in a book or the context of the sentence to 'guess' a word she can't read - sometimes it's a different word than what's on the page but it still works in the story.

Betty understood that her reading should make sense to her; as Gallimore and Tharp (1990) note: "Reading is both the condition and process of acquiring meaning" (p. 194). She was fortunate that her mother seemed to appreciate her efforts to make meaning.

Coupled with her quickly developing understanding, learning to read was a genuine thrill for Betty! As the school weeks progressed, it became increasingly common to find her nestled with a book during a room break or when her work was completed. She enjoyed sharing her pleasure with others, willingly reading to them or helping them with a word they wanted to read or write. Mother's description of her enthusiasm was graphic: "I haven't seen Betty so excited since she learned to walk. I thought she'd be pleased with herself, but she's actually excited, (jumps up and down, squeals, hugs us), when she reads something new."

Our child-parent-teacher partnership supported Betty during her explosive transition from emergent literacy to conventional reading. During this period, her parents' understanding of literacy development changed. Her father wrote, "Not being a trained educator, I didn't realize how rapidly literacy is developed in a few short months. We've long since read to Betty, but I've never had to think about the many ways 'literacy' is developed in a child of six or seven years of age." Her mother added, "Reading has helped her self-esteem so much. She doesn't show signs of being pressured into it or stressed. We're not 'driving' Betty's book time - she's 'demanding' (requesting) it. She is self-choosing writing and reading over TV (thank goodness!) more and more."

When Betty's father reflected on the research period, he made of list of things which promoted our partnership. They were:

- The Lippincott books (the set of old, sequentially developed readers)
- Parent-teacher conferences
- Homework
- Receiving completed, graded work
- Can see progress
- Coach Betty and congratulate her on her hard work.

Her father sought Betty's reflective input, and she added:

- Doing pages like "Look at the Cat" (They were short stories which I had developed from selected vocabulary and which were some of the earliest work sent home.)

When asked what things seemed to interfere with our partnership, he listed: parent's jobs, chores at home, tiredness, and having to sleep. Her mother reiterated her concern with time: "I still write, but like this short letter, it takes place at 11:30 at night. Some nights the laundry and dishes win out, some nights sleep, but tonight the need to let you know some of what I might have said in a journal seems more pressing."

During our research study, due to Betty's rapidly expanding literacy development, family involvement with her literacy changed.

> We've read to Betty since her first year on this earth. We've allowed her, or better stated, have gotten out of the way when she wanted to read, recently. She also enjoys typing letters on the computer. She occasionally plays "Reader Rabbit" on the computer, too. Her mother has her writing

"thank you" notes for Christmas presents from relatives and friends. Her mother warmly summarizes: "I am comforted knowing that Betty shares wonderful learning experiences in her classroom and her reading skills are blossoming."

Sharing the Love of Reading

By the spring, it was not surprising that Betty's reading was outstanding; on the vocabulary assessment (Slosson, 1963), her reading grade equivatent was 4.4. She enjoyed reading, writing and sharing stories throughout the year, while continuing to support other children with their literacy development.

Her family blessed me with numerous gifts during the year, including their friendship. A wooden apple sits near my desk with the message: Teachers are precious people who cause joyful happenings in the hearts of children. An additional gift, a framed bit of calligraphy, imparts our shared value - reading.

> The greatest gift is the passion for reading.
> It is cheap, it consoles, it distracts, it excites,
> it gives you knowledge of the world and experience of a wide kind.
> It is moral illumination.
>
> - Elizabeth Hardwick

And final food for thought from Betty's mother:

> When I think of the books that have meant the most to me in my time, they are decidedly 'unnecessary', for example: Jonathan Livingston Seagull, The Way of the Peaceful Warrior, The Secret Garden, The Black Stallion, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, Science and Health, Nop's Trials, The Dictionary (really!), Five Little Peppers and How They Grew, The Christmas Carol, Kinship with All Life, etc. How could I have really had any kind of life without those books? So, I want to pass on to Betty a love of books and reading and taking time to let what the author is saying sink in.

I think about the books that have meant the most to me, and wonder what ones will be Betty's, and what ones are yours.

<u>Ben</u>

I was lost in thought when his gentle tap on my shoulder catapulted me back to reality. We had decided to make a mural of our new school building for open house. The huge expanse of blue background paper lay before me, next to the brown for our roof and brick. How to design the multilateral roof line, I wondered. As I sat on the child's chair, deep in contemplation, the children were moving on to other areas of personal interest, designing swing sets, roadways, sidewalks, children, busses, the flagpole, parking lots, cars, trees, the front entrance, and so on. My perplexing mission was to provide the basic building, the foundation of the work.

"How about this, Mrs. Jeffrey?" Ben's out stretched hand presented the solution.

I turned to see his offering, a two by four inch penciled rendition of our school building, With amazement and affection, I exclaimed, "Ben! That's it! It's wonderful! Thank you! How did you do it?"

"It was easy. I just tried it, and it worked," he replied proudly.

"May I share this with the others?"

His beaming face was a clear response. "Boys and girls, come take a look at Ben's plan for our building. It's perfect for our mural. Let's give him a hand!"

The children gathered round to view the miniature masterpiece, and applauded their approval. "Nice job, Ben!" "Way to go!"

He'd used a piece of available scrap paper for his design, and although the sketch was small in dimension, it was large in consequence. With confidence, I turned the basic building design work over to him.

From that moment on, any concerns or questions regarding the mural were referred to Ben, our Chief Architect and Design Consultant.

First Grade Once

A golden opportunity had appeared, buoying up Ben's confidence. Such moments were important to the boy who had already spent two years in school before he arrived at our door. This classroom would be his second first grade experience. With an April birthday, he would be the oldest student in the class,

celebrating his eighth birthday the following spring.

According to a pre-school evaluation, Ben had been ready to begin kindergarten; his scores were 97% on both the motor and language development sections. And generally, kindergarten had been a positive experience; his teacher wrote, "Ben is a happy student and a pleasure to teach. He continues to make progress and is excited about learning."

His report card, however, indicated he struggled with the work habits of completing tasks, cleaning up his work area, and taking care of materials and equipment, and the social skill of following class rules. By the end of the year, Ben was demonstrating progress toward learning the names of upper and lower case letters and their associated sounds, literacy skills many kindergartners have mastered by that time.

During the following year's experience in first grade, his difficulties with work habits continued and deepened. Of specific concern were working independently, listening attentively, and using time wisely. His overall language arts grade was below grade level throughout the year. Especially troublesome were areas related to reading well orally, reading independently and for enjoyment, communicating ideas in writing, writing independently, and forming numbers and letters correctly.

In December, his teacher wrote, "Ben is just beginning to gain confidence in himself. He is still depending on me when I know he has the ability". In the spring she added, "Ben is having problems listening attentively. He also lacks interest in what we are doing. When I can work with him one on one, he can be a really good worker."

Ben received literacy support services during the fall and winter through the Chapter I program, federally funded support for small groups of students, and in the spring through the Reading Recovery program, individualized county sponsored support based on the emergent literacy work of Marie Clay. By June, noticeable progress had been made. His reading recovery teacher's report contained the following phrases: "good control of reading strategies, focusing on meaning, searches and cross-checks at point of difficulty, uses what he knows to problem solve, consistently examines pictures for information and talking aloud to make sense of text, very independent reader, perceives himself as a reader, enjoys reading to others." Regarding writing strategies, she added, "generates a

sentence easily, assumes writing task with few prompts, spends valuable time talking and discussing the words which affect his score on timed tests, hears sounds in words, consistently says words slowly when writing."

She concludes her report with information related to his classroom experience. Summary phrases include, "classroom teacher is impressed with reading strategies and ability to read fluently, concern with lack of maturity, very little work completed unless one on one, considering retention."

Before school began in the fall, I met Ben's previous first grade teacher. She explained that the decision to retain him had been extremely difficult for his parents: "They cried." His Chapter I teacher had encouraged them to consider retention, believing he was a "bright child who wants to please".

Ben's first grade teacher also knew his fifth grade sister, whom she described as "very bright and quick, very independent". Ben was "very young, very sweet and loving, very much a baby, very bright". This final description was supported by Ben's scores on an ability assessment taken during the year, ranging from high average (quantitative 73%) to high (verbal 89%; nonverbal 89%).

During this year in first grade, he frequently forgot things, like his back pack on the bus, or his lunch box in the room, which often lead to tears. He would also cry if "pushed too hard". His classroom teacher believed Ben could be in the top third of his new first grade class, and that he would respond well to being a class leader and helper to others.

First Grade Twice

Considering Ben was almost seven and one half when we met, I was surprised at his rather frail stature, mischievous behavior, and affectionate nature: He had thin arms and legs; it was not unusual to find him crawling under desks for no particular reason; and regardless of the difficulties he might be having, usually for not following directions, a random, ready hug usually greeted me. He adjusted easily and seemed happy to be in our first grade classroom.

Ben's fall assessment was strong; 91% on the items evaluated (Appendixes N, O & P), ranking him fifth in the class. He read 11 words on the graduated vocabulary list, a small number considering his spring reading report. They were: see, look, can, want, three, run, jump, is, up, ball, play. He skipped over the

words: mother, little, here, come, one, baby, down, make, help. Ben's fine motor control was outstanding; his handwriting was meticulous and he was able to perform detailed cutting work. Initially he did not seem interested in writing words; his first school journal entries were detailed drawings and number writing.

Placement in our classroom seemed appropriate; his maturity level appeared to be similar to his classmates, and his fall assessment indicated that his literacy development should progress more easily for him this year.

The Parents' Perspective

As might be expected, Ben's parents were very hopeful for a positive and productive second experience in first grade. "We would love to have Ben enjoy reading himself. And to increase his confidence in his reading ability. Ben has a wonderful imagination. I would like to see him write about his stories."

It could be implied from the phrase "enjoy reading" that, to his mother, Ben did not particularly enjoy reading either during his previous first grade experience or the following summer. The notion of desire to read is a powerful one; indeed, Trelease (1985) describes it as the " ... prime mover, the magic ingredient" (p. 6). We must help children learn to read, but also we must support them in wanting to read.

There may be a subtle interplay between desire and confidence which is difficult to separate. Will Ben's desire to read hopefully increase as his confidence raises, and if so, how can we support an increase in confidence? Or will his confidence improve as his desire to read grows and he works more diligently at it, and if so, how can we support an increase in desire? Somehow we must try to help increase Ben's desire to read and write, and improve his confidence with reading and writing.

His mother's expectation that Ben enjoy reading was a reflection of her childhood, where reading was a natural and normal part of family life. "As a child I always saw both of my parents reading. I think this led to my love of reading." The value of reading in Ben's family was evident by the time and effort put forth.

> Now that I have children, I hope to have them love reading as much as I do. Because of this I have read to them since they were very small. Ben loves to be read to and is enjoying reading more and more. ... We read together

> and practice the different skills to figure out words.

Speaking and listening were valued literacy skills as well: "We encourage Ben to tell us about his day and applaud his accomplishments."

Because the family had previously experienced first grade, they had some thoughts on how the first grade program could be strengthened. His mother wrote,

> I think more reading teachers should be available for the slower first grade readers. Since Ben was in first grade last year, he had experience in Chapter I and a few weeks in Reading Recovery. He made a great deal of progress in Reading Recovery because of the one on one interaction with a teacher.

Students who are repeating first grade are ineligible for participation in the Reading Recovery program, and generally score too high for membership in the Chapter I group. This was the case for Ben as he entered our class. The support he received would need to come from his classmates, his family, and his teacher.

The Teeming Trio

Ben's journey of confidence building, increase in desire and growth with literacy development was a pleasure for us to observe and support. Step by step, he advanced in an overall positive and productive direction.

I understood his mischievous behavior more clearly following the evening of parent orientation in mid - September. When asked what his parents would like me to know about him, his mother responded, "Ben loves to play make believe with his sister. They travel to other planets, under the sea and to all types of strange and wonderful places." Perhaps he traveled to some of these magical spots while crawling under our desks! Somewhere during my time with Ben I began to view him as a sweet, friendly, somewhat immature, impish character; perhaps this perspective sprouted roots on this evening.

A few weeks later, during our fall parent-teacher conference, the results of our fall assessment were shared. It was pleasant for Ben's parents to see his score near the top of the class, and we shared our hopes for a successful year. They raised some concerns related to his reading by describing certain behaviors exhibited at home: he didn't really seem motivated to read, he knew a word on one page and not on the next, and he did not like to reread books he was practicing.

Perhaps some of Ben's behaviors stemmed from frustration with reading; watching other first graders regularly surpass you could be very disheartening. Two strategies, which had been described in the fall parent letter (Appendix Q) and which might help relieve their concerns, were discussed: work for short blocks of time on reading, perhaps 10 minutes, take a break and return to the work later; and in order to keep the family work experience as positive as possible, stop work when either Ben or his parent begin to feel frustration. His parents agreed to try these suggestions. Overall, Ben's mother and father were optimistic regarding their decision to repeat his first grade experience, and we agreed to try and facilitate as positive and productive an experience for him as possible.

On the evening following our conference, his mother made her first journal entry, highlighting a positive step Ben had taken and which he wanted on record.

> October 10 - This is my first journal entry. Ben told me to write this. We are here together in his room - he is drawing a Power Ranger and writing a story. He was not interested in reading tonight but he wanted to make sentences from the words in the back of Sad Sam [one of the old, sequentially developed readers]. He made the sentence, "A pup is up" and then asked if he could add an "s" to pup so he could make up the sentence "To pups ran" Even though it is not the number two, I was very excited he thought of making pup plural.

Two days later, a spark of delight greeted his mother: "When I got home from an errand tonight, Ben greeted me at the door of his room with, 'Mom, I've read *Mud Pies* two times!!! It was easy!' So I had him read it to me and he did so with a lot of enthusiasm and excitement. And he really enjoyed it." The subtle interplay of desire and confidence seemed to be at work.

A few days later, he "... dug through his closet and found the flash cards I bought last year. All of last year he avoided playing with them no matter what game I made of it. But tonight he had [his sister] holding them up and he was sounding words.... " An impetus for learning seemed to have ignited, and by the end of the month his mother noted an even greater change.

> October 26 - I want to write about this morning. We were ready early and Ben asked if we could read *Mrs. Brice's Mice* . I agreed. This was the first time I had read this book with him. He was sounding words I would never have thought he could. He read sentences without the usual "pause and

look around" between them. It was very exciting. I feel today was a real turning point.

Indeed, Ben's interest in reading *Mrs. Brice's Mice* was significant. *Mud Pies* is a delightful, colorful, funny, fast moving, easy to read beginner book. Many first grade children have enjoyed reading and rereading it. On the other hand, *Mrs. Brice's Mice* is a charming story, yet much more detailed, lengthy, and challenging for a beginning reader. It is not a book I selected for Ben, rather one he elected to check out from our classroom library. The fact that Ben was attempting to read this book indicated that his motivation, desire, and confidence were increasing, and that the materials from our classroom and strategies we had engaged seemed to support this growth.

At school, we shared joy, delight, pleasure, and especially those ever ready hugs as he returned materials from home and demonstrated his achievements. Ben was also beginning to show more interest in pleasure reading. Although he did not bury himself in a book during our quiet reading time, he increasingly seemed to enjoy the opportunity to leaf through various books and magazines; illustrations in the Zoo Book series especially caught his eye.

Generally, Ben did not appear to enjoy spending time with creative writing at school. He managed to busy himself with cutting or drawing projects during own journal writing time. What few entries he made centered on thorough, detailed drawings and illustrations rather than writing words, sentences, or stories.
The writing he did accomplish demonstrated well developed skills, including left to right movement, space between words, abstract words as real, writing as meaningful communication, and sentence structure. In mid - October he wrote in his journal: "My daddy bought me a power ranger costume. It was the red ranger." Samples from his efforts on the computer writing program include, "I'm going to be the red ranger for Halloween. My costume has white diamonds. The metal part has a gold picture of a dinosaur." (and) "My dad made me a book that had me a commander. I made sure there was plenty of peanut butter and jelly on the ship before we left." This final example exemplifies some of the vivid imagination referred to by Ben's mother!

During break time in our classroom, he usually chose to either play with classroom toys, especially LEGOS, or work on a project of his choosing at his desk, which generally included drawing, coloring, cutting, or pasting. His

concentration with these projects would frequently wane. Ben enjoyed visiting with others (in fact, most of his interaction with other classmates seemed to be more social than academic), or moving back and forth between play and project. Spotting him under a desk somewhere remained a common occurrence during break time.

In fact, Ben could be found under a desk even during work time. Perhaps he dropped a pencil, his scissors, a crayon, or small piece of paper, and while retrieving it, would somehow simply not return. Concentration and focus seemed to be easily interrupted at work and play. This lead to some warnings, usually for not following directions or talking during work time. In fact, although he rarely lost a break for a serious offense or for getting three warnings in one day, his total number of warnings ranked him the fourth highest in the class by the end of the second grading period.

Despite these distractions, progressive literacy development continued. He generated a wonderful story at home in early November, and brought it to school with a huge smile and hug. The pride in his accomplishment was palpable! It was a challenge to read due to the liberties he took with spelling and creative naming, but he managed to share it with us. You will learn more about Ben through this piece!

> Jason is fighting Puddies. All the Puddies were gone. And Jason was nice. Another Jason was mean. The nice Jason morfed. Mean Jason grew. Nice Jason said, "We need Denozords." All the Zords hooked together and made Megazoid. A sword came down from the sky. It destroyed the mean Jason. He fell and blew up. Another monster came down from the sky. It is called Pludacorn. A sword appeared in Jason's hand. Zordon pulled Jason to the command center. Alpha 5 put a sparking shield on Jason. He teleported back to the fight. The Pludacorn shot Jason but Jason slashed Pludacorn's horn off. Reda Repolsa saw Pludacorn's horn on the ground. She made Pludacorn grow. Jason called, "We need Denozords!" Then up the Zords got together and made Megazoid. Pludacorn changed Magazord. A sword came down from the sky. Magazord swung the sword near Pludacorn's face and Pludacorn fell and blew up and the town was safe.

An utterly charming note was written by our author at the conclusion of this story:

"Writing this story made me proud." How sweet this journey of literacy development can be!

Ben's strong verbal abilities, evident throughout his story, were also apparent during his explanation of the word "morfed": "It means changed into the suits they wear, like metamorphosis - change." We had studied insects in September, learning about and witnessing the wondrous metamorphosis of a monarch caterpillar forming a chrysalis and later emerging as our butterfly. Ben's use of morfed was quite fitting!

He received "Seal of Approval" and "I read this to my principal" stamps from our principal after sharing his adventure story with him, and later wrote on the computer, "Mr. [Principal], you are my favorite principal because you always give me a stamp." His mother further described his delight, and noted my suggestion that, to facilitate an easier read and for future reference, she "walk through" Ben's stories with him after they were finished and pencil in spellings of the especially difficult to decipher words.

> Ben was so proud of his Power Ranger story and the fact Mrs. J. took it [to copy] and he got two stamps from [his principal]. He worked very hard on it. He was surprised that he had written so many words. I had him read it to me and I wrote it out again so in the future we would know what he wrote.

Among the three of us, an effective child-parent-teacher partnership had formed and appeared to be providing an environment for Ben's own literacy metamorphosis. Although he did not demonstrate a strong interest in writing stories at school, he continued to write detailed sentences, for example: "I am a Bobcat. I have a shirt. I have a hat. I have a neckerchief. I want to make an Indian headband." (and) "My day care is selling Christmas trees now. I was in the Christmas parade."

In conjunction with writing progress, growth with reading steadily continued. The story of Morris the Moose exemplifies some of the progress taking place.

> November 8 - Ben took the initiative tonight and read the first few pages of *Morris Goes to School* without me telling him. He really enjoyed it. I told him we would read half of it tonight to give him a goal - and he wanted to keep going - he said he wasn't tired - he wanted to keep reading.

> November 9 - This morning Ben was ready for school a few minutes early. Again, on his own, he got his Morris book and started reading. This time he read silently while I read the paper. I feel this is another turning point. Tonight, we finished Morris and he did an excellent job sounding words he did not know.

Ben seemed to be on his way toward the land of pleasure reading!

Our partnership was supported with curriculum materials which were regularly exchanged between school and home as Ben and his mother worked together as consistently as possible. An interference with our partnership she identified was her full time work outside the home.

> ... there were not always enough hours in the evening to spend the time with Ben and there was often a feeling of quilt on my part because we did not get to read together. And on the other side I felt guilty about spending so much time with Ben that I rarely had time to help [his sister] with her homework or just to offer the help even though she didn't need it.

Although she felt frustrated and guilty at times, overall his mother was pleased with each step he took toward independent reading, writing, and sharing about his day.

On the middle survey she noted,

> We are so excited with Ben's progress in reading, writing, and speaking. We have seen much more improvement than we expected at this point. He tells us about the day in great detail where it use to be one word responses.

And about this time, Ben surprised his mother with a special gift, which hopefully alleviated some of her guilt.

> [Tonight] after his bath, Ben decided he wanted to read and, after a very long week, I did not feel like working with him. I was too tired. I thought he would put the book down and I would feel guiltier than I already did. But he surprised me again by going off and reading on his own.

Perhaps that moment will be a happy memory for his mother!

Although great progress was occurring, the journey was not always smooth. Occasional bumps in the road occurred, at school and home, but they were able to be negotiated. At school, he continued to struggle with concentration, following directions, talking, and staying on task. The few times which warranted a lost break were hard on Ben; he was usually despondent and sometimes cried. Even

receiving a warning could occasionally hurt his feelings. I felt the need to carefully guide him through a problem when the need arose; he often seemed sensitive to criticism. Regardless of the day's events, we always ended it with a big hug, and I never had to seek it; as usual, Ben's were ever ready.

Some of the rocky road at home was described in his mother's journal entries. On December 10th she noted how "very frustrated" she gets when Ben guesses what word he thinks should come next. "Most of the time he knows what the word is if he takes the time to look at it, he just says the first thing he thinks of." Again, on the 13th, frustration surfaced, this time with Ben: "This was not a good night for Ben. He guessed at words without looking at the letters and then got very frustrated when I made him try again. So we put the books away in hopes that tomorrow would be better."

Overall, Ben's parents were very pleased with his growth, as you can imagine. When asked to identify things which helped promote our partnership, response centered on our positive focus, the materials sent home, and Ben's hard work.

