MAKING CONNECTIONS: LITERACY PRACTICES OF KAREN REFUGEE FAMILIES IN
THE HOME, COMMUNITY, AND FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAM

by

NICOLA SUZANNE FRIEDRICH

B.Ed., Brock University, 1989
M.A. The University of Colorado, 2008

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Abstract

Critics of family literacy programs within culturally and linguistically diverse communities have long argued that these programs simply transmit school-like practices into the homes of participating families (Auerbach, 1989; Reyes & Torres, 2007). Although sociocultural researchers have demonstrated that family literacy programs can and do reflect the sociocultural realities of immigrant and refugee families, without descriptions of how literacy is enacted, it is difficult to determine if practices specific to one context are taken up within the other. The purpose of this study is to document and describe the contextualized literacy practices of families within a community of resettled Karen refugees while they participate in a bilingual family literacy program in an urban centre in western Canada.

Drawing from sociocultural theory, this ethnographic case study of parents and their pre-school aged children focuses on the families’ enactment of literacy events mediating social activity during play in two early learning settings: the home and a bilingual family literacy program. Observed literacy events were analyzed through the lens of the activity system (Engeström, 2001) in order to identify the meditational means the participants used to create and re-create situated practice (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999) during play. The findings suggest that, through their participation in the program, the Karen parents came to understand activity within the social activity domain of play as fostering the early literacy development of their pre-school aged children. However, rather than abandoning traditional learning practices, by drawing from culturally formed tools and culturally specific participant structures, the Karen parents transformed situated practice with the result being an expanded form of social activity during play in both the home and in the family literacy program.
This study enhances our understanding of how literacy events are enacted in the homes of the resettled Karen refugee families and in the bilingual family literacy program in which they participate. Administrators and facilitators responsible for the delivery of family literacy programs within culturally and linguistically diverse communities can draw from insights generated from this study to ensure their programming recognizes and values the diverse meditational means participating families bring to the program.
Preface

This dissertation is an original intellectual product of the author, N. Friedrich. The fieldwork reported in Chapters 4-6 was covered by UBC Ethics Certificate number H12-00926.
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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my family. Thank you for your patience, understanding, compassion, forgiveness, and support. I recognize the sacrifices you all have made in order for me to complete this final stage of my education. Gary, thank you for understanding my need to grow academically and for providing me with the space, time, and resources to focus on my program. Mariah and Mikaela, thank you for forgiving my many shortcomings as a mother and celebrating my experiences as a student. Mom and Dad, thank you both for believing in me and supporting me as I fulfilled my lifelong dream. Finally, I will always be grateful to Carlie for her calming presence throughout my program.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

During the meal, Cheryl, program manager with a provincial literacy organization, asked one of the mothers to sit for a photo. After seating the mother, she gave her one of the translated picture books and positioned her children so that it looked as though they were reading the book together at the table. The photographer started taking the picture. I asked Cheryl what was going on. She motioned to the papers she was carrying in her hand, saying that she was tasked with taking pictures of various aspects of the program to include in promotional materials. I was surprised; in the nine months I had spent observing in the program, I had never seen parents and children reading books together as was being depicted in this photo op. I mentioned this to Cheryl. She just shrugged and said something about showing the funders what they wanted to see. (Field notes, April 30, 2014)

Rationale

I made the above entry in my field notebook during one of my last observations for my ethnographic case study of the literacy practices of resettled Karen refugee families and their pre-school aged children attending a bilingual family literacy program. Cheryl’s¹ task was to capture a mother and her children engaged in a shared book reading event with a bilingual picture book. Her arrangement of the family in the event reflects a prevailing view in the field of family literacy, that adults, primarily mothers, transmit literacy to their children through the shared reading of books (Anderson, Streelasky, & Anderson, 2007; Kendrick, Anderson, Smythe, & McKay, 2005; Reese, 2012).

The individual program modules shaping activity within this bilingual family literacy program were developed with input from multiple sources. However, without descriptions of how literacy is enacted “in the context of a panoply of activities” (Hull & Schultz, 2001, p. 21) in which the families participate, such images may result in generalizations by family literacy educators and administrators as to how literacy is practiced in the immigrant or refugee

¹ All the names and places in this study have been changed in order to protect the anonymity of the participants.
community in which the program is situated and may lead to a simplified understanding by program facilitators of the complexities of literacy learning within the community. Taken together, the result may be a diminishment in culturally and linguistically diverse programming. This loss of diversity may be especially problematic for resettled refugee families with young children born in the host community. As active participants in early learning settings within the host community, these children may come to understand these literacy-learning practices as the norm. Furthermore, without opportunities to observe or participate in diverse meaning-making activities within an early learning setting, parents may not fully recognize the role of culture and language in their young children’s early literacy development. Moreover, over time, the young children may come to reject more traditional ways of knowing and doing.