> The encouragement from you to show Ben he could do it. Supplying us with books, word lists, and short stories to help Ben and give him quick successes, and Ben's' hard work. I think the quick success books that give the children a sense of accomplishment are wonderful. I know Ben has done well with them. All children, and adults too, need the positive reinforcement completing something gives us.

Family involvement with literacy changed somewhat during our study period, and parental understandings and expectations were enriched: "We encourage him to write stories now and I feel we are doing better in our expectations and understanding of how Ben is doing."

His mother's final journal entry summarizes the exciting journey we had taken thus far, and concludes with a blissful prophesy.

> This is my last entry and it ends on a high note. Ben read very well tonight and enjoyed the time we spent reading together. I think Ben's reading has improved so much during these first three months. And his writing is so much more complete. And most important, he enjoys it, and I think will continue to do so in the years to come.

Mary

"I think you'd better come, Mrs. Jeffrey."

Our reading teacher's words caught me off guard. The morning was almost frantic with excitement and activity. Children were nervously arriving at our new school and locating classrooms. Student orientation a few days earlier had helped "break the ice", yet for many, apprehension and anxiety prevailed on their young faces.

"Do I really need to?" I whispered plaintively. The classroom was swamped with children and parents.

"Yes, you do." There was no doubt in her voice. "There's a girl from your class who needs help."

As we ventured toward the door, my curiosity rose. After 11 first days of first grade, I wondered what this one had in store.

Standing back from the entrance was a woman I'd never met. She was crying. I looked to the right. Another woman I'd never met was video-taping. I looked to the left. Mary and her mother were locked in an embrace, and both were sobbing.

Like little bubbles of conversation in cartoons, I wanted to snatch mine back as it left. "Are you taping this?" I asked incredulously.

Gasp! My comment was instantly preserved for posterity! Then I was lost for words.

Who were these other women? Why was everyone crying - yes, the woman video taping was weeping as well. Four females in tears outside my classroom door on the first day of school, in conjunction with my faux pas and the commotion behind me, left me momentarily speechless.

As an angel, our guidance counselor appeared and whisked everyone away. "Let's take a walk," she offered.

Response was swift and sure. "YES." The gathering immediately set in motion and faded down the hallway.

Thank you, Angel.

As they ventured off, with sniffling and blowing noses, I turned back to the room's activity and wondered, "What just happened?"

Entering and Exiting

Eventually Mary silently entered the room of her own volition that first day of school. Her tears subsided, but seemed to hover close to the surface all day long. When school was finally over, she returned to her mother's, aunt's and grandmother's arms with obvious, unbounded relief; everyone survived the traumatic experience.

From that day on, for more weeks than I can recall, her mother tentatively escorted and, six and one half hours later, joyously greeted her at our classroom door. Angel attempted to woo her into holding their ritualistic, anguished partings and subsequent joyful greetings in the main lobby, removed from the rest of the class. "The lobby really is an appropriate place for Mary to be dropped off and picked up," she offered.

When this did not bring a change, Angel took another step. At the conclusion of school one day, she visited with Mary's mother. "Tomorrow I'll pick Mary up in the lobby and escort her to class, and bring her to you at the end of the day. This might help her with the transition."

Before school began the next day, Mary's mother marched into our classroom. "Mrs. Jeffrey, I don't want anyone telling me where I can or can not drop off my daughter. I will escort her to your door."

Well, that was that.

Background Information

Looking back, my introduction to Mary began with an ominous note from my principal: See me sometime about a student you will have - Mary. (This type of note frequently brings a challenging experience to my life!) Upon inquiry, I learned that Mary had never been enrolled in a public or private school setting; home schooling had been the avenue of choice for her parents. I was referred to a kindergarten teacher who had contact with the family shortly before school began. Mary had a March birthday, and because she had never been in school, her parents were concerned about her grade placement.

The kindergarten teacher's assessment and personal perceptions offered insight. Mary was a "very sweet kid and eager as a student". She knew most

letter names, but "not really any sounds" nor any sight words. The decision to keep her out of kindergarten had been influenced by the prospect of a full day at school; her mother had been a teacher and "did not like full day kindergarten." Mother seemed "easy to work with and open to suggestions"; Mary seemed "very shy and wouldn't answer until sure she was right". Mother's biggest concern was Mary's "willingness to speak out"; the kindergarten teacher thought a "speech impediment" may be involved.

This information, though helpful, did not prepare me for Mary and her family's reaction to the first day of school. As time went by, in spite of the fear and anxiety she may have felt, Mary arrived each morning, and "hung in there"; her attendance was perfect the first eight weeks of school.

The Silent Scenario

Mary rarely spoke at school, communicating more through drawing or physical gestures. Coloring, cutting, and gluing various class projects, while working along side others, was enjoyable. Playing with others was easy; successful strategies were employed to solve problems or answer questions. For example, she might gently guide someone to an area in question, point and shrug her shoulders. The child would ask different questions until they hit upon the right one: "Do you need help, Mary?" "Don't you understand?" "Do you want me to play with you?" The understanding, support, and tolerance children often offer to those in need is exemplary and joyful to behold.

Like the children, Mary and I developed a relationship with negligible verbal communication from her. Attempts were made to help her feel as secure and welcome in our classroom as possible: warm, friendly greetings; patient questioning to elicit her usually nonverbal response; respectful consideration of her needs; support and encouragement with her efforts; praise when she shared her accomplishments; and a daily hug as she left our room. As time passed, she seemed to become increasingly more at ease.

Her mother's first journal entry in September was rich in description, offering a guide to understanding the transition Mary was experiencing.

> Mary's first attempt at expressing herself was through her art. She drew lots of hearts, pictures of her cat, baby hamsters, and 'little people' at

school. She later memorized names of friends, words her teacher wrote on the board and would write them down at home and ask what they were. Her shyness in the new situation at school intimidated her so she "saved" questions till she was with family. At this stage in the school year, she was trying to learn the "rules" of school and was very much like a sponge - trying to absorb it all and was exhausted. I found her coming home from school and immediately going back to her familiar toys and slipping into imagination land - carefree land.

Considering the tremendous change in their lives, it seemed Mary and her family were adjusting.

Not speaking did interfere with understanding Mary's level of literacy development. The kindergarten teacher's observation appeared accurate; Mary did not seem to answer if she was not sure. Of the 52 alphabet letters, she correctly identified 24, but offered no corresponding sound information, electing to give no response, or a shrug, and she read one color word - red (Appendix N). When four consonants were visually offered, and the task was to circle the beginning sound associated with a word (for example: z, m , l, k - zoo, Appendix O), she correctly identified 12 of 20 (60%). Mary's understanding of letter sounds, specifically the ability to generate letter sounds and identify the consonant representing the beginning sound of words, was below average, based on the information obtained. When asked to recall and write sounds, words and punctuation without the aide of visual support, her score was 8 of 20 (40% - Appendix P).

Her assessment total was 36%, ranking her lowest in the class. One of my obligations early in the school year is to provide the names of children who could benefit from literacy support through Chapter I or Reading Recovery services. Mary's name joined those with scores indicating the most need. I shared the results with her mother by telephone, letting her know we would discuss the specifics of the assessment at our parent teacher conference. During our conversation, she seemed unopposed to the idea of additional evaluation by our reading teacher which could help determine how best to meet her daughter's needs. Her signature was required before additional testing could take place, and the necessary letter was sent home with Mary on the afternoon of our conversation.

However, following discussion and consideration at home, her parents decided not to permit additional evaluation of Mary. I visited with both parents regarding this issue, briefly with her mother when she returned the letter indicating "No", and more extensively with her father the following afternoon. He stopped by unexpectedly, and we had an opportunity to share our mutual concerns.

My perspective was that valuable literacy information might be gained via additional evaluation. Attempts were made to reassure Mary's father that the assessment setting would be private, and as comfortable and pleasant as possible. Her father noted that he and his wife did not want to appear uncooperative, but were deeply concerned about Mary becoming "labeled" early in her educational career, which they believed could occur if she were to receive support services. Also, they were concerned about confidential information placed in her cumulative file which would "stay with her". He referenced a problem they had experienced with Mary's fourth grade brother; a few years before, an assessment of some type had caused his wife and him a great deal of distress. In order to find resolution, they had to address their concerns with the assistant superintendent.

Would they consider approval for the assessment, for the purpose of gaining information, without further placement in a program? Mary's father took this idea home to share with his wife, but it, too, was rejected. Again the concern was "labeling"; they know "teacher's talk."

With respect for their concerns and right to refuse services, a compromise was reached. Mary's mother would work with her regularly at home. Reading and writing materials and strategies would be provided, and Mary would be allowed to progress at a pace most comfortable for her.

The School - Home Connection

The supportive environment for learning at home was influenced by her mother's personal experiences with literacy which "started with her parents". As a child, she and her siblings "... spent many 'dog day' summer afternoons on a cool street reading books, telling stories, and making scrap books." Likewise, Mary and her fourth grade brother have "... grown up with books, crafts ... and the freedom to choose the activities they want to be involved in."

Allowing freedom of choice stemmed from her philosophy regarding child rearing:

> I'm a firm believer that children can't be pushed into activities they're not interested in. They're "pleasers" - they'll do piano and the things their parents want them to do but they won't thrive in these activities and I'm not so sure they'll retain what they've been taught - so what have they learned?

It seemed our mutual decision to support Mary's literacy development at home at a pace comfortable for her aligned with her mother's philosophy. Our child-parent-teacher partnership was evolving.

In spite of the relaxed approach to literacy development we'd agreed to follow, expectations for Mary's progress were high.

> In first grade I'm hoping Mary will improve all of her literacy skills. I want her to be able to pick up age appropriate books and read them with enjoyment and confidence. I want her to be able to express her creative ideas verbally and on paper. I want her to finish first grade with confidence in her skills and fond memories of her teacher and classmates.

Considering our point of departure on the first day of school and Mary's fall assessment, there was much to accomplish!

Mary's earliest writing consisted of copying words from the room's walls. A September project involved coloring a Jack in the Box, cutting him out, pasting him on writing paper, and writing something about him. She performed the first three tasks very carefully, but seemed confused about what to do next. I can still see her standing beside me, with paper in hand, shrugging her shoulders.

"Write a little about the Jack in the Box. Write anything you like," I offered.

When she returned, the words written on her paper were: sun, queen, paint, x-ray. These words were posted among the alphabet cards suspended from the ceiling.

"Thank you for trying, Mary. You wrote some words! Can you tell me something about your Jack in the Box?"

Mary made a soft humming sound.

I nestled in closely. "It's Okay. You can tell me. Tell me quietly, if you like."

"I like my Jack in the Box," she spoke softly.

"Great! Thank you, Mary!" I offered with a hug. "I'll write that for you here." Mary watched as I wrote her sentence at the bottom of her paper and reread it to

her after finishing, carefully pointing to each word.

"Would you like to try reading it?"

She nodded. I helped her point to each word as we quietly read what might have been the first sentence she'd originated and seen in print. "I like my Jack in the Box."

Rather than interjecting any negativity into the moment, I elected to wait and discuss the notion of avoiding words from the alphabet cards for this type of writing until a later date. Mary seemed rather anxious and we were just beginning to write.

Two days later, we did a similar project with a lion, except that a strip of rhyming words (play, day, may, say, etc.) accompanied the activity. This strip was to be pulled through the beast's mouth as, hopefully, the student practiced reading the words. As a class, we discussed the rhyming words, observing how they were the same and different. Then the children were encouraged to try and use a word or two from the word strip when they wrote about the lion, such as "The lion likes to play."

Mary began her work diligently, so I saved my bit of guidance regarding the alphabet cards, planning to offer it when she requested help, which I anticipated would occur. Instead, soon her work was over. On her paper were written the words: play, paint, queen, cat, yes. Play was from the word strip, paint and queen were from the alphabet cards, and yes was from the chalkboard; I had missed the opportunity. Again, I thanked Mary for her work, recognizing that she used the word play from the word strip. When asked what she wanted to say about her lion, she replied, more eagerly this time, "I like my lion. He is the best and I like him."

These two examples indicate that Mary was at a very early stage in her writing development. One emergent literacy description of various writing levels identifies copying as level three out of ten. At this point I did offer some guidance about the alphabet cards, but very carefully. It seemed she was trying her best to please.

As time passed, I increasingly began to wonder if Mary's reluctance to speak was tied less to a shyness of personality and more to a problem with articulation. I found it difficult to understand her the few times she spoke. Perhaps she realized this, which contributed to her reluctance to speak. A connection to her seemingly poor understanding of letter sounds could be related as well;

perhaps she could hear sounds accurately, but could not easily reproduce them and therefore, would not try. Or perhaps her hearing was affected. Could her difficulties with articulation connect with learning to read? She seemed unable to isolate the sound for "f", when attempting to read the word "fan"; despite hard effort, she was able to offer the word "van". The aide in the computer lab noted a similar observation; Mary was unable to isolate the sound for "s" as in "sun". Instead she called it "at" or "et".

Questions began multiplying. I discussed these thoughts with our speech pathologist who recommended I obtain written permission from her parent for an informal assessment of Mary's hearing and articulation development. Then, if it seemed warranted, I would prepare a formal referral. Perhaps Mary would qualify for speech and language support services.

My concerns were shared with Mary's mother, who indicated that she thought a hearing and articulation assessment would be fine, but she wanted to visit with the speech pathologist before signing an agreement. This conference occurred, an agreement was signed, Mary was screened and, although her hearing was appropriate, it did seem she could benefit from speech support services to help with articulation. It was early November before the informal assessment took place and a subsequent formal referral was completed and submitted.

During these months, Mary and her mother worked together regularly, and her reading and writing developed slowly but steadily. She returned materials to school with little fanfare, and read them to me, articulating as best she could. We moved through materials at a pace which seemed comfortable for her. Occasionally a stretch of time would pass with a lapse of materials returned; I sent reminder notes, such as: "How is this going? Please let me know if you are frustrated - we can change directions." (and) "How is this going? Do you need more time? Please let me know if you need help." Generally the item was soon returned, accompanied with her mother's initials or signature indicating accomplishment. Indeed, when checked, Mary was managing the materials well.

At one point, however, I did need to have Mary redo a book. Although she read the short story, she was unable to read a number of words from the word list at the end of the book. Perhaps she had auditorily memorized some of the story line. In October, her mother supported this possibility: "... she still continues to

memorize and is reluctant when challenged to 'sound' letters out; she has learned letters together are words, words contain vowels."

But by November, tremendous growth in reading and writing were demonstrated. Her mother exclaimed,

> Mary is reading - truly sounding out words and loving it! This has really broadened Mary's world. She no longer has to depend on her bother [or] parents to show her everything in the book. Mary sits in her rocker, (I'm assuming she's imitating her teacher) lines up her stuffed animals and babies and read to them. She gets at least 10 books and reads to me and shows the illustrations. It's so exciting!

Indeed, Mary was beginning to return her materials with an increasingly confident smile, and when asked to read to me, would reply, "Sure!"

Writing strategies advanced as well. On a clown project, she wrote: "I like my clown. My clown likes to look at me. I love my clown." When using the opposites of on and off, she authored: "The baby cat is on me. The baby cat is on my bed. The baby cat is off of me. The baby cat is off of my bed." She may have tapped into help from her classmates for help with her writing, a strategy I support. Her mother observed,

> Her writing is coming at a slower pace. She hasn't quite made the connection yet and will 'find' words ... and try to put them into sentence structure but for the most part these sentences often don't make sense and are a 'struggle' to write.

Yet, writing was becoming a more meaningful activity for Mary. The days of copying this or that to fill up some space seemed to be gone.

Changes

Mary's excitement with learning and confidence grew as her literacy development progressed. After school, she would "... unload her back pack in the car and begin reading to her brother and mommy on the way home". Her mother's understanding of literacy development was changing during this time; Mary was teaching her the need to be patient during the learning process.

> I must admit - my children are three years apart in ages and I guess I forgot how much patience it takes to listen to your child struggle through words

> and letter sounds. I have to control myself because I want to *help* and say the word or sound. The few times I did - Mary was disappointed because she really wanted to do it herself. I'm convinced once the children are sparked and want to learn, they do it. They patiently and willingly do it. It's a beautiful process.

Indeed, during this beautiful process, we all learned from each other. I learned there are ways to circumvent what seems like an obvious course: Mary progressed without the school's support services. Mary's mother learned to be involved with her daughter in new ways; their time together was "...much more focused. Now we read specific library books, handouts, ... The parent and child seem more relaxed because we know what's expected". And Mary was learning to read and write conventionally.

Her literacy development flourished with the support of our child-parent-teacher partnership. The first day of school seemed like a strange dream; the tearful six year old was growing into a confident first grader. When asked to describe what things helped promote or interfere with our partnership, Mary's mother focused again on the need for patience.

> I'd say the most important thing [promoting our partnership] was allowing Mary to adjust - to be shy - to take in the situation - for the first month or so. This gave her a chance to observe, make new friends and to gain confidence and trust in her new school and more importantly her teacher. Testing and the desire to place in "special" programs the first month of school [interfered with the partnership]. Even though it's intended to help the student, it can be interpreted as "singling out" and the urgency for placement can force parents to reject the program immediately. Particularly with first graders - parents are inclined to question the validity of tests administered so early in the school year when there are so many adjustments occurring with the child.

Suggestions for change continued in this vein: "Delay testing until at least four to six weeks into the school year." The machinery of our fall assessment procedure seems to function without question, yet her mother's concerns warrant consideration. As educators, our need to organize and "get the ball rolling" may interfere with what is best for the student.

Her mother's final journal entry, a high complement, offers confirmation of

Shor's (1992) eloquent expression, "What students bring to school is where learning begins" (p. 44). I was heartened to receive affirmation that the constructivist theory to which I adhere is exemplified in action and evident to some.

> I must commend Mrs. J. on her approach of learning taking place at all levels and no matter what level you're on - it's a success to complete it and go to the next. Mary knows the different levels that her classmates are on and she's truly proud of those below and above her. She doesn't feel rushed or compelled to compete. She has confidence her teacher will allow her to progress at her own level - without embarrassment or stress - only love, encouragement, and positive praise when she completes her assignment. This is what a teacher should be!!

Happiness Is ...

Mary's charming chapter book, unrequested and independently written in the spring, exemplifies her tremendous growth.

My Pet Hamsters

The Hobby Shop

One day after school I went to the hobby shop. That's where I got my hamsters. It was fun.

Buying the Hamsters

When I found the right hamsters, I said to the man, are they a boy and a girl? The man said yes, they are. OK, I said. I said to my mom, can I buy them? Mom said yes. Yea! I said.

Getting the Supplies

When we bought the hamsters, we bought the food and the cedar chips and the water bottle and the cage. We almost spent all our money.

The Ride Home

When we bought the hamsters we went home.

Setting Up the Supplies

When we got home we set up the supplies. Then we put the hamsters in it.

Next Morning

When the next morning came I got to play with my hamsters before school starts.

Feeding the Hamsters

When I get home from school I feed the hamsters.

Cleaning the Cage

When we clean the cage we put the hamsters out of their cage. Then we give them things to build their next nest.

The New Babies

One day when Bobby's friends were coming over to play and when I picked up Heartdrop we found 18 pink baby hamsters. They were adorable.

Big Babies

Four weeks went by and soon the little babies were big.

We had a happy, confident author in our midst!

Although Mary never did blossom into a relaxed conversationalist, she did begin talking a bit more as the year progressed. Her demeanor and disposition revealed that she was increasingly happy and eager to come to school. She began to reciprocate our end of the day hug, which eventually grew into a spontaneous offering of them.

When her parents learned that receiving speech support meant she would have a "special education file", they brought the referral process to a screeching halt.

On the last day of school, Mary and her mother entered our classroom laden with gifts. They had prepared white visors for each of us, complete with our names and decorations. They were described as "autograph hats". Ball point pens were gathered, and the autographing began. Mine sits atop a file cabinet, where I can see the names of all my "First Grade Friends", as the hat is affectionately titled.

With pleasure for all, expectations for Mary had been met. She did "finish first grade with confidence in her skills and fond memories of her teacher and classmates."

Jim

"Do you have time to listen to me read, Mrs. Jeffrey?"

I was hunched over the work of another student. Joe and I were carefully meandering through his written text, hoping to decipher what he had in mind. It was a challenging task.

I recognized Jim's voice. His endearing question was reminiscent of Todd's "I can read this book" pronouncement a few weeks earlier. I turned to see his beaming, dark brown eyes and full smile. Deep satisfaction was in his voice. In his hand was the Troll "Now I Know" book, Story of Dinosaurs.

"Can you read that book, Jim?!" I knew the book contained some challenging vocabulary, including the names of various dinosaurs, yet his nod was strong and affirming. "Wait right there. Joe and I will finish this sentence and then he can take a break. He's ready for one, I bet." Joe smiled in agreement.

"OK."

Jim waited patiently, which was a rather unusual behavior for him to demonstrate. Typically he was on the move, full of energy and enthusiasm, and frequently headed in a direction not aligned with the general flow of expected classroom conduct; in his mother's words: "Jim acts like a big tough guy but is really a softy inside." He was emerging as a natural leader ("Come on, guys, let's do this!") and channeling his energy seemed to be on the educational agenda.

Joe and I rested our task a few moments later, and Jim invaded the already warm seat. As my arm encircled his shoulder, he began reading, with pleasure.

> *Now I Know - Story of Dinosaurs / Dinosaurs lived a long time ago. / Most dinosaurs were very big. / There were many kinds of dinosaurs. / No one ever saw a living dinosaur. / But we have found their bones. And the bones tell us about the dinosaurs. / Tyrannosaurus Rex was the King of the Dinosaurs. Tyrannosaurus had a big head, and long sharp teeth. / Tyrannosaurus walked on two legs, and liked to eat meat. / But not all dinosaurs ate meat. / Brontosaurus ate plants, and walked on four legs. ...*

As he turned pages, those deep eyes frequently glanced over with confidence. His "Can Do" attitude was definitely apparent. Occasionally he used picture clues to help him; when 'long sharp teeth' threatened to slow him down, a glance toward the menacing fangs lifted him on his way.

"Brontosaurus is such a difficult word. How do you know it so well?" I asked with wonder.

"Well, I've been interested in dinosaurs for a long time. And I already knew the names of some, so this book was easy for me. I saw another book about dinosaurs that showed a dinosaur biting another dinosaur. And then it showed how they dig up the fossils and stuff, and that's what I want to be when I grow up."

An Ignited Inclination to Read

Jim's interest in books may have been sparked by his mother, an avid, passionate reader since she was a young girl. "I always liked reading as a child. ... I read a lot. That was my hobby. I was an avid reader. That was the only thing I ever wanted to do ... get a book and lay on my bed and read."

Her daytime reading continued into the night as she took books to bed, frequently wanting to read beyond her appointed bedtime. Frustrated with the need to stop reading, a strategy surfaced as a possible remedy to her problem. Bring a lamp to bed, and prop it under the covers.

What's that smell? Oh, no!!! Fire!!!

"Maybe that was a warning, I don't know!" she later recounted.

Grandma loved to tell Jim this story. Once she reinforced it with a special gift: a flashlight!

"This is to read in bed with when your mom says you're not supposed to!" she laughingly shared with Jim. "Do that instead of having a lamp because your mother set the covers on fire!"

The Propensity Passes

Two stories exemplify the notion that Jim may have inherited his mother's tendency to dive into books. A favorite places him as a two year old, nestled with his granddaddy for a good read.

> ... when he was about two we read that book [something about the big bright strawberry] twice a day, for 17 days. We sat down with his granddaddy who was going to read that book to him and Jim started, and could not read it, of course, but could quote exactly, including the inflections

> that I used, that I read to him on every page ...and including all the way I would ... the expressions what I would use. It was hysterical! We were rolling on the ground with tears. It was so funny!

Jim's mother continued to love this vignette, laughing heartily throughout the telling.

Another story takes place about four years later. It is the summer before Jim begins first grade.

> From the beginning of the summer to the end ... we were always catching Jim's light turned back on at night when it's not supposed to be, with a stack of books in his bed. And I don't know, that's not a real serious offense. Or he gets out of bed and he leaves the door open so he can get light into his room. But in the morning when his bed is made, you always have to take a stack of books out that he's stuck down in the bed with him. He's always done that I guess the past year - easily the past year or two years.

The stacks of books available to Jim generated, in part, from regular trips to the public library.

> He's got his own library card, and he was so proud - he checked out books on his own card. He'll go to the library and check out all the dinosaur books. If they have a series, he'll check out all of them. And then one time it was all the whale books.

Jim was fed a steady dose of books from a wee boy. His mother, a homemaker and community volunteer, had read to her three sons, ages 12, 10 and 6 (Jim),

> ... ever since my older son was probably a few months old. We've always read out loud at night ... that's not usually something that we skip. ...
> We alternate between working on a chapter book and picture books. And even my 12 year old likes to listen to picture books. ... We've read James and the Giant Peach fairly recently. And we're working on A Christmas Carol. And we've read The Best Christmas Pageant Ever, which they loved. [Other favorites are] Dr. Dolittle; The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe, The Last Voyage and the other Narnia books; ... and Caddie Woodlawn, which we started many times but never finished. We've probably read the same few chapters four times. They like it, but ... maybe we start it at the wrong time.

In sharing this family time and good literature, Jim's mother wished to pass on her

love of reading to her sons. Yet, despite a consistent family reading routine, a fundamental hope, and a family financial commitment to purchasing books, her two older children did not seem to have the passionate love for reading Jim was demonstrating.

> I always wanted my kids ... to love books. And the older two enjoy it but maybe not as much as I ... and they're not unwilling readers ... maybe not as much as I had hoped, but Jim might. ... We've always had lots of books around and we have a separate category in our budget for books. They have magazines and books and a lot available. And the older two enjoy reading and they will do it by their own choice. That will be one of their choices. But they're not crazy about it like I would kind of hope that they would be.

The Jim I was getting to know clearly indicated that his mother's hope may find fruition in him.

Successful Strategies

During Jim's reading of *Story of Dinosaurs*, he maneuvered his way through text with an understanding that reading should make sense and sound right; written words fit together like the way we speak. When he read "Tyrannosaurus walking on two legs", he looked at me and stated with assurance, "That's not right!" Trying again, he self corrected to, "Tyrannosaurus walked on two legs". He looked again and said confidently, "That's better!" Undoubtedly, Jim's rich exposure to literature fostered and nurtured this understanding.

Not only did he have a fundamental understanding of how the written word should sound, when Jim entered first grade, he had a strong skill foundation which indicated that conventional reading and writing could be just below the surface. He easily accomplished all aspects of the fall assessment (Appendixes N, O &P) except for a few vowel sounds; his score of 96% ranked him second in the class. He read seven words from the graduated vocabulary lists (Slosson, 1963): look, can, one, baby, three, run, jump, with - but tried no others.

Copying, a low level stage of writing development, appeared on the third day of school when he wrote 'look, book, crook, brook, hook, cook' in his journal, words we had discussed the day before and were still listed on the board. The

fourth day, however, revealed more understanding of written language; "I play with Michael. I like it."

Although Jim understood that written language proceeded from left to right, all words are real ("with"), and writing conveys meaning, he did not demonstrate a sense of space between words; most of his writing ran together. Of greater note was his low interest in writing. Rather, he self-selected to draw in his school journal most of the time, especially balloon shaped people. In fact, from August 31 through December 16, he wrote on only six out of 38 entries. They were:

September 29 - I love mom and dad and my brother and my sister.

October 17 - red, blue, green, orange, black, brown, purple, yellow
(Accompanying colors were displayed; this was probably copied from our room display.)

October 28 - I like the fall festival.

December 5: I can read like crazy. (This is a great one, isn't it!)

December 6: I love playing with my dog.

December 14: I like playing with Bill and Joe and Mike. I do not know Joe's last name but I know Bill's last name and it is Smith but I forgot I know Mike's last name and it is Johnson.

In contrast to Jim's high fall assessment score (96%) and strong abilities (on a standardized test in the fall, his ability scores were 97%, 97%, and 92% for verbal, quantitative, and nonverbal), his work using pencils, scissors, crayons, and the like was generally below grade level in quality. Working neatly with the fine motor tasks of coloring, cutting, and writing was unusual; typically Jim's work was quickly and carelessly done.

Also he tended to accomplish the minimum expected. It was not unusual to hear Jim ask, "Is this enough?" (or) "Do I have to do more?", frequently accompanied with a twinge of whining in his voice. I find this behavior somewhat annoying, especially when it is elicited by capable students.

Various positive strategies were employed to encourage the development of a sense of pride in his work, for example: "I like the way you cut this part. See if you can do a bit more over here like that."; "You did a great job of writing this capital S. Can you try to improve your other capitals?"; and, "Take a look at Eva's coloring on this project. She has some interesting ideas you might like to try."

When these suggestions met with apparently little improvement, a more

direct strategy was initiated: "Jim, you keep asking me questions like, 'Is this good enough?' and 'Do I have to do more.' I would like to see *you* interested in taking extra time to do a good job, a job that you can be proud of. Please try to work until you feel you are satisfied, until you feel you have tried hard. I know you can do good work; I've seen you do it."

Similarly, little success was generated with the direct approach. It seemed Jim's main goal was to get the job done as quickly as possible. "I finished, Mrs. Jeffrey, and I tried hard" he would sometimes state, ready to move on to more interesting activities, like playing with blocks, LEGOS, board games, or clay. The quality of most projects was not easy for me to accept. At times I had him spend more time; other times I let it go; and, occasionally I asked him to start again. We weren't making much progress on improving his motivation for better work with fine motor tasks.

This pattern seemed unbreakable until a more negative approach was taken: "Jim, I'm frustrated. We've talked about the quality of your work, but with many activities, I don't see much effort on your part to do a good job. I've talked with you about how I feel. I know you can do a good job when you try. So, from now on, when you give me work that I believe is not carefully done, you will get a warning."

That was the successful strategy; Jim did not like to get warnings. Two examples of projects completed with attention to detail offer a glimpse of his potential. First, although the work was difficult to read because there were almost no spaces between words, in mid November he generated a colorful and carefully cut out turkey, and described him with humor: "My turkey can run and fly. He goes down the stairs. His nails get caught in the stairs." Likewise, in mid December he created a colorful, detailed Christmas tree, and wrote, "On December it is Christmas and we get presents. Do you know who brings the presents? Santa brings the presents."

Frequently, when paper and pencil were substituted with a computer program, Jim seemed more interested in writing and generated pieces more easily, for example, "I like dinosaurs. They are my favorite animals. They have sharp long teeth because they are big." (and) "We have decorated our tree. It has almost everything on the tree. We have lights on the tree and we have lit our candles. It is fun because it's almost Christmas." His mother commented on his

efforts.

> We've noticed a lot of improvement in the writing. The material he brings home from Writing to Read. At first I think he was typing just the words - fish, cat, dog, mom, dad. Now he's tying to form ideas of his own. And they are hysterical. "I got a rash and it was itchy." I loved that! And then there was another one that was really funny. Maybe it was I'm going to Disney World. [His actual product was: I am going to Disney World, maybe Friday. I want to go on the big water slide.] He was starting to tell a story and putting a little more effort in. In the very beginning it seemed like it was "Well, let me just get this out of the way".

These comments were heartwarming. Some changes in Jim's attitude and effort toward writing were beginning to occur, at least in that setting.

On the other hand, his reading progressed easily, steadily, smoothly, and quickly. At school he became increasingly involved with books of varying difficulty. He found a support and helper in Justin, a very able reader, and others: "I have learned about books that tell us things, like when Justin sits down with me and reads Zoo Books with me, and people help me read books and now I can read them by myself." Also, Jim was receptive to my suggestions: "The Troll books have helped me because you told us that they were the easier ones and then I've been picking those out ...."

Child - parent involvement with reading and writing materials sent home was usually irregular; reminder notes were occasionally sent home with Jim, and some things seemed to disappear. One book slipped behind a kitchen counter and didn't surface for weeks. This was not a personal concern to me because Jim's reading was progressing so well. His mother and I occasionally visited about his progress when she volunteered in our school office; we were both pleased with his reading, and she was sympathetic regarding my various strategies to encourage better written work. By November, she described a change in how she was working with him and how he was attacking reading.

> He doesn't seem to require nearly as much - having someone sit down with him and go through a book - it used to be you'd sit down and read through it and maybe the next time he was able to read it fairly well on his own. Now he seems to be able to pick up simple, easy books and read them the first time without any prompting. ... And he's not afraid of anything. He'll get the

bulletin at church and he'll read words off the bulletin, or off cereal boxes. He picked up a Berenstain Bear book about a month ago and started reading it with very little stumbling over it. And some of that I know is because it was a familiar book but we thought, Whoooogh! Where did you - what happened here?

Her enthusiasm continued in December when she described Jim's attempts to read hymns during the church service, "... following the hymn that we were singing and he was sounding out - he was saying it right along, including words broken up with hyphens". Another surprising effort was Jim's attempt to continue reading from *A Christman Carol* when his mother had to leave for an interruption: "It may have been that I put my finger on the spot to keep my place ... but still he sort of picked right up from where I stopped reading.... I thought that was real exceptional."

Although materials sent home to augment Jim's literacy development were returned irregularly, his mother appreciated the variety involved: "I've always been suspicious of methods that relay solely on phonetics or look - say ... and act as if that is the only method." Variety was also available for Jim through the abundance of books at home, and through books he self-selected from the classroom, school and public library. It seemed our working partnership was generally enhancive of Jim's literacy development.

One book of note, checked out from our classroom library, describes the support of text and illustrations to promote meaningful reading. It is from Mercer Mayer's *Little Critter's This is my House* . Jim and I were talking about when he came to first grade and the fact that he had not really been reading very much at that time. I asked him, "Do you remember a time when you said, 'Oh, I'm reading this?'"

> It was at my house. Right in the morning I got this book and I was saying to myself -- I want [to read this] -- and then I looked at all the pages to see if they were easy in that *Little Critter - This is my House* book. Well, that's what I looked at and then [I thought] - 'These are easy' and then I knew every word.

"How do you think you knew every word?"

> Because the pictures kind of told me what they were doing. The hardest one that I had troubles with was on my little sister was inside -- my little

sister should be inside now and I had trouble on "inside", and she's outside and she should be inside.

The actual text was "It is raining. My little sister should be inside now." Jim reasoned that, because it was raining, his sister should be inside, rather than outside, which is where she was in the illustration.

As this example illustrates, for Jim, learning to read seemed natural and almost easy. His mother summarized: "We really feel like it's not really having to work with him. ... and I feel guilty about it a little bit, but I think, well ... let's not make something a struggle that doesn't need to be."

Family Dynamics

Jim received time, guidance and support from both parents as he worked on his reading at home. Work sessions on tape offer a glimpse into the conversational dynamics of a parent - child relationship as the process of literacy development proceeds. Highlights of this dynamic follow.

1. Jim's mother frequently employed a kind of neutral or almost neutral hum when Jim stumbled; a "hummmm" or "hummmm?" quietly but effectively alerted him to reconsider, for example:

"Drip Drop drops on ... a pad."

"Hummmm?"

"drops... is that ... oh yeah, on a pond."

2. She consistently focused on meaning throughout their work sessions. Jim was reading Lippincott book #8 *Drip Drop .* Drip Drop is a rain drop who goes through various conditions. After he spins down, she remarks, "Do you notice his face on that one? He is falling off!" As drops enter the pond, she highlights the illustrations, "Oh! Look at their smiley faces ... Oh, look!" After Jim reads, " The drops add to the pond" she responds, "They're all part of the pond, aren't they?"

3. His mother occasionally ignored a simple error and seemed to focus on the "big picture" by challenging Jim's reasoning. During work on book #9, *The Tin Top,* a portion of the text is: Mom taps the top. The top runs. The top spins.

Matt [the tot] is not sad. Mom is not sad. / The tin top spins and spins. It did not drop. Spin, top, spin. -- When Jim reads, "Mom pats the top" [rather than "Mom taps the top."], she does not correct him. Rather she attempts to pull more information from him at the end of the story: "Mom was not sad. Matt was not sad. But ..." (It appeared she was trying to have Jim talk about how the little puppy in the story was feeling, who seemed nervous or frightened in the illustration.) However, Jim did not "bite" on this thought and she did not revisit it.

4. Where his mother might ignore an error in reading, Jim's father usually did not. Jim was reading from Dr. Seuss *I Can Read with my Eyes Shut* .

"And when I peek"
"No"
"And when I peek ... keep them open" (and)
"You'll learn about jokes"
"No"
"Jacks"
"Jake" (His father offered the correct word.)
"Jake the snake - that rhymes!"

5. Jim's father offered a lesson in oral reading: "No. Now stop at the periods. Period. 'You can learn to read music and play a hot zot if you keep your eyes open.' Period. And you pause for a second."

6. Both parents sprinkled humor throughout their work sessions with Jim. Everyone laughs at the antics of the various story's characters. During their work on book #10, *The Ball and the Mitt* , a baseball goes into the mud. When this happens, Jim's mother said, " Ohhhhh. You wouldn't worry about that, would you? You'd go right in and get it!" (laughing). Jim replies, "I know!" (laughing). From *I Can Read with my Eyes Shut* , Jim and his father laugh and read together: (Jim begins) "You can learn about ice. You can learn about mice, I mean mice on ice. And (in unison) ice on mice! (laughing).

7. His mother occasionally tied a story to Jim's own experiences or life. As the story in book #10 continued, a dog named Tramp appears. Jim's first attempt to read this word was "Trainbow" (he laughed). Then "Tr ... imp". He repeated this

word three times before his mother interjected, "Noooo. Not Trimp." He tried again. "Tr ... amp". His mother reinforced, "Tramp. Like the Lady and the Tramp." Jim replied, "That's just what I was going to say!" (laughing). "Ohhhh. Maybe lady will run up," his mother adds with a laugh. Jim continues reading, "Tramp runs up. Tramp is in the mud." He brings the story to his own life by adding, "That's like Blue" (their family dog). Mom responds, "Blue would do it, wouldn't he?"

Child-parent dynamics during work sessions are interesting and informative!

Sweet Success

Everyone involved with this child-parent-teacher partnership seemed satisfied and encouraged with Jim's progress. His mother summarized, "We're completely pleased with what he's doing and how well he's doing." Jim described his writing journey as "learning new things that I want to write and my handwriting is getting kind of better. ... I'm learning new things to think and then I ... want to do this, I want to do that. And if I don't think that it's fitting in enough, I choose a new idea." And about reading, "I like to just try my best on reading and read different kinds of books."

As time went on, Jim began writing lengthier stories on the computer. In the middle of winter, he wrote,

> We built a sliding ring and it is fun to slide down. It has two ramps and one is bigger and one is smaller. I like to go down the ramps. I crashed. (and) On the 12th I went to the women's basketball game and the Hokies won the game. I had a lot of fun. The Hokies were vs the Green Waves.

Jim's interest with writing slowly improved during the year, and his passion for books and reading never wavered. In late April, when evaluated on a graduated vocabulary lists assessment (Slosson, 1963), he scored a grade equivalent of 3.6 (third grade, sixth month). It was easy to find him engaged with books during our daily quiet reading period; he seemed to find continual delight with pleasure reading. His interest in and curiosity about life remained unbounded.

By the spring, he was somewhat more inclined to write with paper and pencil, and did author a delightful story about his life after school.

My Day After School

Going Home

How I get home is I ride my bike. It is fun. And today I am going to Shawn's house but I'm not riding my usual way. I'm riding the bus.

At Home

When I get home I spend some time with my mom. Then I ask her if I can go to my friends.

Playing With My Friends

I like my friends. They are Joe and Scott and Ben and Justin.

Helping with Supper

I help with supper but we might have pizza tonight.

Reading a Book

I like reading. Sometimes I hide and my mom looks for me and I read.

(This illustration showed Jim reading under a bed.)

In Bed

I have to go to bed now. Good night. ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ

He voluntarily presented a piece for publication in a spring school wide publication, which he prepared on the computer.

I read the whole Book of Headlines. It is funny. I read it in one night. It has 64 pages. It is about people who make newspapers and they are mad because the printing press is making funny letters.

Perhaps, his mother's wish was coming true. It seemed Jim's delight with reading was blossoming into a fruitful passion!

On the last day of school, Jim authored a final piece, and in the process shared some of the sweetness of primary education.

Today is the last day of school.
I will miss Mrs. Jeffrey a lot. All the teachers too.
I love our school.

A Paradoxical Partnership

Dorothy

I Go To School

To My Mother and Father, With Love

There was a little girl, her name was Samantha and all night she couldn't sleep because tomorrow she is going to go on the first day of school. This is going to be fun because she is going to the first day of school. She was so excited! But she did not want to wake her mother and father up. Oh! She could not wake her mom and dad up. So then she waited.

Then at last, "Mom! Dad! Wake up! Yea!" she yelled. "It is the first day of school. Yea! I am going to school! I think it is going to be fun at kindergarten! Yea!" So she put on her clothes. Then she was ready so she went downstairs. "Yea! At last! I am going to school!"

"No." said mother. "We have to eat first because you are going to be hungry."

"What will I eat? Pancakes? Mmmmmm!" So she started to eat. "Mmmmmm. It is good! Now it is time to go. Yea!" So they went to school. Then they went. "Wow! This is school."

"Yes! This is the school!"

"And Mom, I never saw a school. But now I saw a school," said Samantha. "A school looks like it is pretty big." So she went, "Hi. What is your name?" said Samantha.

"My name is Miss Kitty."

"Hi, Miss Kitty."

"What is your name?"

"My name is Samantha."

Thus began the first five pages of Dorothy's 20 page masterpiece, written during the spring of first grade. In her story, she took us through art, music, gym, recess, math, writing, and reading classes, and frequently returned us to her home

to share the day's events with mother and father.

During my many years with first graders, Dorothy had emerged as one of the most prolific writers.

Words and More Words

One word comes to mind when describing Dorothy: WRITER. During her process of learning to read and write conventionally, Dorothy wrote. She copied a copious amount of words from the classroom, including: seasons, colors, rhyming words, words from alphabet cards, words from vowel charts, number words, science terms, months of the year, the lunch menu, room rules, the morning opening agenda, and words from work sheets. She frequently recycled many of her lists of words. The opening pages of her school journal are filled with words.

As with most of Dorothy's work, her handwriting was very neat and legible. The fine motor skills of coloring and cutting were excellent, and as time progressed, it became clear her artistic skills were bountiful. At one point, she drew three children doing the hokey pokey with such style and movement, it was shared with our art teacher, who was keenly aware of Dorothy's talents.

Dorothy's motivation to learn was obvious by the effort expended in her work. Whatever the task, Dorothy typically performed it carefully and thoroughly; it was not unusual to see her hunched over some project. It seemed she enjoyed working and sharing her results with anyone interested, including other students, her family, other teachers, and myself.

Sweetness Is ...

I haven't known many children sweeter than Dorothy. Her happy disposition and enthusiasm for life were evident in her spring masterpiece. To describe her as an epitome of cooperation would not be unfair.

When Dorothy was registered for kindergarten, her mother noted she was "very sensitive." Occasionally, sensitivity was visible at school; a hint of hurt feelings might surface, but when a bit of tender loving care was offered, she seemed to recover easily. With a quiet and somewhat passive demeanor, she might seek approval for her work, or assurance that her relationships with others

was okay. Generally, attempts were made to support and encourage an increase in Dorothy's confidence.

During our September parent orientation, her mother described the youngest of her four daughters.

> Dorothy is a very sweet, behaved girl. She is responsible, but whines sometimes at home. She is a good singer and loves to draw and paint. She is a very happy girl, full of life and she is also very affectionate.

Home life was probably very busy; Dorothy's sisters were in 3rd, 4th, and 6th grade. From my perspective, the whining her mother referred to was reserved for home; I don't recall ever hearing Dorothy complain.

Although an exceptionally cooperative, hard working, and friendly student, in some ways she did not perceive herself as such. During the spring, when the children were given an opportunity to rate themselves on a simple "Report Card" (M = most of the time; P = part of the time; N = not yet), she responded in some surprising ways.

> Most of the time I:
>
> > listen while others speak; take care of my books and materials; work quietly and independently; like to read by myself in a book of my choice; enjoy my writing activities; share my writing with others; finish my work on time; and work and play well with others. (I would agree with all of these.)
>
> Part of the time:
>
> > my writing can be read easily (She had excellent handwriting.); and I enjoy reading activities.
>
> "Not yet" do I:
>
> > follow instructions (I found this to be an unbelievable response - she was exceptionally cooperative!); express myself orally (She was somewhat shy.); like to work in group activities (This was never a problem I identified.); keep my desk neat and tidy (She was in the top 5% for this!); and, walk quietly around the room (Again, this was unbelievable! She was certainly one of the quietest in the classroom!).