Although Cheryl was satisfied with the arrangement of the book-reading event (see above), as a literacy researcher, I was interested in looking beyond the simple arrangement of the event and showing how families within a community of resettled Karen refugees made sense of the literacy practices promoted within a bilingual family literacy program sponsored by the host community. After having spent time in the community and in the program, it was clear to me that the families’ form of participation in events within the program reflected not only the underlying beliefs of the program regarding young children’s literacy learning, but also the underlying beliefs, values, and attitudes of learning within the Karen culture. In designing this program of research, I was interested in understanding how the Karen parents made sense of learning in early childhood as it was practiced in the host community. I was particularly interested in understanding how Karen parents and their children enacted literacy in the bilingual family literacy program, Parents as Literacy Supporters (PALS) in Immigrant and Refugee Communities, and in their own homes. My primary interest was in understanding how the
parents responded to diversity, not only in terms of language and culture, but also of cultural tools and participant structure, in activity within two contexts in which early literacy learning takes place, the home and the bilingual family literacy program, PALS.

Sociocultural researchers have carried out research using ethnographic methods to document and describe the literacy learning practices of culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse children in homes and in family literacy programs. Following in the tradition of the New Literacy Studies (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 2007; Street, 1984), the focus of much of this sociocultural research was on literacy practices inferred from reported or observed literacy events (e.g., Kenner, 2005; Li, 2009, 2010; McTavish, 2007; Mui & Anderson, 2008; Perry & Moses, 2011; Purcell-Gates, 2013; Reese, 2009; Quadros & Sarroub, 2016; Ruby, 2012; Souto-Manning & Dice, 2009; Volk & de Acosta, 2001, 2003).

Fewer studies analyzed literacy practices through the lens of Activity Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and took activity as their focus. For example, Gregory (2001) drew from Vygotsky for her year-long study on the reciprocity taking place during play between siblings from low socioeconomic status (SES) families in an area of East London. Her unit of analysis was literacy activity taking place between the siblings (e.g., story-reading sessions, playing clapping games and rhymes and role-playing school-like lessons) and she gathered data through audio-recordings made by the siblings themselves and analyzed transcripts of the recordings using conversational analysis. Similarly, Ruby (2012) video-recorded a child assembling a jigsaw puzzle with both her grandmother and mother and analyzed the communication between the child and adult. In contrast, Henning and Kirova (2012) drew in part from written descriptions of classroom
behaviours and practices involving children’s play with cultural artifacts in an early learning program to explore the role of these objects as mediators within the preschool classroom.

Moreover, sociocultural research evaluating family literacy programs with culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse populations tended to focus on both child and parent outcomes. Evaluative studies reported on perceived outcomes (child and parent) and perceived benefits as reported by parents through written responses on questionnaires or oral responses shared with researchers in interviews or focus groups (e.g., Anderson, Anderson, Friedrich, & Teichert, in press; Anderson, Friedrich, & Kim, 2011; Anderson & Morrison, 2007; Doyle & Zhang, 2011; Singh, Sylvia, & Ridzi, 2015; Swain, Brooks, & Bosley, 2014). In some cases, researchers supplemented their evaluation by calculating child outcomes using various standardized literacy measures (e.g., Anderson et al., 2011; Zhang, Pelletier, & Doyle, 2010). Although much of this research identified specific literacy activities within the program (e.g., storybook reading), to my knowledge, there has yet to be research within family literacy programs regarding how literacy is enacted.

Much of the research documenting families’ literacy practices was situated in a small number of cultural groups including Spanish-speaking (e.g., Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Gillanders & Jiménez, 2004; Reese, 2009; Souto-Manning & Dice, 2009), Bangladeshi (Gregory, 2001; Gregory et al., 2007; Ruby, 2012), Sudanese (Henning & Kirova, 2012; Perry & Moses, 2011), and Chinese (Kendrick, 2005; Li, 2003, 2009), with the majority of the families identified as being immigrants (e.g., Gillanders & Jiménez, 2004; Gregory, 2001; Li, 2010; Mui & Anderson, 2008; Reese, 2009). Fewer studies involved migrant (e.g., Purcell-Gates, 2013) or refugee families (e.g., Henning & Kirova, 2012; Perry 2009; Quadros & Sarroub, 2016).
This brief overview of the sociocultural research reveals that there has yet to be research to document and describe the literacy learning practices of families, in particular, resettled Karen refugee families, during their participation in family literacy programs. While the body of literature documenting the experiences of resettled Karen refugees in host cities within North America has grown, the authors of studies set within these Karen refugee communities described this research as qualitative with data gathered primarily through interviews and focus groups with a focus on issues related to resettlement (e.g., Niner, Kokanovic, & Cuthbert, 2013; Oleson, Chute, O’Fallon, & Sherwood, 2012; Riggs et al., 2012; Ussher et al., 2012). Fewer studies included observation as a method of data collection and focused on literacy (e.g., Friedrich, Anderson, & Morrison, 2014; Omerbašić, 2015; Quadros & Sarroub, 2016; Singh et al., 2015), which I aimed to do in this study. In the next section, I define the purpose of the study and present the research questions that guided my collection and analysis of the data.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