Reading Dorothy's personal report card saddened me. She seemed too hard on herself.

English as a Second Language

French was spoken in Dorothy's home. Through her records I was unable to determine the ethnicity of her parents, and the topic never arose during the few conversations her mother and I shared. I don't recall ever meeting Dorothy's father.

Because English was her second language, it was not surprising that she struggled on many aspects of the fall assessment (Appendixes N, O &P). Although she correctly named all but three of the 52 letter names, her understanding of their corresponding sounds was weak. Effort was not an interference; she attempted every one, sometimes responding with a kind of sounded version of the letter name, such as "esss" for the sound of letter s. However, she correctly generated only 16 of the possible 52 letter sounds.

When four consonants were visually offered, and the task was to circle the beginning sound associated with a word (for example: y, s, l, p - yard - Appendix O), she correctly responded to 10 (50%). Dorothy's understanding of letter sounds, specifically the ability to generate letter sounds and identify the consonant representing the beginning sound of words, was below average, based on the information obtained. Also, when asked to recall and write sounds, words, and punctuation without the aide of visual support, her score was 6 of 20 (30% - Appendix P).

Dorothy's fall assessment total score was 57%, ranking her 12th out of the 16 students assessed. Based on this information, she was referred to our reading teacher for further evaluation. She did not qualify for individual support through the Reading Recovery Program, but did meet the qualifications for small group support through the Chapter I Program. Her mother readily signed permission for Dorothy to receive this support.

During our parent teacher conference in early October, the results of Dorothy's fall assessment were shared with her mother. Based on her weak understanding of sounds associated with the our alphabet, I strongly encouraged her mother to help her create an Alphabet Book at home. A format for the book and a strategy for making it was offered. It was simply composed of 26 pages, blank except for a large capitol and corresponding lower case letter in the top right

corner of each page, made with bold black marks (Aa, Bb, Cc, etc.). The pages were stapled together with a blank sheet on top so Dorothy could individualize the cover page. Small pictures from old magazines which correspond with the individual letter sounds could be cut out and glued into the book, or Dorothy could illustrate the pages with her own pictures.

Her mother, a full time homemaker, agreed to help Dorothy with this task; we concurred that it seemed like a project she might enjoy, and I was hopeful her understanding of letter sounds would improve. No time frame was established for the project; it could be done for fun and relaxation whenever Dorothy felt inclined to work on it. I knew she enjoyed this type of activity, so there was little concern about it becoming a burden. In fact, I stressed the notion that patience with learning to read and write is important, and may be especially valuable when learning a second language.

Dorothy's mother further agreed to work with her on a regular basis with books and materials sent home which would support her learning to read, write, and more correctly speak the English language. The time frame recommended for work at home was 10-15 minutes at a setting, perhaps twice a day if possible. Discontinuing work when either Dorothy or her mother grew frustrated was also reinforced. Both of these topics had been addressed in the fall parent letter (Appendix Q). Dorothy's mother seemed very pleased with and enthusiastic about our plans, and left our conference with the alphabet book and a supply of old magazines in hand.

The strategies we discussed appeared to mesh with her mother's expectations about Dorothy's first grade experience.

> We grew up in a non-English speaking county. Dorothy learned English at school. We do not talk in English at home. We believe that if a young child is exposed to more than one language at a time, he / she will acquire these additional languages for life. English is a difficult language to use to learn to read and write. It is an easy language to acquire as a second language. ... We expect that she acquire basic reading and writing skills, and speak good English.

It seemed that Dorothy's mother was willing to support her expectations. Their work together at home was regular and consistent: "We read to Dorothy English books, pointing to the words as we read, and asking her to identify some of the

words she just learned." She returned materials to school "like clockwork" and when her progress was assessed, she usually performed beautifully. As time progressed, occasional concern developed because the exchange of materials seemed inappropriately rapid; I did not want Dorothy to become overloaded or feel pressured to complete materials too rapidly. Taking time to develop a solid understanding of our sound system, and enjoying learning to read, write and speak the English language in a supportive yet relaxed setting, seemed valuable goals.

However, occasionally, when I sent an item home for a bit more practice, I was firmly addressed, via written feedback, "Mrs. Jeffrey, Dorothy knows how to read that." In fact, Dorothy's mother demonstrated a firm stance on many occasions. Once Dorothy returned an envelope to school without the book inside; at least when I checked the envelope, the book was missing. I wrote a short note: "Please return the little book. The envelope was empty. Thank You!" Also, I had previously sent a reminder about a Zoo Book Dorothy needed to return to school.

Her mother responded,

> Dear Mrs. Jeffrey,
>
> I have returned your magazine on the animals together with papers signed when Dorothy knows very well how to read, <u>and the little book</u> "The Pump". I wouldn't sign the envelope if the book is not inside it. I always double check on that. Maybe another child has taken it home <u>or</u> it is in your classroom. Last night I rechecked in my house. We don't have the book. Have a nice day.

On another occasion, Dorothy returned a survey her mother had completed regarding families who had lost a pet within the past six months. She responded with firm, heavy writing, "We do not have a pet and we will <u>never</u> have one!"

Taking into consideration the manner in which Dorothy's mother responded to some school requests, and based on the fact that Dorothy and her mother seemed to have a system developed which was working for them, I attempted not to interfere with the exchange of materials unless absolutely necessary. One strategy I did occasionally employ was to hold off sending a new book home if I determined Dorothy needed a bit more time on a returned book, which I would reinforce at school. In other words, I did manipulate books now and then to slow the pace.

Dorothy's writing slowly and gradually improved. Her first writing in September, about the Jack in the Box, consisted of the random words "My A Jack The at Jack". A short time later she wrote a sentence, "Look at the lion". By mid October she wrote, "[Central] Elementary is the best. I like to play at [Central]" (and) "I love books. I read and I like books because books ... Oh I like books.", and in mid November, "One day it was Thanksgiving. I can not wait [for] it. Eat the turkey!". A month later, she authored, "One day it was Christmas. I was happy and I got lots of presents. One Christmas I got a teddy bear and I got a ball and a top and a horn." (and) "One day I had a puppy, said mommy dog. So one day mommy went with her puppies to play.", (and) "One day my father said to me a story before bedtime. It was beautiful!"

The Odoriferous Ordeal

"What is that smell?" I thought to myself. I was greeting the children as they entered the classroom one September morning. "It is vaguely familiar, a strong, somewhat enigmatic odor, like but yet unlike old urine. Could it be someone had an accident?" Though not typical, accidents are not uncommon with first graders.

I carefully, slowly, and sniffingly meandered among the students as they unpacked their backpacks, attempting to isolate the source, without success. As the children dispersed into the classroom, the odor disappeared. "Perhaps it was just my imagination."

However, a reoccurrence took place a few days later. This time it was easy to trace. Dorothy.

My first thought, which I took to our principal to ponder, was to "strike while the iron is hot". I proposed calling Dorothy's mother and asking her to please bring a change of clothes for her. In this way, her mother and I might be able to share a conversation about the situation, and, although Dorothy seemed unaffected, I thought she might feel better.

Our principal concurred with the plan, and I telephoned her mother.

"I'm sorry to bother you, but it seems that Dorothy may have had an accident. She seems to have a strong urine smell this morning. I was wondering if you might be able to bring a change of clothes to school for her."

"Is she wet?"

"No, not that I can tell."

"Maybe she has a discharge and will need to see a doctor. I'll come now."

A short time later, Dorothy's mother appeared at the door. I asked Dorothy to step into the hallway with us.

"Dorothy, I thought I noticed kind of an odor or smell this morning, and I called your mother. She is here to help you change your clothes. Don't worry about anything. You're not in trouble. We're just trying to help."

After I pointed out a nearby teacher rest room, the two of them left, returning a few minutes later with bewildered looks. There did not seem to be any wetness, discharge, or odor.

"It must be another child in your class. There is no problem with Dorothy."

"I'm sorry to have troubled you. Thank you for coming to school so promptly. I appreciate it."

Later, I shared what had transpired with our principal and guidance counselor, believing they should both be informed. A few days later our principal informed me that Dorothy's bus driver stopped by the school office to inform him that he detected a strong urine smell on her and her sister. Perhaps I hadn't imagined something after all.

About four uneventful weeks passed. I was relieved that whatever had seemed to be of concern had somehow disappeared.

Then one day, there it was again. Our guidance counselor was able to stop by for a visit, and concurred with my assessment. On that day, Dorothy's mother stopped by our classroom to deliver something.

"It's interesting that you stopped by today. Although I have not noticed an odor on Dorothy for weeks, I seem to notice one today. Would you be willing to check her for me?"

"Yes, certainly."

When Dorothy and her mother returned, her mother's response was, again, negative. "There is no odor, Mrs. Jeffrey. It must be another child in the class."

Later that day, a note from our guidance counselor was in my mailbox: "I'm in Jane's 4th grade class right now and smelling the EXACT SAME ODOR on Dorothy's sister!"

Because we seemed to be in a dilemma, I sought advice and support from

Dorothy's reading teacher and the two other adults in my classroom; the special needs child enrolled in our class had aide support; one woman spent the morning with her, and one the afternoon. We all agreed to keep each other informed, should the need arise, and to keep our concerns confidential. Shortly after we visited, her reading teacher did notice an odor.

Two uneventful weeks passed before one aide reported "... a trail of odor" from Dorothy during physical education class. Something definitely seemed to be happening.

Because the problem seemed to have expanded to Dorothy's sister, a meeting was organized by our guidance counselor and planned for the middle of November which would include the girls' mother, the guidance counselor, and the girls' teachers. Her sister had qualified for support with a learning disability; therefore, a number of teachers were working with her, and would be included.

The number of adults at the meeting, including Dorothy's mother, was eight. With hindsight, this number was probably intimidating to her mother and could have been reduced. There were other issues addressed before the odor problem, especially ideas relating to furthering the development of the girls' confidence.

Because I had initially discussed the odor topic with Dorothy's mother, I agreed to open discussion about it at our meeting. The issue was bridged as gently and tactfully as possible. A brief description of our observations was offered, with the information that, since October 31, no odor had been detected on either girl.

Despite corroborating agreement from four teachers at the meeting, the girls' mother stated that she had been unable to detect any odor on them at all. She insisted that the problem must be with other children in the classes. We shared our belief that our professional responsibility was to inform her of our concerns. We were not trying to single out her daughters; rather we were trying our best to support them. It seemed we all left the meeting on compatible terms.

Three days later, I received a note to call Dorothy's mother. I was unprepared for the hurt, anger, and distress she voiced. She relayed that the discussion about the odor "upsets her very much". She wondered how it could be "mysteriously gone for two weeks" and then return when she "didn't do anything special ... it wasn't Dorothy. Now I'm very surprised about her sister. No one ever told me about it. It's not logical."

"Do you feel we've been unfair about this?" I asked.

"I wouldn't say unfair. I've never had [this as] a problem in my life. I have been depressed and upset for two days."

"I'm so sorry this has bothered you."

"Of course it would. Because it's not true, it bothered me. Seven teachers were there. I feel bad about it. I want to give you the right to take Dorothy to the bathroom and check her. Smell the others, too. Let's get it straightened out, because it's not true."

As we concluded the conversation, I attempted to reassure Dorothy's mother that confidentiality regarding this topic was respected by all teachers, and that our purpose was to inform her and support her daughters

Distress seemed to continue with her mother, and both parents met with our principal to discuss their concerns. He shared with them his experience with the bus driver plus his personal experience: He had specifically greeted the girls one morning as they exited the bus, and noticed the odor as well.

Despite this information, Dorothy's mother remained steadfast and resolute in her position. Following their conference, our principal informed the teachers involved that we were to let him know of any subsequent problems, after which he would immediately phone the parents.

However, there was never occasion to deal with the issue. Whatever had been the problem never resurfaced again.

Getting Along

From that point on, whenever Dorothy's mother and I saw each other informally, she seemed to avoid me. We visited rarely, if at all, and what conversation we did share was brief and of no consequence. Months later, we did have an early spring conference which was short and strictly focused on Dorothy's academic progress, which was very positive and fruitful.

Our strained parent-teacher relationship did not seem to interfere with Dorothy's work at home, or her literacy progress. As previously described, she returned books and materials to school like clockwork. Her attitude toward me, her work, her friends, and school in general never seemed to change. She was sweet, affectionate, hard - working, eager and exceptionally cooperative. I was

grateful that the difficulty her mother and I were experiencing in our relationship did not seem to interfere with the child-parent-teacher partnership we seemed to have developed in order to support Dorothy's literacy.

As reported on a survey, there were some changes during the study period in the way the family was involved with literacy at home.

> We are reading more to Dorothy, going daily through her reading assignments. Dorothy is progressing nicely and she loves to learn to read and write, asking us often how to spell a word. ... We are pleased at how quickly Dorothy is learning to read.

Parental understandings about literary development did not change: "We already went through this understanding with our other three children who are older than Dorothy."

One day in late spring, Dorothy's mother met me in the hallway, and began talking to me. This is my best recollection of our conversation.

"Mrs. Jeffrey. I must talk with you. I feel bad about the feelings I have for you. I am a Christian woman and I am trying to forgive you for what happened with Dorothy. I want to feel better about this."

"Let's go and sit down on the sofa by the window."

"I don't want to carry these feeling around with me any more. I don't like having these feelings for you. I am trying to work on this."

"I am so sorry about what happened. I was doing the best I could to help with a difficult situation."

"You know it was never true. My daughters are clean. They take regular baths. It was someone else."

"I know they do. You have beautiful, sweet daughters. Dorothy is one of the sweetest girls I have ever known. That was a long time ago now. It's all in the past. Maybe we can put it in the past and leave it there. I do not have any bad feelings for you, and I don't think of you in any negative way. Maybe that will help you feel better about me. Always remember that I love children, and that I try my best to help them. I love Dorothy, and I was only trying to help. I am so sorry that it caused you so much pain. I hope you can forgive me."

"I will try. I am trying. Thank you, Mrs. Jeffrey."

We parted with a mutual embrace.

Our Blossom

As the end of the school year neared, it was obvious that Dorothy's literacy development had taken a monumental leap during first grade. A beautifully completed Alphabet Book was returned with pride. She began to read increasingly difficult words, and a May assessment indicated 2.8 reading grade equivalent (Slosson, 1963). But writing continued to be her focus. When she was busy at home writing *I Go To School,* her 20 page masterpiece, she kept me informed with regular progress reports. The methodical, consistent efforts through the Chapter I Program combined with the help, guidance, and support at home, via our child-parent-teacher partnership, seemed to have launched Dorothy into a solid understanding of reading, writing, and speaking the English language.

Dorothy's mother and I did begin visiting more; she usually picked up her daughters after school, and occasionally we would see each other in the hallway or lobby. One day, after Dorothy had finished her masterpiece, we were sharing our joy.

"Mrs. Jeffrey, she wanted to work on it all the time. She would barely take time to eat, and had to be almost forced to go to bed!"

Indeed, at the conclusion of her book, Dorothy presented an "authors page", complete with a small school picture of herself. She shared: "I made this book because when I started school, the first day of school, each time I couldn't stop thinking what I could write. I just couldn't stop!!!"

Time Can Heal

As the years have passed, from my perspective, Dorothy's mother and I have grown increasingly relaxed with each other. We now greet each other with what I perceive to be mutual warmth and respect.

Perhaps she would agree: Time can heal wounds.

A Barren Relationship

Justin

The day was bright and beautiful. Summer was still upon us, and the warmth of the sun felt good. We'd spent most of the afternoon inside our classroom and an outdoor break was needed. Some fresh air and exercise would hopefully offer us respite from the stresses of beginning anew.

This was our third day of school. A new year brings such tremendous change and adjustment for the children and me. New faces and names to learn and remember. Who goes home on a bus, and which busses are they? Where is the lunch money for Joe? Does everyone have food or money for lunch? Who has siblings to help at the end of the day, and in what grade and class are they enrolled? Exhaustion accompanying the first few days (and weeks) of school is ever present, regardless of the number of times I've experienced it. Some of the children were beginning to look a bit tired as well.

But Justin's difficulties were seemingly greater than the need for rest. He was standing on the sidewalk bawling. "Now what," I thought to myself. "Is this going to be the pattern? What an unpleasant proposition!"

Justin had wept quietly throughout the first day; a rough estimate would be 10 to 15 times, certainly more times than I cared to count. His crying had seemed to stop as easily as it started. Day two had seemed to move along with less frustration, and only four to five times did I notice any tears. Perhaps he was beginning to adjust.

Now this. This was no small cry, or silent tears. This was full blown sobbing complimented with a certain degree of gusto. After a few minutes, since he did not seem to be reconciling his frustration, I thought it best to check out the situation.

"Are you feeling frustrated about something?" I asked after casually meandering nearby.

"I'm feeling frustrated about so many things," he tried to share between sobs.

"What things?" I nudged in closer, and attempted to put my arm around his shoulder. He pulled away.

"Well, for one thing, it's too hot and too bright out here."

"Yes, it is a bright afternoon. You could solve that problem pretty easily. How about standing under the walkway?" I moved in that direction and he followed. "Now that's a little better, isn't it?"

"Well, second, I really want my mommy. And third, I don't like the way Ben and Todd are playing."

"Well, you will need to wait a while to see your mommy. And you know you can choose to play with other children."

Justin's response was continued crying. I felt the need to walk away, which I did. He stayed under the walkway for the remainder of our recess, crying.

Justin and Me

The description of my thought process in this scenario does not reflect the professionalism and respect I so strongly propose and attempt to demonstrate in guiding my work with children and their families. But, honestly, even after three days, some of Justin's behaviors seemed to epitomize the antithesis of characteristics and attitudes I seek to promote in children, including confidence in their abilities; problem solving; risk taking (an "I'll try" approach); acceptance of others; tolerance for diversity; compassion; and empathy.

My need to walk away from Justin seemed to spring from a combination of three ingredients. First, I do not think it is a good practice to offer comfort when a child is demonstrating an inappropriate behavior; reaching out may tend to reinforce the behavior and imply, "Poor, Justin." This does not promote confidence building, problem solving, or risk taking behaviors.

Implicit in this perspective is my biased opinion of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. Personal experience has guided my understanding of children during the transition into first grade. A petite blond girl in Minnesota approached each fall morning of first grade with a basket full of tears. An entourage escorted her through the hallway toward our classroom. Safely tucked in the middle was Jennifer, sobbing uncontrollably. Her attendants were comforting in every way imaginable: kind words, gentle touches, token gifts. Each day seemed to offer new challenge on methods of consolation.

It was not until I removed all peer support and in effect, took her audience

away, that she began to regain composure. By inviting Jenny to come to the classroom before the others, and as soon as she arrived at school, she soon began to feel less hesitant and fearful. She and I were able to begin the day together, with a warm embrace and without fanfare or exhibition. Her tears quickly faded and by the time her friends arrived, I was able to remark, "Isn't Jenny doing a nice job this morning! Congratulations, Jenny! You can do it!"

Within a few days, her crying stopped completely, and by the time the other children arrived, she was delighted to see them. They began offering positive reinforcement for the great effort she was mustering. "Good morning, Jenny!" "You look happy today!" Within two weeks she felt ready to begin entering the classroom with others, and did so with the same enthusiasm and energy typical of first graders.

Instead of feeding her inappropriate behavior with attention, the setting was changed which offered support and encouragement as she slowly but steadily grew in confidence and understanding that she could, in fact, do it.

Memories of Jenny rose clear and fresh in my mind as I watched Justin that summer afternoon. Classmates had offered him comfort and enticement to play, but the need to exercise overshadowed their willingness to stay. And my attempt to offer understanding and support appeared to be unsatisfactory. The best approach seemed to leave Justin alone with his frustrations.

Second, and directly related to the first, I choose to offer attention and recognition when the behaviors I am hoping to promote and develop are being demonstrated. This approach I have often summarized as a "catch them doing it" strategy. When a child is exhibiting a behavior deemed appropriate, attempts are made to privately reinforce it at that moment; "You did a great job of making that decision. Keep it up!" (or) "I like the way you solved that problem. Good thinking!"

Through attention and positive reinforcement, it is hoped that the child will begin to more clearly understand expectations, and more positive behaviors will follow. Occasionally I will ask the child if we should share their success with others; "Shall we tell the class about it?" I believe the child should be empowered to make this decision; highlighting their behavior should be a support rather than an embarrassment.

A third ingredient is less pleasant to discuss. There seemed to be something about Justin's behavior that frustrated or annoyed me. A tone was

apparent even as I wrote the opening scenario about him. Expressions such as 'now what' and 'what an unpleasant proposition' are neither positive nor productive. Once in a while a child will affect me in this way; fortunately it is a rare occasion. It is with difficulty that the thought is considered: perhaps our floundering family relationship was due, in no small degree, to my personal reaction to Justin.

Mom and Me

Justin's mother and I seemed to get off on the wrong foot as well. Four events seem to characterize our early relationship.

First, when Justin, his kindergarten brother, and his mother came to our classroom for student orientation a few days before school started, both boys were loud and interruptive, and seemed hyperactive. Their mother stood and watched this behavior, making no effort to curb or calm the situation. She did let me know how bright Justin was: "He reads almost everything." Indeed, he did read many things as he was dashing around the room, including the body parts of insects: "head, thorax, abdomen".

Witnessing a mother observe disruptive and rude behavior in her children, while making no attempt to remedy that behavior, is a source of frustration for me. Perhaps Justin's mother sensed this. Following their visit, I located Justin's kindergarten teacher, who happened to be teaching across the hall.

"Tell me about Justin," I inquired.

"Well," she replied with a laugh, "he improved a lot during the year. His crying was much worse in the beginning, and decreased, but never stopped. He was very bright."

"Crying wasn't the problem when he visited today. He seemed a bit out of control; his voice was loud and rather annoying, and he kept interrupting his mother and me. His brother was about the same."

"Yes, well, that's Justin."

"Did his mom seem to rather let things go regarding his behavior?'

"She's concerned but ... I think it's hard. Good luck. You'll need it."
Thus, I was introduced to Justin's mother.

A second event took place on an evening in mid September, during my

parent orientation presentation. We were "walking through" the fall packet of information; parents were seated in children's desks, and I was using overhead slides to highlight various items. One page in the packet described the year's school wide themes, selected by the faculty during our previous summer workshop. Our first grade team had subsequently identified categories within the themes, and the page we were reading summarized this information. This page was provided to parents in an effort to quickly communicate our overall plans for the year

The first theme was Relationships, and our first grade team selected Insects as one of the units of study under that theme. Justin's mother asked, rather sarcastically it seemed to me, how the study of insects fit into the theme of Relationships. I explained that we were planning to focus on the relationship of insects to our lives and the relationship of insects to each other, with specific emphasis on the monarch butterfly life cycle.

As I stood before the room full of parents, I sensed both her question and body language to have a patronizing message. She and her husband are scientists and I may have been over sensitive to her question.

A third incident seemed to threaten the development of a constructive parent-teacher relationship. That same evening, following the general session, there was an opportunity to casually visit with parents. Both of Justin's parents seriously and tenaciously pursued me to set up a time for a visit to our classroom. They wanted to talk to the children about insects: "We did this last year with Justin's class". When I indicated that it might be easier to make arrangements for that at a later date, they did not want to wait. But I was tired and needed an opportunity to check my schedule before making such a commitment, and there were other parents waiting to visit, so I tried to tactfully delay the discussion.

They left the classroom but later stopped me in the hallway, almost insistent in setting up a time now: "It would be easier for us to get it settled tonight." At that moment, all I wanted to do was go home. Suddenly the thought occurred to me to invite the other first grade classes as well; we were all planning to study insects.

When I suggested this possibility, Justin's parents were almost non responsive, but inclined toward the positive; "I don't know." "I guess so." Therefore, the idea would need to be addressed with the other first grade teachers. A decision on a time would have to wait.

When we parted from this conversation, I felt they were miffed they did not get their appointment arranged to visit our classroom. Perhaps if I had honestly admitted that I felt too tired to adequately address their request, they might have felt more satisfied when they left.

When I got home, I had a chance to sit down and read the index cards parents had completed during the meeting. In response to the question, "What would you like me to know about your child?" Justin's mother had written: "Justin loves school! He loves you and all the books." This was comforting to read following my experiences with his parents that evening.

A fourth incident seemed to be the death knell for any prospect of developing a positive parent-teacher relationship; at least, I never felt a connection between Justin's mother and myself following this event. To me, almost all our following conversations and correspondences seemed to lack warmth or effective dialogue. I never saw his father after the evening of parent orientation.

After attempting to find a time for all four first grades to join in a combined meeting time for Justin's parents to make their insect presentation, it became obvious that sharing the experience one class at a time would be more easily managed, if his parents were willing, and might offer a more personal exposure for the children as well.

After a few attempts to reach his mother by phone to inform her of this, we finally connected one Monday evening. She was coming in the next morning for our scheduled parent teacher conference at 8:00 and offered to bring her insect collection with her at that time. She was available and could meet with our class after the conference. Because she had her supplies at home, there was no problem getting prepared. This seemed like an easy step to take, and I was relieved and delighted to have finally made at least this arrangement.

But my exhilaration was short lived. I realized the next morning, after I got to school, that I had made a huge mistake. The one morning of the week when I had a commitment was Tuesday; we had art class at 9:15. This had been a very hard bit of information for me to process. Our other special classes (music, physical education, library and guidance), were scheduled in the afternoon. Our art teacher previously had come to our classroom on two occasions to remind me that it was time for art. How I could miss this so often still amazes me; art class provided my longest block of planning time (50 minutes!) during the entire week!

However, I was not geared to go anywhere at 9:15 in the morning, and when I made arrangements with Justin's mother on Monday evening, I had forgotten about it again!

I hated to tell her this, and desperately tried to remedy the situation, but she did not wish to discuss making other arrangements. We proceeded with our conference, but I increasingly felt a distance develop between us. When asked how she thought things were going, she replied, "OK." I shared with her the details of Justin's fall assessment; he was the top student and read many difficult words from the graduated vocabulary lists (such as empty, stone, grove, ocean, damp, perform, destroy, delicious, hunger, understood) scoring a grade equivalent of 3.4 (Slosson, 1963). I noted that he seemed inconsistent with confidence in speaking; when frustrated, he appeared very verbal, but under less stressful situations, he could be very quiet, almost shy. Regarding his writing, we agreed he did not appear to be very interested, and we would encourage it.

His mother's expectations for first grade literacy development included the challenge to improve his already strong reading skills.

> I expect him to continue to love reading and to improve his writing abilities. I hope he will remain challenged in a class where I know his reading ability is greater than the norm and a lot of time is spent on children who need help. ... [I would like to see] that he remain challenged in reading and writing. That he is challenged in such a way that he learns not to give up if he can't do something right away.

He was an eager reader at home, and seemed to be thoroughly enjoying the Zoo Book series from school. As time passed, it grew apparent that providing additional challenging reading materials would be difficult. It has been my experience that, occasionally, in spite of the achievement spread, some children desire to be offered similar materials as other students, rather than appear to be different. When asked if he would be interested in doing work like his classmates, Justin offered little or no response, such as "Okay" or "All right." or, more typically, a shrug.

He was encouraged to do as he wished with the materials he did choose to take home; he could read them or not. He could think about it, and talk over it over with his mother, if he wished. However, as time passed, his interest was minimal, regardless of the materials exchanged. A week or two might pass

before an item was returned.

One exception is noteworthy. When a book shelf of more advanced readers was offered for preview, Justin selected one on a Friday and handed it back to me the following Monday.

"Wow, Justin! Did you read that book already?

"Yes."

"Would you like to tell me about any of the stories?"

"No".

"Were any of them very interesting?"

"Not really."

"Would you like to try another book?"

"No."

A different approach was attempted. Focus moved to chapter books located in our school library. When we identified various locations for them, and he was instructed how to check out a book when he needed or wanted a replacement, his interest in reading at school, and taking books home from school, improved slightly. He continued, however, to maintain an interest in our classroom supply of Zoo Books, which he checked out regularly.

The only feedback received from his mother regarding curriculum materials sent home did not arrive until mid November: "The reading assignments sent home are very easy for him. His younger brother can read them as well."

Aside from our brief academic discussion, the majority of our conference time was spent sharing descriptions of Justin's behavior, especially his mother telling me about Justin's sensitivities. For example, once he didn't get the kind of fruit juice he liked after soccer practice, and he cried loudly. He was a very fussy and sensitive eater, and really hadn't eaten fruits or vegetables since baby food; he did take vitamins. She described both Justin and his younger brother as boys "tending to cry if their needs are not met". (At a later date, the kindergarten teacher described the brother as "one of the rudest boys she'd ever started out the year with".) When I shared some examples of Justin's crying behavior thus far in first grade, she countered that "it didn't seem to be that bad in kindergarten". I found this surprising after my visit with his kindergarten teacher a few weeks earlier.

I suggested we attempt to coordinate our responses to Justin's crying;

consistency of expectation and consequence at home and school can sometimes help a child who struggles with frustration. A suggestion was also made to invite our guidance counselor into our conversation. She might have strategical suggestions which could be helpful to us. We parted on polite but reserved terms.

I was notified shortly after our conference that Justin's mother had arranged a time to meet with the guidance counselor, but did not want me present. Based on past experience, this was not a good omen; rather than working toward a partnership, it seemed our relationship was diverging.

Before they met, Justin's mother and I had two impromptu conferences in the teacher workroom; she volunteered at our school occasionally, and we ran into each other there. During our first meeting, we discussed the Recording Books at Home slips (Appendix S). These had been introduced during parent orientation and a description of them was offered in the fall parent letter (Appendix Q). Parents were strongly encouraged to read to their child at home, and listen to their child read, although it was recommended not to force the latter activity. Books read at home could be recorded on the slips available from school.

For a few years, I have been keeping a class record of the number of books read at home. Children returned slips when they had five books listed, and each morning students who brought slips to school were recognized with a round of applause; then the number of books read was added onto the class record. As an incentive, when our total reached increments of 250, we celebrated with a special treat, such as popcorn or cupcakes.

Justin's mother informed me that "Justin is embarrassed to return the slips and stand up to be recognized." This was surprising news and a new experience for me; the routine seemed simple and no first grader had previously had a problem with it. In an attempt to negotiate and compromise, I suggested that he did not need to stand up, and if he didn't want his name read, I would not. My goal, which I reiterated to his mother, was to encourage reading at home and to recognize those students who did so; this procedure was not done to embarrass anyone. She said she would offer these suggestions to Justin.

We also discussed Justin's writing at home. It seems that a parent letter encouraging children to write stories at home (Appendix R) had sparked some family problems. My goal with the letter was to offer some guidelines and an incentive (an Extra Effort Award) for creative writing. Part of the letter states,

"Although students can receive help with this project, the ideas must be their own. At the present time, the stories must be at least 50 words in length. Beginning in February (second semester), stories must be at least 100 words in length." The letter had been further explained to the students; their parent could write or type a story as they told it, or the student could write or type it. It was emphasized that story writing was not necessary; writing at home was a choice they could make.

Justin's mother told me that she was expecting a story a week from Justin, each 50 words long: "We thought that since Justin had never even written a 50 word story that we should encourage writing." Somehow, it seemed that her encouragement to have Justin to write a story, aligned with my goal, had transformed into an expectation. "We sit down once a week to do it but it's not going well. He gets frustrated and starts crying."

I suggested she relax a bit in her expectations; perhaps twice a month might be better, and perhaps let him select the time and the topic. I placed emphasis on the purpose for the activity; this was not to expect writing at home, but to encourage it. Although she did not say anything negative, through her body language I got the impression she did not like the approach of encouragement vs. expectation.

When our paths crossed again about 10 days later, I asked how things were going with the book slips and story writing. She indicated that Justin still didn't like to return the slips; I responded that what he was comfortable with was fine. He was reading at home, so that was the point. He was consistently checking out Zoo Books from our classroom library as well.

Regarding his writing, she had tried to give him some choices regarding the items we had discussed. It seemed to be better but was still somewhat frustrating for them both. I reiterated my purpose was to encourage writing, and that positively recognizing Justin's efforts, whatever they might be, would be very supportive. She noted again that he didn't seem to like to write. I proposed that, as he gained confidence, he would probably voluntarily write more, and stressed the value of internal motivation in fostering any new skill. Again, she did not appear very receptive to my comments.

The topic of Justin's crying at school came up; he continued to frequently cry. His mother again mentioned that he "did not have this much trouble in kindergarten", the possible implication being that something this year must be

contributing to the problem.

Following this meeting I made a decision to prepare two documents. First, because Justin's crying was a continual concern for his parents and myself, I would prepare an observation log of his experience in first grade to this point, highlighting his moments of frustration based on my recollections and folio documents. The log would be maintained and shared with his parents in an effort to keep them informed. Perhaps it would enable us to note a pattern of behavior or changes as they occurred, which might further help us identify sources of frustration or strategies we could initiate to help Justin.

Second, I would design and prepare a management plan which all his teachers (art, music, physical education, guidance, and library), and his parents, if interested, could use with Justin when he was crying. It was hoped that consistency of response might offer him security and support when frustrated.

The Guidance Counselor and Mom

After preparing both of these documents, they were shared with our principal and guidance counselor; both approved of their value and the methodology employed. The documents were ready for our guidance counselor to share with Justin's mother at their meeting, but the opportunity to share them did not arise. Instead, the counselor told Justin's mother about the management plan, which seemed acceptable to her. Rather than sending home the documents with Justin (I did not want to concern him), they were mailed. Although feedback, questions, suggestions, and comments from Justin's parents regarding the documents were requested, no direct correspondence or reaction regarding them were ever received.

The following written communication from our guidance counselor summarizes the meeting she and Justin's mother shared.

> My one hour visit with Justin's mother was fine and she seemed very happy and supportive when she left. She also loaned me her copy of *The Difficult Child.* ... She's NOT unhappy with you, just concerned that you're having so much trouble with Justin. I repeated that he had more episodes in kindergarten, (which she had asked Justin and he confirmed), and I said he is improving. We talked about temperament and she said with some

> chagrin that Justin is just like her. She doesn't see a need for a big conference, and is supportive of your behavior modification plan, saying Justin now understands that [sitting away from the class when crying] isn't punishment time out, but rather helpful time out. I sang your praises and said I'll see him weekly for 6 weeks to encourage use of humor and thinking of something else as a means of intervening by himself when he starts escalating. Also, I'll reinforce relaxation strategies and teach some positive self - talk.
>
> Then, after six weeks, we'll see if we need to try something else. She'll call me again, I think.

The management plan was put in place at school, and did seem to offer consistency of response to Justin's moments of crying. Yet, the tears continued.

Justin's mother and our guidance counselor did continue to meet occasionally; I am unaware how often. Our counselor would share ideas with Justin's mother that we generated regarding possible avenues or strategies to pursue with him. On one occasion in early spring, however, our counselor remarked, " We might get better results if any ideas we might have for Justin seem as if they come from me. His mother just doesn't seem very receptive to ideas from you."

To me, that seems a fairly good description of our barren parent-teacher relationship.

The End

Justin continued to cry; episodes were inconsistent in origin. Another child telling him to "go faster" down the hall once led to a half hour of tears. Change in routine or special events often were upsetting. He spent an entire art class upset because they were studying Monet, and using pastel water colors. Justin wanted to paint with red.

Throughout the year I offered Justin the best support and encouragement I could muster. Repeatedly I found myself needing to move away from him when he was crying. My routine of hugging children as they leave the classroom each day never appealed to Justin. At best, he seemed to tolerate a touch on the shoulder. Barren could describe our relationship as well.

Regarding his literacy development, Justin seemed to increasingly enjoy reading at school, and occasionally self-selected more challenging books from our school library. He did not like to be interrupted from his reading or his work to help others, and occasionally complained to me about "being bothered." In late April, his grade equivalent on the graduated vocabulary lists assessment was 6.2 (Slosson, 1963).

His interest in writing improved minimally. He did write, "I like cub scouts. I am in Pack 56 Tiger Cubs. The ages are 7 to 8 years old. I like tiger cubs." (and) "I am going to get my Christmas tree on December 18 Saturday. A pine tree. I hope I get the basketball court and the puppy. I always wanted a puppy for a friend." In the spring, when required, he did produce a chapter book about his life after school, which included,

> Then we have supper. I set the table. And my Mom or Dad cook supper. After supper I put my dish on the counter. Then I turn on the TV. Sometimes we watch the old or new Startrek. Sometimes something else. Then it is time for bed. We put our clothes in the dirty clothes place. Take a bath. Sometimes not. Brush teeth. Put on pajamas. Have a story. Say our prayers. Give a kiss, hug, handshake ... to my Mom and Dad.

Although Justin's mother and I had discussed his writing on three different occasions, she noted on the middle survey, "We feel that we have not had a lot of feedback on Justin's literacy development." They had changed their involvement with him at home however.

> We have relaxed our involvement with the book lists and writing assignments [Please note! Writing was encouraged, not assigned.] the teacher has sent home, allowing him to choose the level of involvement. We have noticed that he requests more trips to the public library, perhaps to find books that are interesting to him.

After I sent the documents about Justin's observation log and management plan, the correspondences I received from his mother centered on his immediate needs regarding health or after school plans. What I did hear on the third survey, however, relays the poor understanding between this parent-teacher relationship:

> The goals and expectations were not clearly defined to us. When told that papers were being sent home to fill out whenever the child read or was read five books or brought in a 50 word story, we thought that since Justin had

> never even written a 50 word story that we should encourage writing. After setting aside some time once a week (he choose the time) for story writing and quitting as soon as he got frustrated, we were told by the teacher not to do this. [Told not to do what? Quit when frustrated? I am unclear about this statement. Certainly I did tell his mother to quit whenever she or Justin felt frustrated.] We now do not even mention writing to him, or the 5 book lists that he seldom fills out, despite copious reading at home, and everyone, especially the teacher, seems happier.

I have yet to determine just how I seemed happier.

CHAPTER V
INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

Just Do It

For many years, my focus of interest has been on parent involvement with first graders' developing literacy. Early attempts of encouraging parents to work with their child generally had seemed successful. Dean took off with reading once his mother became involved. They loved going to the library, checking out piles of books, and reading, reading, reading; they filled out more slips of book titles than anyone in the class and Dean proudly returned them, beaming as his efforts were recognized. He became hooked on reading and progress naturally seemed to follow.

Likewise, Rosie and Lon appeared to make strong, enthusiastic, constructive and positive gain in academic achievement and attitude toward reading and writing with the help and support of their parents. Had I unwittingly chanced upon a nearly unrecognized, unappreciated, and untapped, at least to me, resource for helping first graders learn to read and write?

I longed to shout the news from the rooftops! Look at what parents can help us do! Watch this! Get them involved - give them this and that, do this and that, and check the results! See what I'm doing. Here is the strategy, follow this plan. JUST DO IT!

It's Not That Simple

Alas! Life is not that simple.

For example, assume that the formula for a successful, happy marriage was: fall in love, become engaged, plan a wedding with everything just so, walk down the aisle, say these words, kiss and you're done. That's it. Now you're married and happy.

Rather, regardless of the best laid plans, expectations and understandings, the day to day living of married lives is filled with the ups and downs of life; the relationship between partners is dynamic and interactive in nature as challenges, disappointments, celebrations, and opportunities arise. My

parents always told me that a successful marriage took commitment and hard work, and until I was married I often wondered what they meant; even with that, some do not survive.

Similarly, the task of parent involvement with children's developing literacy involves relationship building among participants: child, parent, and teacher. Partnerships and friendships may form and literacy can be enhanced; examples permeate the preceding chapter. On the other hand, the participant relationships can struggle. As my advisor remarked, "Sometimes when you have a problem, it drives people together; sometimes it drives them apart." The stories of Eva and Todd exemplify the former, while Justin's exemplifies the latter.

My naive assumption that teachers could easily offer a formula which involved parents with their child's literacy development has matured into an understanding of the complexity of the undertaking. Eight families participated with this study, and each family offered different approaches to the effort; the way parents were involved with their child was different; what seemed to work for the partnership in one family did not work in another. There was a uniqueness to each family and a complexity to each child-parent-teacher relationship.

Partnership Development

The purpose of this study was to describe what happens when parents and children are invited to participate in a child-parent-teacher partnership which mutually supports the child's literacy development during transition into first grade. Of the eighteen children enrolled in the first grade class, eight families (42%) indicated an interest and willingness to share about how the idea of partnership worked in their family.

Seven partnerships were formed during the study while one child-parent-teacher relationship did not develop into a partnership. Eight descriptors of the successful partnerships have been identified as characteristics contributing to our partnership development: interest in and willingness to participate, shared purpose, reciprocal flexibility, ability and willingness to negotiate and compromise, unconditional commitment, mutual respect, effective communication, and availability of curriculum materials.

Interest in and Willingness to Participate

It is possible to develop a child-parent-teacher partnership which mutually supports a child's literacy development when the participants are interested and willing to form one. Perhaps an obvious characteristic of our partnerships, this descriptor must not be assumed or overlooked in importance and value. As a beginning point, a successful partnership may need this ingredient to launch the journey. Or in a grounded theory analogy, the seed of possibility would not have the opportunity to germinate without receptive soil.

Although an interest in and a willingness to form the partnership may be an important characteristic, more is needed to make it successful. All participants indicated an interest in and were willing to participate in the parent partnership program, yet not all relationships successfully developed into partnerships.

Shared Purpose

Sharing a purpose appears to identify an additional ingredient for successful partnership development. All families who participated in the research expressed an expectation of progress for their child's literacy development;

" It would be fine if Eva could learn the language ... read simple books ... and be able to write simple English."

"We expect Todd to learn at his own pace in reading and writing."

"We hope that Betty is constantly challenged with interesting reading material ... "

"We would love to have Ben enjoy reading himself."

"Mary will improve all of her literacy skills"

"We always thought that Jim would not have that much difficulty in school."

"[We hope] that Dorothy [will] acquire basic reading and writing skills, and speak good English."

"I expect Justin to continue to love reading and to improve his writing abilities."

Likewise, my purpose as a first grade educator is to provide a positive learning experience for children (Appendix R), and specifically in this research

study, to enhance children's literacy development with the support of parent involvement (Appendix A).

It may be that, when participants are interested in and willingly participate in a potential partnership, and when there exists a shared purpose among participants, certain identifiable behaviors may be demonstrated by the participants which support partnership development. Five seem to pervade.

Reciprocal Flexibility

Defined as "susceptible of modification or adaptation; adaptable" (Webster, 1989, p. 542), flexibility was evident in all of the seven successful partnerships. Rather like dance partners who adapt to different rhythms, it seemed we adjusted or changed our focus as the need arose.

The adaptation of my morning schedule supported Eva's adjustment to school. We began our morning opening as Eva's morning composure tolerated, and took an outside break which benefited her and a special needs student. Likewise, her parents remained flexible throughout the first few weeks of school, a time period marked by tremendous stress for Eva; although they considered withdrawing her from the first grade experience, it seemed they continually modified their expectations with the hope that she would one day adjust. Our hope was that Eva eventually would become a happy member of our class, and to that end, we demonstrated flexibility.

Todd's mother and I demonstrated flexibility in our approach to his first grade experience. He repeatedly had difficulty listening and following directions, yet we strove to maintain a positive focus and adapted our expectations, rewards and consequences when necessary. Our goal of offering a successful school year to Todd superseded his interfering behaviors.

The parents of Betty, Ben, Mary, Jim, and Dorothy demonstrated flexibility by adapting their home life to include time for the curriculum materials sent from school. Similarly, the children adapted their lifestyle to accommodate the new demands on their time, and each willingly worked at home with their parents. As the first grade teacher, I demonstrated flexibility by allowing each child to progress through the curriculum materials at their own pace; continual attempts were made to adapt the work to the needs, interests, and expectations of each

family.

On the other hand, it was very difficult for Justin to exhibit flexibility regarding the reading at home incentive, which involved recording the titles of books read at home on a small sheet designed for that purpose (Appendix T). He found it embarrassing to return the slips and stand to be recognized, and was unable to adapt to this classroom routine as time progressed.

Ability and Willingness to Negotiate and Compromise

Webster (1989) defines negotiation as "mutual discussion and arrangement of the terms of a transaction or agreement" (p. 957), and compromise as "settlement of differences by mutual concessions" (p. 303). For many of the partnerships, there appeared to be no need to negotiate and compromise; flexibility seemed to intervene before differences became obvious. Yet for the families of Ben, Mary, and Dorothy, negotiation and compromising strategies were apparent within the partnerships.

Ben's mother repeatedly discussed options with him regarding his work at home; "I told him we would read half of it tonight to give him a goal - and he wanted to keep going - he said he wasn't tired - he wanted to keep reading." (and) "This was not a good night for Ben. He guessed at words without looking at the letters and then got very frustrated when I made him try again. So we put the books away in hopes that tomorrow would be better." Ben and his mother negotiated their time and experience together, and compromised by putting work aside when frustration surfaced, a strategy recommended via parent letter (Appendix R) and discussed during our parent conference.

Negotiation and compromise were demonstrated by Mary's mother, father, and myself. We settled our differences regarding Mary's need for extra support with literacy development by establishing a viable home - school support system; it was my professional responsibility to refer her for school sponsored support but her parents chose not to include her in this availability. Because Mary had never been in a school setting prior to first grade, she also needed time to adjust to the tremendous transition in her life. The compromise her mother and I made reflected our two fold shared purpose: allow Mary to adjust to school at her own rate, and support her literacy development at home with consistent exchange of

materials and strategies from school implemented by her mother.

Dorothy's mother and I were willing to negotiate and compromise the pace of her reading the little books: "Dorothy is reading these books twice every night. It is because she knows them very well without any mistake that I am returning them. There is no need to keep them two nights. But if you wish so I will keep them two nights. Please let me know what you wish." I responded, "My concern is pushing too fast. I'll let you determine Dorothy's readiness to move on. Thanks for your help." Dorothy's mother and I were willing to mutually discuss and arrange our differences.

One factor which may have interfered with partnership development in Justin's family was the manner in which his mother interpreted the letter sent home inviting parents and children to work together at home with writing (Appendix S). During an impromptu mini-conference, Justin's mother indicated that she was having him write one story a week, but that "it wasn't going well". I attempted to communicate my goals for this project by stressing the value of encouraging children to write at home, rather than expecting them to do so, yet difficulties at home continued. It seemed we were unable to negotiate and compromise our differences regarding his writing at home, and eventually, his parents did not "even mention writing to him."

A further attempt to negotiate and compromise with Justin's mother regarding his concern with the reading at home slips was equally unsuccessful. When his mother indicated that he was "embarrassed to return the slips and stand up to be recognized", I suggested some alternatives which might be more comfortable for him. He did not need to stand up, and if he didn't want his name read, I wouldn't. Justin continued to resist participation with the incentive project, and eventually his mother noted, " ... we now do not even mention ... the 5 book lists that he seldom fills out, despite copious reading at home."

Unconditional Commitment

The seventh definition of commit is: "to bind or obligate, as by pledge or assurance; pledge; to commit oneself to a promise; to be committed to a course of action" (Webster, 1989, p. 296). It could be said that participants in the seven successful partnerships demonstrated a sense of unconditional commitment to our

shared purpose of literacy development enhancement as evidenced by our flexibility and willingness to negotiate and compromise.

The manifest characteristics of flexibility, and ability and willingness to negotiate and compromise, may derive from a supportive, fundamental commitment to the child's growth and well being; the parents and I demonstrated an obligation ("... something by which a person is bound to do certain things, Webster, 1989, p. 994) to their child's successful literacy development.

In other words, when the descriptors of flexibility, negotiation and compromise were demonstrated, they were reflective of an underlying premise, philosophy or belief system, i. e., that this child will improve in literacy development, and I am committed to supporting, promoting and encouraging that development.

Mutual Respect

An additional underlying supportive and fundamental dimension to the successful partnerships could be described as a sense of mutual respect by the participants, particularly demonstrated by the adults in the various successful parent-teacher relationships. Defined as "esteem for or a sense of worth or excellence of a person" (Webster, 1989, p. 1221), the concept of respect for the person could be expanded to include respect for a person's ideas, perspectives, understandings, experiences, and knowledge.

My respect for the literacy culture of each family, including their interests, habits, understandings, expectations, and involvements, has increased through experience and study. Likewise, a sense of respect for my experience and suggestions seemed apparent from the parents of the successful partnerships.

The characteristic of mutual respect did not seem present with Justin's mother and me; I attempted to respect her interests, concerns, and understandings, and the concerns Justin was experiencing, which were expressed through his mother. It did not, however, seem that she demonstrated a respect for my experience, ideas, strategies or suggestions. In fact, she eventually grew "not very receptive to any ideas from me."

Effective Communication

Effective ("adequate to accommodate a purpose", Webster, 1989, p. 455) communication, formal and informal, verbal and written, seemed to traverse the seven successful partnerships. The manner in which we shared knowledge and understanding accommodated and served our purpose of enhancing the child's literacy development. Ineffective communication seemed to be a factor that impeded the development of a child-parent-teacher relationship. With Justin and his family, for example, there was talk going on but it was not the reciprocal kind of exchange needed to promote partnership development. It did not seem to serve our purpose.

Curriculum Materials

It is difficult to consider if or how the seven successful partnerships might have developed or what they might have looked like without the use of curriculum materials. The materials may represent the tangible component of partnership building. In one way or another, all seven parents cited the materials as helpful and supportive.

Eva - "Our child likes to read books borrowed at the school. We read them for her and translate. She also likes to read by herself. Our child likes to do her homework, especially if she additionally can color something. ... We help her with writing simple sentences. This is still difficult for Eva. Some assignments are as fun as playing. ... Parents must also show interest in the children's homework. The teacher has to put efforts in making the school work fun and exciting for the children."

Todd - "Just recently we took some of his papers from school to lunch at the Homeplace Restaurant and he read to our friends as we waited in line outside. ... The reading sheets that Todd brought home were wonderful for us to use in helping him learn to read. He enjoyed the small books sent home in the envelopes."

Betty - "The [small] books. ... Homework. Receiving completed, graded work," [promoted the child-parent-teacher partnership].

Ben -"I think the quick success books that give the children a sense of

accomplishment are wonderful.. I know Ben has done well with them. All children, and adults too, need the positive reinforcement completing something gives us. ...supplying us with books, word lists, and short stories to help Ben and give him quick successes [promoted the child-parent-teacher partnership].

Mary - "I wish all teachers could use as much supplemental materials as Mrs. J. does. It really makes a difference. We can spend a few minutes on different pages and the child doesn't get frustrated. I guess it's true - variety is the spice of life!"

Jim - "We're very pleased with ... the different ways that material is presented. The little sheets that come home and he needs to be able to read them. ... And then adding just the regular books that he brings home to read.... He loves the books that he brings home from class." And from Jim, "The Troll books have helped me because you told us that they were the easier ones and then I've been picking those out and I picked some other ones out that I've read like Hand, Hand, Fingers, Thumb. And that wasn't a Troll book and then the other ones taught me some other words like Diplodocus. ... Those Troll books, that's what's gotten me into reading."

Dorothy - "The books she brings home [promoted the child-parent-teacher partnership].

Locating palatable curriculum materials for Justin was difficult. By the time he entered our classroom, he was reading well above grade level. He enjoyed our classroom Zoo Books, and gradually began taking books home from our school library. As time passed, he also began reading chapter books at school when he finished his work and during our daily quiet reading time, but most of his reading was done at home with books he selected from the public library. When spring arrived, according to one assessment (Slosson, 1963), his ability to read assorted vocabulary words had grown by nearly three years, into the sixth grade level. It may be that Justin and his family did not need to development a partnership with his teacher.

Summary

Seven partnerships were formed during the study while one child-parent-teacher relationship did not develop into a partnership. Eight descriptors of the successful partnerships have been identified and described as characteristics contributing to partnership development: interest in and willingness to participate, shared purpose, reciprocal flexibility, ability and willingness to negotiate and compromise, unconditional commitment, mutual respect, effective communication, and availability of curriculum materials.

It is difficult to say if all eight descriptors are necessary for fruitful partnership development; yet each appears to be a valuable component. Removal of any one characteristic would seem to weaken the partnership, save for the descriptor of ability and willingness to negotiate and compromise.

With four partnerships, this characteristic (ability and willingness to negotiate and compromise) was not evident, or present in such subtle forms to be negligible. When frustrations or difficulties arose with the families of Eva and Todd, flexibility seemed to prevail; we were able to adapt in such a way that negotiation and compromise appeared unnecessary. With the families of Betty and Jim, where the child's literacy development progressed almost effortlessly, frustrations and difficulties did not surface. Flexibility was evident within these two families as time was found to work on materials sent home to enhance the child's literacy development. Here, also, the characteristics of negotiation and compromise appeared unnecessary.

It could be argued, however, that all eight characteristics are necessary for successful partnership development, which includes the descriptor of ability and willingness to negotiate and compromise. Without that characteristic, a partnership may weaken and collapse when frustrations and difficulties do occur, and when the ability to be flexible is insufficient to problem solve the situation.

Benefits of Partnership

Enhanced Literacy Development

The support our successful child-parent-teacher partnerships offered

seemed to enhance the literacy development of the children involved. Eva made giant gains in literacy development with the aide of materials sent from school, such as simple English books to read and simple English sentences to construct at home where translation of material was supported by her mother. Her mother summarized: "Eva learns much faster than we had expected. Last time, I wrote that we expected her to read simple books in English at the end of the school year. This she does already. After two months, her eagerness in learning is great." Cooperation between parent and teacher was noted by her mother as important; "It is important for a child to feel that parents and teacher cooperate. The children will be more confident and feel more safe in their new situation. ... It will be easier to motivate a child to read and write."

Without the regular two way exchange of ideas, observations, and concerns Todd's mother and I shared, it is doubtful he would have made his strong literacy gains. Our partnership easily could have taken a negative tone based on Todd's difficulties listening and following directions, but it seemed we helped each other maintain a positive focus, to his advantage.

Examples of Todd's enhanced literacy development include: "He wrote a note to himself" (and) "Todd noted a list that I had made, and he read [it]." (and) "Today Todd sorted through the mail and correctly read most of the notes inside." (and) "We have encouraged Todd to write reminder notes to himself for important things. He often forgets to give his lunch money to the cafeteria, so this week he wrote a note --- Lunch money --- on a colored Post it Note to remember. Yes, he remembered to turn it in!" (and) "We planned our Thanksgiving menu and Todd helped to write these things down on paper." (and) "Grandma saw a big difference in his reading and writing skills." (and) Todd is starting to read more to us than wanting us to read to him."

Betty entered first grade with a strong literacy foundation, and may have made outstanding literacy progress without the support of our partnership. However her progress may have been enhanced and enriched by our partnership; "Betty has eagerly attacked reading, but she is catching on even faster than we were prepared for! She is sounding out much more difficult words than I thought possible." (and) "I haven't seen Betty so excited since she learned to walk. I thought she'd be pleased with herself, but she's actually excited (jumps up and down, squeals, hugs us) when she reads something new."

After experiencing first grade once with Ben, his parents were thrilled with the early progress he demonstrated. In mid October, his mother noted, "This was the first time I had read [Mrs. Brice's Mice] with him. He was sounding words I would never have thought he could. He read sentences without the usual 'pause and look around' between them. It was very exciting. I feel today was a real turning point." A month later, she reported, "We are so excited with Ben's progress in reading, writing, and speaking. We have seen much more improvement than we expected at this point [November]. He tells us about the day in great detail where it use to be one word responses."

By the end of the study period, Ben's mother noted two components of our partnership which seemed to promote his steady progress: " .. encouragement from you to show Ben he could do it and short stories to help Ben and give him quick successes." She summarized his growth: "This is my last entry and it ends on a high note. Ben read very well tonight and enjoyed the time we spent reading together. I think Ben's reading has improved so much during these first three months. And his writing is so much more complete. And most important, he enjoys it, and I think will continue to do so in the years to come."

Mary's parents understood she needed time to adjust to the school setting, and they believed allowing her time "... to adjust - to be shy - to take in the situation ..." was the most important component of our partnership. As she gained " ... confidence and trust in her new school and more importantly her teacher" she began to "absorb everything she could at school. She unloads her backpack in the car and is busy reading to her brother and Mommy as we're driving home. She's less shy and feels quite comfortable spelling out and sounding out the unfamiliar words."

Jim, like Betty, may have made excellent progress with literacy development without the support of our child-parent-teacher partnership. His mother did note, however, that "he loves the books that he brings home from class" and "lately he has not been wanting to listen to the chapter books (she reads to her children) because he wants to read *his* books *to me* in the evening. So we're having to juggle that around a little bit."

Dorothy arrived at the school setting with strong motivation to learn. Her interests and efforts seemed to be supported by the materials and strategies sent from school to home, and her mother, despite our differences, upheld her

commitment to work with her, noting, "Elsa is progressing nicely and she loves to learn to read and write, asking us often how to spell a word." When asked what things helped promote our supportive partnership, her mother listed one item: "The books she brings home."

It should be noted that Justin's reading did progress nicely during the year; by late April, he scored a grade equivalent of sixth grade, second month on one assessment, a growth of nearly three years. The "copious reading at home" could be credited for this progress; he was not an avid reader at school.

Each of the previous descriptions of children's enhanced literacy development seem to support the notion that meaning or purpose may infiltrate the reading, writing, speaking, and listening process (Bettelheim & Zelan, 1982; Taylor, l989; Gallimore & Tharp, 1990; Chapman, 1993; Burns & Collins, 1987; and Perkins, 1995). Initially, Eva's grasp of the English language was extremely limited, and she may have had a strong sense of motivation and purpose to communicate with others at school. After two months, her mother reported that "her eagerness to learn is great"; indeed, Eva made exceptional progress. The remaining children demonstrated meaningful and purposeful engagement with literacy in diverse ways: Todd began writing notes to himself; Betty was especially pleased and excited with her learning, and "eagerly attacked reading"; Ben began telling about his school day in detail and tackling increasingly difficult reading material; as Mary began to find security and trust in the school setting, her motivation to learn increased; Jim began to demonstrate an increase in desire to select his own reading material; Dorothy carefully and thoughtfully progressed with the creation of her alphabet book, which seemed to support her need to understand sounds in the English language; and Justin found an avenue to pleasure reading at home and through the public library. Teale and Sulzby (1986) offer support for a meaningful or purposeful perspective of early literacy development:

> Literacy develops in real-life settings for real-life activities in order to "get things done." Therefore, the functions of literacy are as integral a part of learning about writing and reading during early childhood as are the forms of literacy. (p. xviii)

Enriched Parental Understanding, Expectations, and Involvement

The children participating in this study experienced their first safe, secure, and pleasant learning environment in their homes. To reiterate, many support the notion that the parent is the child's first and foremost teacher (Lightfoot, 1978; Comer, 1980; Sinclair & Ghory, 1983; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Gelfer, 1991; Kiah, 1992; Darling, 1992; Kies, Rodriguez & Granato, 1993; Boyer, 1995). Typically, the family is the first context for relationships and the child-parent relationship is the first interpersonal learning environment.

Evidentiary comments support the notion that parental understanding, expectation, and involvement with their child's literacy development was enriched during the study. Recall Berger's (1991) observation: "School / home collaboration helps many families in their interaction and support of children" (p. 22).

Some changes in parental understanding and expectation were specific to the parent's child, while some parents indicated a broader increase in understanding related to literacy development.

Specifically, Eva's mother highlighted changes in her understanding related to her daughter.

> My understanding of literacy development has changed some. As we are from [a foreign country], Eva did not speak any English before we moved here, the change is very great. Eva was very reserved in the beginning, and she did not want to go to school. She did not speak, write or read any English, but she was listening as good as she was able to in the classes. Now Eva speaks a little English, also she reads a little, and she even writes some. Eva is much more happy now, and she does <u>like</u> being at school. For us, as parents, the change is great. ... Our expectations have changed as Eva has learned much faster than expected.

Likewise, Betty's mother was impressed with the rapid progress her daughter had made:

> Betty has eagerly attacked reading, but she is catching on even faster than we were prepared for! ... It also strikes me how she uses pictures in a book or the context of the sentence to 'guess' a word she can't read.

Sometimes it's a different word than what's on the page, but it still works in the story.

Her father generalized to others: "Not being a trained educator, I didn't realize how rapidly literacy is developed in a few short months." (More accurately stated, the word "can" should be substituted for the word "is"; for some, the process can be painstakingly slow!)

Ben's mother commented, "We encourage him to write stories now and I feel we are doing better in our expectations and understanding of how Ben is doing."

Jim's mother understood his decreasing need for support: "He doesn't seem to require nearly as much - having someone sit down with him and go through a book. ... He's picking up ... it's like ... he's not afraid of anything..."

More general comments regarding children's literacy development, combined with comments specific to their child, were made by the mothers of Todd and Mary.

> My understanding of literacy development has changed. We learn to accept and appreciate all abilities with relation to reading, writing, speaking, and listening. I see the need for more structure in situations with Todd speaking and when all of us are listening." (Todd's mother)
>
> I'm seeing how very important the four [the ability to read, write, speak and listen] coincide. The days of approaching each one separately are over and we can now appreciate how the four are so closely related and must be treated as one. (Mary's mother)

For many, changes in understanding and expectation occurred during the study period, and these may have precipitated changes in the way families were involved with literacy at home.

Eva's parents, surprised at how fast she learned, were impressed that she "also shows great interest in learning to read and write. We started with one sheet of paper for homework. Now, she is able to read two or three sheets a day, in addition to reading an easy book in English. What is interesting is that Eva seems to read English almost at the same level as she reads her native language.

Todd's mother noted a change in the way the family listened to him. "We all have enjoyed reading and listening to many more stories than ever before. ...

We have expanded our library to include more books chosen by the children rather than the parents. We spend time at the library and bookstore more than ever before. We also take note to listen more carefully.

In Betty's family, the budding reader displayed an unmistakable force. "We're not 'driving' Betty's book time - she's 'demanding' (requesting) it. She's self-choosing writing and reading over TV (Thank goodness!) more and more.

Both children in Ben's family were benefiting from our first grade partnership. "We are working on being better listeners ourselves, and encouraging both children to tell us in great detail about their days. Also we are working on having Ben write more. ... We encourage him to write stories now....

The time spent with literacy in Mary's family was "... much more focused. Now we read simple library books, handouts ... The parent and child seem more relaxed because we know what's expected."

Where Jim needed more support early during the school year, by mid December his mother reported that she rarely needed to offer help. "Well, actually when I think about working with him at home, ... there doesn't seem to be having to work with him. It's just sitting with him and he is either reading to me or I'm reading to him. ... it doesn't seem to be a real labored process."

Dorothy and her mother spent more time reading together during the study period. "We are reading more to Dorothy, going daily through her reading assignments."

During this period, a change in involvement occurred in Justin's family as well. "We have noticed that he requests more trips to the public library, perhaps to find books that are interesting to him."

The preceding examples support Mavrogenes (1990) observation: "Most things that parents can do to encourage reading and writing involve time, attention, and sensitivity rather than money. All parents can learn to foster children's literacy" (p. 4). "No other time for parent involvement is more critical than the early years of a child's educational experience when the patterns and habits of literacy are evolving and developing" note Resh and Wilson (1990, p. 51). Through the process of child-parent interaction during continued literacy development, a process supported by the teacher, parents seemed to grow in understanding, expectation, and involvement with their child.

More Informed Child - Parent - Teacher Communication

An additional benefit of partnership development is that a more informed and effective process of communication and information sharing may begin to develop as the child, parent, and teacher work together. During this study, the main avenues for communication exchange were informal conversations with parents, formal parent-teacher conferences, comments written on curriculum materials exchanged between school and home, survey comments, and family journals.

Two of these avenues, survey comments and family journals, were unique to this study; the other means of communication are typical for a classroom teacher. It was, however, through the two unique avenues of survey and journal communication that I was afforded an especially interesting and information perspective to each child's learning process, parent understandings and expectations, family involvements, and the like.

Although no parent participated with the offer to "dialogue journal", with hindsight, it seems like an exciting methodology for more consistently informed communication between home and school. Some information found in the parent journals following the study would have been helpful in my work with the child during our fall first grade experience.

This is an avenue worth pursuing; a dialogue journal could be helpful to the parent and myself as we share observations and concerns as they occur. A simple survey sent to parents at various points during the school year, seeking feedback, suggestions, comments, and concerns, could be an additional means of information sharing.

When considering the responsibility for initiating parent involvement may seem to rest with the teacher (Plowden, 1967; Sinclair & Ghory, 1983; Law & Mincey, 1983; Dobson, Dobson, and Koetting, 1985), it follows that constructive efforts should be initiated. Swick's 1991 Teacher-Parent Partnership supported the collaborative design as very successful, especially when parents and teachers were highly involved with the project. Involvement through regular avenues of communication may well be a key ingredient toward child-parent-teacher partnership development.

Informal Partnerships

It should be noted that a number of informal partnerships developed with families who chose not to participate with the research project. Initially, ten families indicated an interest in project participation (Appendix A). However, when the second letter was sent identifying the levels of participation (Appendix D), only eight families responded.

That is not to say that no child-parent-teacher partnership developed with the other two families, or with the remaining eight families who did not indicate an interest in study participation. In fact, although specific data are not readily available, a cursory overview generalizes that fruitful partnerships developed with six of the ten remaining families. A regular exchange of information and materials occurred throughout the year, and some partnerships further developed into friendships. One mother and her daughter stopped by two years later and announced, "Mrs. J., we just wanted to tell you. Everyone in Sarah's class this year who was in your first grade class loves to read!"

During the course of the year encompassing this study, four families did not participate with a regular exchange of materials from school. As time passed, and it seemed apparent that home support was not consistent, every effort was made to accommodate the four children's needs at school, via one to one or small group tutoring with university students and volunteer parents.

New Directions

To reiterate, for many years, my focus of interest has been on parent involvement with first graders' developing literacy. This interest continues. Possibilities for further research include the following.

A follow up study of the eight families who participated in this research project could be initiated. Family reflections on the idea of partnership three years later could be shared. Did these families form partnerships with other teachers since this study? If so, how would they be described? Are the eight characteristics identified in this study present in other child-parent-teacher partnerships? Are other characteristics present, and if so, what are they? Were they present in this study, but overlooked by the researcher? What happened to

the literacy development of the children in this study? Was children's literacy development supported with parent involvement at home? Why or why not? If so, what did it look like?

Because I have been teaching first grade for six years in the same community, there are dozens of families in the area who have worked with their child at home using curriculum materials sent from my classroom. Families from this larger population could be contacted to learn more about the effects of our previous work together. Looking back, what kind of memories of our experience do the families recall? What advantages and disadvantages could they identify about the partnership? Did these partnerships seem to have an effect on the child's literacy development? How? Did some habits, or ways of working together at home, seem to begin during our first grade partnership? If so, what are they? Have any of these families developed partnerships with other teachers, and if so, how would they be described? Could the experience of parents of first grade children, who become directly and positively involved with their child's education, facilitate and influence their involvement during later school experiences? In other words, could first grade offer an especially fertile opportunity for parent involvement which might have long-term repercussions?

Each year, it seems as if a small (but growing) number of families find it difficult or impossible to work with their child at home, using materials sent from school. Serious consideration should be given regarding strategies which invite and further support family involvement in these settings; research could be conducted which examines the child-parent-teacher dynamics of these families. How could more families be encouraged to participate with their child's developing literacy? How could they become involved with their child's learning in a manner comfortable for them? How can educators more effectively listen to the needs and concerns of families who, at present, are apparently not involved with their child's literacy development?

The call for parent involvement continues to be heard throughout the educational community. The focus of my interest lies not with parent involvement in the school, but rather with parent involvement in the home with the child, specifically as conventional reading and writing begin. Two groups intimately involved with this phenomenon are primary educators, and parents of the young children. Do contemporary primary educators believe in the value of involving

parents with their child's developing literacy? If so, how are they encouraging that involvement? What strategies are they offering these parents? Are materials being offered, and if, so, what are they, and why were they selected? What position and perspective to the parents bring to the involvement? Do they see themselves as valuable contributors to the literacy development process? Why or why not? Should child-parent-teacher partnerships be promoted in other educational settings, and if so, how?

Personal Reflection: Lessons Learned About My Teaching

The analysis of data gave rise to the formal overview of partnership development and benefits of partnership previously offered in this chapter. Some of the lessons from the study are more personally reflective about my teaching.

Lessons learned from three children in the study are offered. They are followed by changes in the partnership development program.

Lessons From the Children

Eva

Eva helped me more fully understand that learning is constructive; learning and literacy are built in the learner. "Literacy ...is a dynamic process in which what literate action means is continually being constructed and reconstructed by individuals as they become members of new social groups" (The Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group, 1992, p. 120). As Eva became a member of our social group, she constructed her learning in an individual and unique manner.

As a teacher, I do not *know* when, where, or if a student is learning unless they indicate their understanding in some way. In fact, I believe that one of the fallacies teachers can fall prey to is the notion, "I taught; therefore, the student knows." Eva was a shy girl, who kept quiet much of the time. But her eventual English literacy development, in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, impressed everyone as she began to express it.

In mid November, her mother observed what was occurring with Eva. "Eva was very reserved in the beginning, and she did not want to go to school. She did

not speak, write or read any English, *but she was listening as good as she was able to in the classes* (italics added).

Literacy teachers should not underestimate the value and importance of listening; the art of listening should be encouraged and promoted throughout the elementary setting. Long before she could speak, read, or write English, Eva was constructing her understanding of the language. Clay (1972) might well have been describing Eva's early attempts to learn English, while highlighting the value and importance of thoughtful listening and speaking:

> Every sentence the child constructs is an hypothesis about language. If he is understood, his hypothesis is confirmed - the idea could be expressed that way. When the listener is puzzled, the hypothesis is rejected and a different sentence is formed. ... If the child's language development seems to be lagging [indeed, Eva's naturally lagged] it is misplaced sympathy to do his talking for him. Instead, put your ear closer, concentrate more sharply, smile more rewardingly, and spend more time in genuine conversation, difficult though it is. (p. 25-6)

Through modeling, appreciation, and praise, our classroom community of support offered Eva a constructive environment for her learning. She listened to us, and gradually, as she began to speak, we listened to her.

I am reminded of how an infant learns language in much the same way. Babies babble along, experimenting with sounds and words. Eva was more reserved in her learning, and did not demonstrate this experimentation; rather, she used the new language as she gained understanding and confidence. Although she spoke, read, or wrote little during her first weeks with us, she was absorbing a tremendous amount of information through the act of listening.

I recall Eva's mother telling me, at the end of the year, that she believed Eva "thought in English", "dreamed in English", and preferred using English rather than her native language. Through listening, Eva had constructed her understanding very well!

Todd

Todd's story began as he entered the classroom one morning with pride and determination. Imagine what might have happened to his energy and

enthusiasm if time had not been made for him to share his treasure, *Drummer Hoff,* with his teacher, and soon afterward, with his classmates.

As an elementary classroom teacher, time sometimes seems like a great enemy; there is never enough of it. Teaching is an awesome responsibility. There are numerous objectives and standards to be addressed and assessed, curricula to organize, prepare, teach, assess, reorganize and file, special activities to plan, parents to contact, materials to gather, the list could continue for some time and should include, listen to children.

Suppose the scenario changed.

"I can read this book."

"Good, Todd, but not now. I'm too busy right now, and we have other plans for today. It will just have to wait."

Where does his energy and enthusiasm go?

We must honor the moment when a student announces, "I can read this book" or any similar voice of accomplishment. Recall Ayers (1993) observation: "The strongest source of knowledge about the student remains the student herself, and tapping into that knowledge is not so difficult. Kids love to tell us about themselves, and we can structure multiple opportunities for them to do so" (p. 42). Child-teacher interactions of any kind should be done respectfully and thoughtfully by the teacher involved. Respectful interpersonal relationships will enhance the growth and learning of all involved in education and are part of a democratic environment. "The rapport between teacher and student - is the engine of educational progress" (Back to the Classroom, 1991, p. 20).

Green's (1988) challenge may relate: "My focal point is in human freedom, in the capacity to surpass the given [the plan book?] and look at things as if they could be otherwise" (p. 3). The autocratic teacher may "do" education to children: "Not now, Todd. I am too busy, and we have other plans for the day." On the other hand, the democratic teacher may share the educational experience with children: *I nestled [Todd] into the warmth and comfort of an encircling arm, and savored the moment.* The act of teaching becomes the art of teaching.

Children should be honored and involved in the learning process. Dewey (1916) opposes practices which treat learning as a passive process of absorbing information: "[Education] is that reconstructing or reorganizing of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course

of subsequent experience" (pp. 89-90). The course of subsequent experience could be a direct reference to the course of action which Todd's teacher takes following his proclamation. Our plan books need to be set aside for celebration and recognition, and, in doing so, we demonstrate our pride in the accomplishment, and our respect for the learner. Rather than spotlighting ourselves and our plans, we listen to the learner, and allow the learner to shine.

Our concern should be to consider what we may miss if we don't. Indeed, our educational dreams, hopes, wishes, philosophies, standards, goals, objectives, plans, materials, assessments, and evaluations for the learner may have this aim - the quintessential "I Can."

Jim

As Jim traversed his way through text, using illustrations and context for support, I was reminded of a moment of revelation. One spring morning, about ten years ago, a first grader and I were hunched over a reading passage. I was overjoyed with satisfaction as she fluently moved through the story of the hare and the tortoise. Yes! I thought to myself. The fruits of our labors!

As we turned to the supportive vocabulary list, however, Sue stumbled over words read less than a minute earlier. I stopped and looked at her. I wanted to say, "Sue, you just read that word in the story." Instead, I pondered.

It was clear that, without the supporting context and picture clues, Sue did not "know" the words turtle, walked, cross, finish and so on. What did that mean? She read the story and not the vocabulary words; could she read or not read? Perhaps the answer lay in the gray area between the two extremes.

Reading is a process of making sense of text, and without the story's context, the words were less meaningful. Could she read? Yes or No? Well, I reasoned, yes and no. Sue was in the *process* of learning to read. Clay (1972) observes: "The process of learning to read is a slow-growing skill, which usually takes the 'average' child four years to master" (p. 18).

Consider how a baby learns to walk. A great deal of time and practice is involved with grabbing onto something stable, pulling up, and moving around with little baby steps. Is the baby walking or not? Why or why not?

Eventually an unassisted, tentative step is taken! Bravo! Call the relatives!

Record it in the baby book!

Keep trying. Fall. Up again. Try and try again. Two steps taken without assistance. Could the baby be described as walking, or not quite walking, but almost walking. Is it difficult to pin down a definitive answer? Why? Is the baby in the process of learning to walk?

Time passes. Practice continues. The number of unassisted steps taken steadily increases. Although many parents may have recorded the date of "Baby's First Step", it is much more difficult to date, "Baby walks."

I've noticed that frequently parents will identify a general time frame. "She's been walking for about two weeks. Still a little tentative, but getting more steady every day."

This walking scenario analogizes with the reading scenario.

A child generates a word. Perhaps you are driving around town, and out of the back seat comes, "Possibilities, Daddy, I think it says possibilities." Laminack (1990) relates this true story.

> Actually it said North American Van Lines. The text, printed on the side of an 18 wheel moving van, was two large interlocking circles with an enormous white arrow running through the center. ... As we pulled alongside the moving van at a traffic light my 2 1/2 year old son Zachary pointed to the truck and asked, "What's that say on that big truck?" I responded that I couldn't read it because I was driving and asked him to read it for me. He paused, looking at the truck for a few seconds then straight ahead as if watching the traffic light when out of nowhere he announced, "Possibilities, daddy, I think it says possibilities." ... Zachary's response was tied to television advertisement designed to entice the viewer to obtain and use a Mastercard via repeated displays of the card coupled with the slogan "master the possibilities". The two interlocking circles of Mastercard have the word "Mastercard" printed over them in white letters. From Zachary's viewpoint this image (print display) was not unlike the two circles and the white arrow of North American Van Lines. ... he had ... made sense. (p 536-7)

Zachary had pulled himself up and taken a baby step toward the act of reading. He used his supportive experience and knowledge in taking that step. He was not reading, but he was certainly tying to make sense of print.

Like Zachary, Sue had used context and illustration to support her reading. During the story, she created hypotheses about how the language operated (Clay, 1972 ; Sulzby, 1991), and, used self-monitoring and self-correction strategies to support her efforts (Clay, 1991). It may be helpful to revisit components of the emergent literacy perspective, which recognizes that literacy development begins before formal schooling, that listening, speaking, reading, and writing develop concurrently, that literacy develops in active engagement with real life settings, and that children do critical cognitive work in literacy development from birth (Teale & Sulzby, 1986).

Sue's assistance with reading may have been contextual, picture cues, a word or beginning sound offered, or a nod or smile from her teacher. As Vygotsky's zone of proximal development supports, what readers perform with assistance today, they will perform independently and competently tomorrow (Moll, 1990).

To read (and walk) without assistance generally requires time, practice, patience, trial and error, and work. And like walking, the resulting freedom can be exhilarating. Sue's time would come.

Changes in Partnership Development Program

A number of changes have taken place in efforts to encourage and promote partnership development since the completion of this research project. Other changes are in the formative or brewing stage. Nine topics will be offered.

First, in an effort to incorporate more books into the school - home material exchange, my personal collection of classroom books have been organized by type. Categories which have been incorporated into the exchange include, "easier" books, "harder" books, Troll, and Fairy Tales.

Books with minimal reading compose the easier section, while chapter books and those with lengthy stories are grouped as harder. A few more able readers, usually two to three, chose to skip the easier books and begin with the harder section.

A set of easy to read, colorfully illustrated books published by Troll have been laminated and were sent home with students who were just beginning to learn to read conventionally. Although not sequential in nature, they are especially

inviting, fun and informative. I wish I had readied these years ago; they offer more quick successes.

For stronger readers, classroom fairy tale books were incorporated into the book exchange for reading at home practice. Typically these stories offer the more able reader some challenge and good literature exposure. I wish I had used them with Justin; he might have found them enjoyable.

A consequence of this classroom book organization strategy was that some children began reading three or four different types of books at home, and therefore had three or four different envelopes moving between school and home. For a few families, this number was manageable and stimulating; others seemed to have difficulty with organization and appeared more comfortable with only one or two envelopes moving between home and school.

Second, by arrangement with the school librarian, advanced readers (typically those beyond second - third grade level) have the regular opportunity to check out two books from the school library, one from the easy read section where the other children select books during library class, and one from the "regular" fiction section of the library. These children can return books at any time, and are taught how to sign out a new book if no one is available to help them. This is a change from when Justin checked out chapter books; he was allowed only one book at a time.

Third, although some families found them to be helpful and supportive, I have ceased using the worksheets with typed simple stories. Occasionally I considered resurrecting the worksheets for some children, but found there was enough to do with the books, which I believe are more interesting, meaningful, and helpful; they offer the context and illustrations more supportive of children's developing literacy.

Fourth, worksheets with rhyming words, which were the basis of sentence construction during the research project, were used during second semester during the year following the study, and not at all last year. Time was a factor in managing the material exchange, and the rhyming worksheets seemed to lose their appeal; it takes time to manage them, and read all the work the children accomplish. Instead, we are doing more writing at school.

Fifth, daily journal writing at school has been upgraded from a last minute time slot on the schedule, to a first item in the day endeavor. A format for journal

writing has been initiated which seemed to offer a sense of security and predictability to some students. A journal "starter" was written on the chalkboard each morning: Monday was always prompted, "Over the weekend... " or "Over the long weekend ...", Friday was always "Friday Free Write", and the other three days prompt was related to special events or themes we were studying (for example, "I know these three things about insects:"). Children understood that their first undertaking each morning was to complete journal writing. During the research project, journal writing had been unstructured (students were typically undirected in topic) and scheduled at the conclusion of the school day; unfortunately, it was frequently cut from the schedule due to lack of time.

Sixth, instead of writing one to two chapter books a year, students are now writing four to six. A Table of Contents page is customary, and dedication pages are not unusual.

Seventh, preparation of weekend homework is a regular feature of my Friday schedule; I attempt to accomplish a through check of "who needs what" each Friday morning, and typically write reminder notes to any one who has had an item for a week or longer.

Eighth, this August I will obtain a "free writing" sample from each child. During analysis of this research project, I realized I have never sought this information as a component of my fall assessment! Our reading specialist, trained in Reading Recovery, will be an excellent resource on how to specifically initiate this task.

Ninth, my personal collection of Berenstain Bears books will be laminated and offered for home reading to the more able readers. They provide fun, educational, popular and challenging reading.

Summary

When this study began, I naively assumed that partnerships would form with all interested and willing participants. In fact, during the research preparation process in the spring and summer of 1994, before families became involved (before the rubber hit the pavement), each time the concept of partnership development was described (which was often), it was stated in the affirmative; partnerships will develop. For example,

> The three dyad relationships (child-parent, child-teacher, and parent-teacher) take on the characteristic of a partnership when, following invitation for participation, parents and children willingly agree to work together in partnership with the teacher in order to enhance the child's literacy development. As the three individuals, the child, the parent, and the teacher and their accompanying paired relationships join together for the purpose of enhancing the child's literacy development, a strong, triad partnership emerges. (Jeffrey, 1994, p. 16-17)

Needless to say, assumptive statements such as these required modification, for example, phrases such as "potential" triad child-parent-teacher partnership, and "may" take on the characteristic of a partnership, and partnerships "may" emerge, have been used throughout this document.

That is not to say, however, that I have wavered from my fundamental belief that children, parents, and teachers can become educational partners in the enhancement of young children's literacy development, and that these partnerships can have merit and value. Indeed, the success stories of Eva, Todd, Betty, Ben, Mary, and Jim are a testimony for partnership potential. Through partnership, we enriched the challenging journey of literacy development, and as partners, found the exhilaration, delight, and joy of learning multiplied.

The fact that Dorothy, her mother, and I worked together in spite of our difficult circumstance is evidence that surprising partnerships are possible. And finally, as the story of Justin and his family exemplify, relationship building is interactive and dynamic, and sometimes partnership development is unsuccessful.

My naive assumption that partnerships would develop has matured into an appreciation for the complexity of the process. Yet it is a journey worth promoting and supporting as children, parents, and teachers become the beneficiaries.

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APPENDIX A: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE LETTER

Dear (parent and child names inserted, i.e.: Mr. and Mrs. Smith and Joe),

The school year will soon begin, and what an exciting time for you and your first grader! Undoubtedly, beginning first grade is a great adventure! This year will be especially adventuresome as we move into our new elementary school.

Although it seems impossible to me, I have been an elementary school teacher for 21 years. Of those years, the last 11 were spent teaching first grade. As a first grade teacher I gradually began to invite parents to work with their child at home on reading and writing activities.

You may be aware of the call for parent involvement in our public schools by many educators, family researchers, politicians, and others. I believe one answer to this call can be children, parents, and teachers working together in partnership to enhance childrens' reading and writing development.

During the past two years I have been a graduate student at Virginia Tech and have learned more about the importance and value of children, parents, and teachers working together. Now I am excited to return to teaching and look forward to working with you and your child!

I am interested in learning more about child-parent-teacher partnerships, such as how they develop and how they work for different families. Perhaps you and your child would be interested and willing to visit with me about how the idea of partnership works for you in your family. Perhaps we can learn from each other about how families and teachers can work together!

If you and your child are interested exploring the idea of child-parent-teacher partnership, please return the bottom portion of this sheet in the enclosed envelope. Thanks!

Sincerely,

Sally S. Jeffrey
Your Child's First Grade Teacher

Yes! We are interested in exploring the idea of child-parent-teacher partnership. Please contact us.

______________________________ ______________________________

Child's Signature Parent's Signature

APPENDIX B: VIRGINIA TECH PROVOST APPROVAL FOR RESEARCH

(This represents the verbatim content of the approval. The original is in the researcher's file.)

MEMORANDUM

TO: Sally Jeffrey
Curriculum and Instruction

FROM: Ernest R. Stout
Associate Provost for Research

DATE:September 29, 1994

SUBJECT: IRB APPROVAL/"Sharing the Responsibility for Children's Literacy Development: Parent-Teacher-Child Partnership During Transition into First Grade"
Ref. 94-215

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your request for the above referenced project. We concur that the experiments are of minimal risk to the human subjects who will participate and that the appropriate safeguards have been taken. Therefore, the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects approves your request.

This approval is valid for 12 months. If the involvement with human subjects is not complete within 12 months or there is a significant change in the protocol of the project, the project may be resubmitted for extension or approval.

Best wishes.

ERS/php
c: Dr. Nespor

APPENDIX C: LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION LETTER

Dear Family,

Thank you for indicating an interest in exploring the idea of child-parent-teacher partnership. We may be able to learn from each other about how families and teachers can work together to enhance children's learning!

This exploration will focus on children's literacy development. Literacy is usually defined as the ability to read and write, but many educators and family researchers believe that literacy can also include the important skills of speaking and listening. It may be helpful during our work together to think of literacy development as learning to read, write, speak and listen.

There are different ways that we can work together. I have identified three levels of participation to help you think about what might work best for your family. Although we will naturally work together throughout the school year, this exploration of child-parent-teacher partnership will take place during the first three months of first grade.

Level A: This level of participation is the least demanding of your time. You would be encouraged to complete three different surveys which ask you to think about different aspects of literacy development and how they relate to your child's first grade experience.

Level B: This level of participation is more involved and would require more time. Besides completing the three surveys mentioned above, you and your child would be encouraged to keep a diary or journal of their literacy development during the first three months of first grade. You could select parts (or all) of the journal you would like to share with me.

Level C: This level of participation is the most involved and would require the most amount of time. In addition to encouraging you to complete the brief surveys and maintain a journal, I would be interested in conducting three half-hour interviews with you and your child, and having you and your child audio tape three of your at home "work sessions". The interviews and audio taping would be at times and locations convenient for you. The number of families who participate at this level will need to be limited due to the intensity of involvement. If necessary, selection would be based on diversity of families, such as a mix of boys and girls.

Please think about how your family would like to participate in this exploration. You can respond on the bottom portion of this letter and return it to me in the enclosed envelope. Many thanks!

Sincerely,

Sally S. Jeffrey

My child and I are interested in exploring the idea of child-parent-teacher partnership at the following level:

_____ Level A _____ Level B _____ Level C

______________________________ ______________________________

Child's Signature Parent's Signature

APPENDIX D : LEVEL A PARTICIPATION

Dear

Thank you for indicating an interest in participating with the research project which will explore child-parent-teacher partnerships. A benefit of this project is that we may be able to learn from each other about how families and teachers can work together to enhance children's learning!

You indicated that Level A would be an appropriate level of participation for your family. With this level of participation you will be encouraged to complete three different surveys which ask you to think about various aspects of literacy development and how they relate to your child's first grade experience. Each survey will consist of three to five questions, and will probably take about 10 - 20 minutes to complete.

The information in the surveys will be used to write a report describing various aspects of literacy development and how they relate to the first grade experience. In this report, pseudonyms will be used in place of your names and no specific instance will be described that could be connected to you or your child. Appropriate precautions to protect the confidentiality of you, your child, and information from your surveys will be taken, and confidential information not relevant to the research will be excluded from the report. All materials will be kept in a locked space; no one will have access to them but me and my advisor. However, please know that despite every effort made to preserve your anonymity, it may be compromised. The surveys will be destroyed after three years.

This project has been approved by [our principal and assistant superintendent]. You may choose to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty or prejudice by contacting either my Virginia Tech advisor, Dr. Jerome Niles [phone number] or me [work and home phone numbers].

This project has also been approved by the Human Subjects Committee and the Institutional Review Board of Virginia Tech. If you have any questions you may call Dr. Ernest R. Stout, Chair of the Institutional Review Board [phone number].

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information above and have agreed to participate in the project. Please return it to me in the enclosed envelope.

Thank You!

Sincerely,

Sally S. Jeffrey
Your Child's First Grade Teacher

We agree to Level A participation with this project (complete 3 surveys).

______________________________	______________________________
Child's Signature	Parent's Signature

APPENDIX E : LEVEL B PARTICIPATION

Dear

Thank you for indicating an interest in participating with the research project which will explore child-parent-teacher partnerships. A benefit of this project is that we may be able to learn from each other about how families and teachers can work together to enhance children's learning!

You indicated that Level B would be an appropriate level of participation for your family. With this level of participation you will be encouraged to complete three different surveys which ask you to think about various aspects of literacy development and how they relate to your child's first grade experience. Each survey will consist of three to five questions, and will probably take about 10 - 20 minutes to complete. Besides completing the three surveys, you and your child will be encouraged to keep a diary or journal of their literacy development during the first three months of first grade. The journal could contain reading and writing samples, observations, involvements, evaluations of the literacy process, and other data which you and your child wish to record. You could select parts (or all) of the journal you would like to share with me.

The information in the surveys and the journals will be used to write a report describing various aspects of literacy development and how they relate to the first grade experience. In this report, pseudonyms will be used in place of your names and no specific instance will be described that could be connected to you or your child. Appropriate precautions to protect the confidentiality of you, your child, and information from your surveys and journals will be taken, and confidential information not relevant to the research will be excluded from the report. All materials will be kept in a locked space; no one will have access to them but me and my advisor. However, please know that despite every effort made to preserve your anonymity, it may be compromised. The journals will be returned to you for you to keep, if you like. The surveys and copies of the journals will be destroyed after three years.

This project has been approved by [our principal and assistant superintendent]. You may choose to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty or prejudice by contacting either my Virginia Tech advisor, Dr. Jerome Niles [phone number] or me [work and home phone numbers].

This project has also been approved by the Human Subjects Committee and the Institutional Review Board of Virginia Tech. If you have any questions you may call Dr. Ernest R. Stout, Chair of the Institutional Review Board [phone number].

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information above and have agreed to participate in the project. Please return it to me in the enclosed envelope. Thank You!

Sincerely,

Sally S. Jeffrey

We agree to Level B participation with this project (complete 3 surveys and keep a journal).

______________________________	______________________________
Child's Signature	Parent's Signature

APPENDIX F : LEVEL C PARTICIPATION

Dear

Thank you for indicating an interest in participating with the research project which will explore child-parent-teacher partnerships. A benefit of this project is that we may be able to learn from each other about how families and teachers can work together to enhance children's learning!

You indicated that Level C would be an appropriate level of participation for your family. With this level of participation you will be encouraged to complete three different surveys which ask you to think about various aspects of literacy development and how they relate to your child's first grade experience. Each survey will consist of three to five questions, and will probably take about 10 - 20 minutes to complete. Besides completing the three surveys, you and your child will be encouraged to keep a diary or journal of their literacy development during the first three months of first grade. The journal could contain reading and writing samples, observations, involvements, evaluations of the literacy process, and other data which you and your child wish to record. You could select parts (or all) of the journal you would like to share with me. In addition, I will be interested in conducting three half-hour interviews with you and your child, and having you and your child audio tape three of your at home "work sessions". The interviews and audio taping would be at times and locations convenient for you. After I have transcribed the tapes, I will return them to you for you to keep, if you wish.

The information in the surveys, the journals, and the audio-taping will be used to write a report describing various aspects of literacy development and how they relate to the first grade experience. In this report, pseudonyms will be used in place of your names and no specific instance will be described that could be connected to you or your child. Appropriate precautions to protect the confidentiality of you, your child, and information from your surveys and journals will be taken, and confidential information not relevant to the research will be excluded from the report. All materials will be kept in a locked space; no one will have access to them but me and my advisor. However, please know that despite every effort made to preserve your anonymity, it may be compromised. The journals will be returned to you for you to keep, if you like. The surveys, copies of the journals, and transcriptions of the tapes will be destroyed after three years.

This project has been approved by [our principal and assistant superintendent]. You may choose to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty or prejudice by contacting either my Virginia Tech advisor, Dr. Jerome Niles [phone number] or me [work and home phone numbers].

This project has also been approved by the Human Subjects Committee and the Institutional Review Board of Virginia Tech. If you have any questions you may call Dr. Ernest R. Stout, Chair of the Institutional Review Board [phone number].

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information above and have agreed to participate in the project. Please return it to me in the enclosed envelope. Thank You!

Sincerely, Sally S. Jeffrey

We agree to Level C participation with this project (complete 3 surveys, keep a journal, have 3 interviews, and audio tape 3 at home "work sessions").

____________________________ ____________________________

Child's Signature Parent's Signature

APPENDIX G: FAMILY SURVEY I

Dear Family,

Thank you for spending time with this beginning survey. Information you provide will help develop understanding about how families and teachers can work together to enhance children's literacy development. You can include responses from parents and children on this survey. Use the back or more paper if you wish. Additional comments are welcomed! Please return the survey to me in the enclosed envelope.

Sincerely,

Literacy usually means the ability to read and write, but it can include the abilities to speak and listen as well. With this in mind, what understanding do you have about literacy development?

What do you expect literacy development will be like in first grade?

What would you like to see happen with literacy development in first grade?

Tell about ways you are involved with literacy at home.

APPENDIX H: FAMILY SURVEY 2

Dear Family,

Thank you for spending time with this middle survey. Information you provide will help develop understanding about how a child-parent-teacher partnership works for different families. You can include responses from parents and children on this survey. Use the back or more paper if you wish. Please return the survey to me in the enclosed envelope. Sincerely,

---

Now that school has been in session for one month, has your understanding of literacy development (the ability to read, write, speak and listen) changed? Why or why not?

Have your expectations about literacy development in first grade changed? If so, how?

What changes would you like to see happen with literacy development in first grade? Why?

Tell about ways that your involvement with literacy have changed at home since first grade began.

APPENDIX I : FAMILY SURVEY 3

Dear Family,

Thank you for spending time with this final survey. Information you provide will help develop understanding about how a child-parent-teacher partnership works for different families. You can include responses from parents and children on this survey. Use the back or more paper if you wish. Please return the survey to me in the enclosed envelope.

Sincerely,

Thinking back over the first three months of first grade, what things helped promote a child-parent-teacher partnership to enhance your child's literacy development? Why?

What things interfered with the partnership? Why?

If you could make changes in how literacy development was encouraged during the past three months, what would they be? Why?

Tell about ways that your understanding, expectations, and / or involvement with your child's literacy have changed during the past three months.

APPENDIX J : SURVEY CATEGORIES

(with corresponding number of parents responding)

# of Parents	Category
7	Involved with literacy at home, especially reading to / with child
7	Involvement with books / reading changed since school began
7	Expectations regarding reading development / improvement during first grade
6	Expectations regarding writing development / improvement during first grade
5	Parent understandings of literacy development changed during study period
5	Expectations for their child's literacy development changed
5	Curriculum materials helped promote a child-parent-teacher partnership
5	Parents worked with their child at home
4	Expectations for their child changed related to parent understanding
4	Parents past experiences with literacy affected their present involvement with their child
4	Involvement with literacy changed - more writing
3	Time interfered with partnership development
3	Parent-teacher interaction helped promote partnership development
3	Expectations for their child changed related to child's progress
3	Parents offered descriptive personal literacy experiences
2	Parent understandings changed related to child's progress
2	Allowing child time to adjust helped child-parent-teacher partnership development

APPENDIX K: CRITERIA FOR CASES

1. Child's Entry Description
   a. Conduct toward the learning process
   b. Literacy development assessment
   c. Entry writing

2. Family Description
   a. Structure (size of family and order of siblings)
   b. Ethnicity
   c. Parent understanding of child's learning process
   d. Parent understanding of literacy development
   e. Parent expectations related to literacy development
   f. Involvement with literacy at home
   g. Support of child's developing literacy
   h. Opportunity for literacy development relationship (time)

3. Individualization of Home Materials / Strategies Promoting Literacy Development

4. Child-Parent Literacy Relationship

5. Development of Literacy Relationships
   a. Child - teacher (may include influence of child's behavior)
   b. Teacher - parent (two way information sharing)
   c. Triad child-parent-teacher partnership
   d. Child - child

6. Changes in Child's Literacy Development

7. Changes in Parent Understanding / Expectations

8. Changes in Literacy Involvement at Home

APPENDIX L : JOURNAL INTRODUCTION

Dear

Thank you for your willingness to keep a journal during our study! I appreciate your interest and effort!

I am sending home two spiral notebooks with your child to serve as the journals, one for parent use, and one for your child to use. However, you do not need to maintain two journals! You may combine parent and child input into one journal if that seems easier.

If you decide to use only one of the two journals, you may keep the second one for some other use or you may return it to me.

What kinds of things might you wish to include in your journal? You may comment on anything that interests you related to your child's literacy development (reading, writing, speaking, and listening)! Perhaps you recall some special moments or events which have occurred since school started. These could be recorded in the journal. Samples of reading and writing could be taped or glued into the journal. Comments, thoughts, concerns, ideas, observations, involvements, and your evaluations of the literacy process could be included. You could think of it as a kind of diary / scrapbook combination.

Include in your journal whatever is comfortable for you to share regarding your child's literacy development! Please consider dating your journal entries; it may be helpful for you to know that our study will conclude in early December.

Your journal could become a "traveling" journal. If you would like to share your journal and have continual communication with me, simply send it to school with your child and I will share my comments, thoughts, ideas, etc. with you. I would return it with your child. Your journal then becomes a "dialogue journal" in that we share our dialogue in an ongoing manner. As we proceed, let me know if there are ways that you think we might make the journaling process more useful to you or your child. Do not hesitate to ask questions as we go!

Best wishes as you begin your journal! Thanks, again, for your interest, effort, and willingness to participate!

Sincerely,

APPENDIX M : JOURNAL CLOSURE

Dear

The research project exploring child-parent-teacher partnership is drawing to a close. Your willingness, interest, and effort to participate with the project has been deeply appreciated!

You may send your journal (or journals, if you and your child kept separate ones) to school at this time. If you feel the need or desire to keep the journal(s) longer, a note or phone call from you would be appreciated so that arrangements can be made.

Again, please know how appreciative I am of your input. Information from this research may increase understanding about how families and teachers can work together to enhance children's learning!

Happy Holidays to everyone!

Sincerely,

APPENDIX N: LETTERS - SOUNDS - COLORS - NUMBERS ASSESSMENT

(This represents the content of the student assessment.)

Name	________________________	Knows: ______	letters
Date	________________________	______	sounds
Examiner	________________________	______	color words
		______	numbers

t	z	p	x	v	u	n	r
s	m	w	q	y	o	c	b
h	a	i	e	j	d	g	f
k	l	C	A	J	F	B	I
D	K	H	E	G	L	T	V
S	Q	Z	U	M	Y	P	N
W	X	O	R	red	blue	brown	black
purple	yellow	green	white	orange	gray	10	6
2	5	7	3	1	4	8	9

APPENDIX O-1: BEGINNING CONSONANT SOUND ASSESSMENT

(This represents the content of the student assessment.)

1.	x	t	z	p	11.	y	s	l	p
2.	z	m	l	k	12.	c	h	v	r
3.	c	p	r	s	13.	z	t	g	b
4.	d	f	x	g	14.	v	h	w	x
5.	v	n	w	h	15.	r	n	j	c
6.	j	s	n	t	16.	p	d	k	l
7.	f	m	d	r	17.	g	n	s	k
8.	k	s	l	w	18.	t	m	c	f
9.	y	m	b	f	19.	z	k	m	b
10.	c	b	w	j	20.	r	n	j	l

APPENDIX O-2: BEGINNING CONSONANT SOUND ASSESSMENT KEY

1. top
2. zebra
3. pail
4. x-ray
5. violin
6. nail
7. rose
8. song
9. mouse
10. wagon
11. yard
12. cat
13. bottle
14. head
15. jump
16. dirt
17. goat
18. fish
19. kitchen
20. lion

APPENDIX P: SOUND, WORD, & PUNCTUATION RECALL ASSESSMENT

(This represents the words, sounds, or punctuation given orally to the students, which they respond to in writing. All items i this assessment were previously introduced to and reviewed with the students before administration.)

Each item is preceded with the following statement:
"Write the (word, sound, or symbol) ________."
For example, "Write the word look."

1. look
2. short a (the sound is given)
3. k/c (the sound is given)
4. at
5. dog
6. g (the sound is given)
7. . (write a period)
8. book
9. B (the sound is given)
10. jog
11. ook (the sound is given)
12. fog
13. the
14. !
15. cook
16. og (the sound is given)
17. b (the sound is given)
18. Look!
19. frog
20. shook

APPENDIX Q: FALL PARENT LETTER

(Page 1 of 3)

September, 1994

WELCOME !!!

The school year has begun, and what an exciting time for you and your first grader! Undoubtedly, beginning first grade is a great adventure!

Sharing some of the things that will be happening in our classroom may be helpful to you. Listed below are descriptions of a number of topics that may answer questions for you.

Classroom Rules: Our classroom rules include the following:

1. Be kind and helpful when you can.
2. Be a good listener.
3. Be a good worker.
4. Use a quiet voice inside.
5. Pick up after yourself.

Following directions and telling the truth are two other areas of behavior we work on throughout the year.

Library Time: Our weekly visit to the library is scheduled for Tuesday. However, library books may be returned to school any time during the week. Also, children may visit the library individually at other times to check out books as well. I have suggested to your child that books from school be kept in a special, designated place at home.

Classroom Books: I have a small "Classroom Library" of assorted books which children may check out. Only one book at a time may be checked out from our room.

APPENDIX Q: FALL PARENT LETTER

Reading at Home: You are strongly encouraged to read to your child on a regular basis!!! This activity will enhance your child's reading skills! Also, please listen to your child read, although it is probably better not to force this activity! Encouragement and praise are extremely important in the learning of any new skill, and this is especially true when learning to read!

We will be keeping track of books read at home (either read by you to your child or read by your child to you). A special form will be used to record five books at a time. Your child can bring a form home whenever a new one is needed. Happy Reading!

Homework: It has been found that the most effective schools involve parents in their child's education. I will be sending home activities for you to do with your child which I believe will greatly enhance your child's learning. Working with your child is encouraged, but is certainly not required!!! Should you decide to work with your child on any of these activities, I recommend working for short periods (5 - 15 minutes) of time. Please try to keep the experience positive, and stop whenever you or your child begin to feel frustrated!

Writing and Spelling: On some of the papers your child brings home, you may notice that very few corrections have been made in their spelling and writing. This is because we are just beginning to write, and we are concentrating on getting ideas on paper. Research indicates that children learn to write by writing, and that one of the most difficult tasks can be getting the words on paper. Please do not criticize your child's writing. Please try to enjoy and appreciate the ideas expressed!

APPENDIX Q: FALL PARENT LETTER

(Page 3 of 3)

Book Orders: Presently I am unsure of which or how many book clubs we well be using for the purpose of ordering children's books during the year. When orders are placed and you wish to pay by check, one check can be sent for the entire order, and it helps simplify the order if you make the check payable to me. If possible, please send the book order and money to school in a sealed envelope with your child's names and my name on the outside. Each company requests a minimum order of 10 items. Occasionally, not enough books are ordered to fill the requirement, and your order will be returned to you.

Footwear: Regular exercise is an important ingredient of your child's healthy growth and development. Although our scheduled physical education classes are Mondays and Thursdays, time is scheduled for exercise on other days as well. Sending your child to school each day with appropriate exercise footwear will be appreciated.

My primary goal this year is to provide a positive learning experience for your child! The best way to achieve this goal is through communication with you. Please feel free to contact me regarding any aspect of your child's education. Your help and support are so appreciated!

Sincerely,

Sally S. Jeffrey
First Grade

APPENDIX R: EXTRA EFFORT AWARD

(Parent Letter)

NEWS FLASH !!!

Mrs. Jeffrey's Class
Grade One

How Can You Earn An EXTRA EFFORT AWARD?

1. **Read a total of 50 books**

   For each 50 books read at home, an award will be given!
   Books can be read by your child or by an older adult (or older brother or sister) to your child.

2. **Write and illustrate a story at home.**

   Although students can receive help with this project, the ideas must be their own. At the present time, the stories must be at least 50 words in length. Beginning in February (second semester), stories must be at least 100 words in length.

APPENDIX S: RECORDING BOOKS READ AT HOME SLIP

Books read by or to: ______________________________________

1. ____

2. ____

3. ____

4. ____

5. ____

Please fill out and return to Mrs. Jeffrey.

Parent Signature ___________________________ Date _________

VITA

SALLY SHERWIN JEFFREY

1007 Evergreen Way
Blacksburg, VA 24060
540-552-4609

EDUCATION

1997 Ph.D. **Doctor of Philosophy, Curriculum and Instruction**
Emphasis: Elementary Education / Language Arts
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
(Virginia Tech), Blacksburg, VA
Dissertation: Sharing the Responsibility for Children's Literacy Development in First Grade: Child-Parent-Teacher Partnerships

1972 M.S. **Master of Science, Curriculum and Instruction**
Emphasis: Sociology
Mankato State University, Mankato, Minnesota
Thesis: Examination of the Child - Pet Relationship with Selected Students

1970 B.S. **Bachelor of Arts, Functional Major**
Psychology / Sociology / Elementary Education
Cornell College, Mt. Vernon, Iowa

PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT

1994 - Present First Grade Teacher

1992-94 Full time Post-Masters Student, Curriculum and Instruction Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA
Part time Research Associate, Technology Education Curriculum Development PreKindergarten and Kindergarten, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA

1989-92 First Grade Teacher, Margaret Beeks Elementary School, Blacksburg, VA

1981-89 First Grade Teacher
South Elementary School, St. Peter, MN

1973-81 Title I Mathematics Teacher
St. Peter Public Schools, St. Peter, MN
Remedial: Grades 1-4

1972-73 Upper Elementary Enrichment Teacher
Severe Behavior Difficulties, Grades 4-6
Mankato Public Schools, Mankato, MN

1971-72 Full time Curriculum and Instruction masters student
Mankato State University, Mankato, MN
Part time Elementary Science Graduate Teaching Assistant
Wilson Campus Laboratory School
Mankato State University, Mankato, MN

1970-71 Teacher of English as a Foreign Language
Iraklion, Crete, Greece

1969-70 Sixth Grade Teacher
Madison Public Schools, Madison, WI

COLLEGE TEACHING

EDVT 5774 Problems in Education: Technology Education for Elementary School, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA
Co-Taught with W. Dugger, Summer, 1994 - 3 credits

SUPERVISION

College Supervisor
Virginia Tech Supervisor for Roanoke (VA) County student teaching model, Spring, 1994

Cooperating Teacher
Virginia Tech Student Teaching Program, Fall, 1990; Fall, 1995
Radford (VA) University Student Assistant Program, 1989-90
Radford University Student Teaching Program, Spring, 1991

Mankato State (MN) University Student Teaching Program,
Fall, 1984, Winter, 1987
Gustavus Adolphus College Practicum Program, St. Peter, MN
15 Students, 1979-88
Gustavus Adolphus College January Orientation Program,
St. Peter, MN
5 Students, 1982-1986

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Jeffrey, S. Technology Education for Elementary School. Presented at the annual meeting of the International Technology Education Conference, Phoenix, AZ, March, 1996.

Jeffrey, S. & Ney, C. NASA Funded "Mission 21" Elementary School Technology Education Program. Presented at the annual meeting of the International Technology Education Conference, Kansas City, MO, March, 1994.

Jeffrey, S. Future Directions for Technology Education for Children. Panel member: Technology Education for Children Council, International Technology Education Conference, Kansas City, MO, March, 1994.

Jeffrey, S., Dugger, W., & Brusic, S. Technology Education for the Elementary School. Presented at the annual meeting of the International Technology Education Conference, Minneapolis, MN, March, 1992.

Jeffrey, S. A Teacher's Perspective of Mission 21: Integration Within the Elementary Curriculum. Presented at the annual meeting of the International Technology Education Conference, Minneapolis, MN, March, 1992.

WORKSHOP PRESENTATIONS

Jeffrey, S. Historical Perspective of Teaching Early Reading. Presented at a PTA curriculum workshop, Kipps Elementary School, Blacksburg, VA, October, 1994.

Jeffrey, S. & Dugger, W. Technology Education - What is Happening in Virginia. Presented at the Regional Guidance Counseling Workshop, Abingdon, VA, April, 1994.

Jeffrey, S. Mission 21 PreKindergarten & Kindergarten Curriculum. New curriculum presented to 15 field test teachers, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA, January, 1994.

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

An Open Interview: Qualitative Research Analysis in Process. Guest at the School Leaders Program (32 members), Curriculum and Instruction, Virginia Tech. Harding Elementary School, May 1, 1997

Participant: A Teacher - Researcher Instant Photography Project sponsored by the National Writing Project / Poloroid Education Program Alliance, 1994-95. Publication Anthology of 1000 Words (1995) available from S. Marcus, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA. " 'Twas the Day of the Field Trip" by S. Jeffrey, pp. 42-45.

Leadership Panel Member addressing members of the School Leaders Program (32 members), Curriculum and Instruction, Virginia Tech. Blacksburg Marriott, October 27, 1994.

Guest Speaker, "A Teacher in Process". Curriculum and Instruction, R. Lalik, Virginia Tech. Presentation for 25+ pre-service teachers. October 3, 1990.

"Mission 21" Video Feature from Virginia Tech, 1992
(R. N. Shambaugh, Writer / Producer).
A short feature (Technology Education for the Elementary Student) with national coverage.
Participants: W. Dugger, J. LaPorte, S. Jeffrey & C. Ney.

Writing Review Consultant for the Delmar Publication MISSION 21 - LEVEL I STUDENT HANDBOOKS (Transportation, Design, Space, Explore) by S. Brusic, Oct. 1991 - Mar. 1992.

Field Test Site Teacher, Level I Mission 21 Technology Education curriculum, First Grade, Margaret Beeks Elementary School, Blacksburg, VA 1989-92.

Chairperson: Mathematics Curriculum Study (K-6), St. Peter Public Schools, St. Peter, MN 1981-82.

Chairperson, St. Peter Public Schools Mathematics Department, St. Peter, MN 1979-83.

Member of North Central Validation Team: Philosophy, Goals & Objectives, & School Community Relations, Inver Grove Heights, MN 1981.

Member of Future Operation of Central Community School Committee, St. Peter, MN 1981.

Newspaper article published: "Basic Math Skills Stressed in U. S. Congress", St. Peter, MN Herald, March 22, 1979.

KRBI Radio Interview: Title I Awareness Week, St. Peter, MN May, 1979.

Co-Chair, St. Peter District Philosophy and Objectives Writing Team, 1977 and 1980.

Workshop Presentation: "The Metric System in the Elementary School", St. Peter Public Schools, St. Peter, MN May, 1976.

Curriculum Development: "Metric System Teaching Unit for Fourth Grade", St. Peter Public Schools, St. Peter, MN Summer, 1974.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi
Phi Delta Kappa
Epsilon Pi Tau
International Reading Association
National Education Association

TEACHING CERTIFICATION

Commonwealth of Virginia (7-1-01) NK-4, Middle Education, Elementary Supervisor, General Supervisor, Instructional Supervisor
State of Minnesota (7-1-99) Elementary 1-6