**Purpose**

The purpose of this ethnographic case study is to document and describe the literacy practices of parents and their pre-school aged children within a community of resettled Karen refugees while they participate in a bilingual family literacy program. My goal is to document whether and how families take up the literacy practices introduced to them through their participation in a bilingual family literacy program that helps parents/caregivers support the early literacy development of children. I am particularly interested in documenting if and how the literacy practices of Karen refugee families in the program and home transform over the course of the year. Three mothers and their pre-school-aged children from a community of resettled Karen refugee families living in an inner-city community in an urban area in western Canada.
participated in this study. The focus of the data collection was their literacy activity within the social activity domain of play in the contexts of the home and the bilingual family literacy program, Parents as Literacy Supporters (PALS) in Immigrant and Refugee Communities.

Research Questions

The following questions framed the data collection and analysis of this study:

1. What were the historical literacy practices of the Karen families?
2. What are the current literacy practices of the Karen families?
3. Do families take up the literacy practices introduced to them through their participation in the bilingual family literacy program, Parents as Literacy Supporters (PALS) in Immigrant and Refugee Communities?
   - Are these practices transformed in the cultural context of the home and community?
     If so, how are they transformed?
4. Do the families bring literacy practices from the home to the program?
   - Are these practices transformed in the cultural context of the family literacy program, and if so, how are they transformed?

Context of Study

The Setting

The European influence. This study was situated on the traditional lands of the Sto:lo (Coast Salish) people. Although there is no evidence of a permanent Sto:lo settlement, historians believe that the Sto:lo people frequently passed through the area on their way to and from the fishing grounds to the north. The first Europeans to arrive were part of an expedition sponsored by the Hudson’s Bay Company tasked with locating an access route north of the 49th parallel for the transportation of furs (Sommer, 1999). In the winter of 1824, members of the expedition
travelled upriver from the coast. Eventually, the river narrowed to where it was impossible for the expedition to continue by boat. The Europeans were forced to portage through the area in search of another tributary that would take them north to the river. Their portage took them through the area that was to become Lacey City.

In the early days of this study, I made numerous trips to the area. One of the first locations I visited was the central branch of the public library. The library is housed in the same building as the City Hall. Positioned prominently along one wall of the sitting area just inside the main entranceway is a mural documenting the development of the area from forest, to prairie, to city, in striking black and white photographs. As I discovered, this celebration of the city’s European roots was visible at other locations within the central core. For example, I noticed that some roads bore the name of the original European settlers whose land they bordered and the large municipal park in the centre of the city, the name of the province’s first Governor General. However, the most visible example I found of the city honouring its European past was at the location of the original European homestead. During my first walk through the area, I came across a small historical plaza located within the shadow of the newly constructed casino and convention centre. In the plaza I saw two statues, both of early traders, one of European heritage and the other, Aboriginal and, painted on the pavement in the middle of the adjacent intersection, the family crest of the first European settlers.

**Development over time.** As much as the crest and plaza pay tribute to the city’s early settlers, the physical arrangement of streets and buildings in the city reflect the city’s early role as the main commercial centre for the region. The site at which the original tracks servicing the electric railroad intersected with the two main transportation corridors became and remains the commercial centre for the area (Sommer, 1999). A mixture of professional, personal, and
government services continue to dominate the central core. My frequent walks in the city took me past a variety of retail, commercial, and service establishments including businesses catering to personal services such as beauty and barber shops and tattoo parlors. Perhaps because of the lower household income within the neighbourhood (Statistics Canada, 2012), there were numerous cash stores (e.g., Cash Mart). The area was also home to a number of retail services including pawn shops, specialty shops (e.g., bridal boutiques), women’s apparel shops, and businesses catering to health and recreation (e.g., pharmacies, scooter shops). However, land used as the main switching stations for the railroad had been transformed into a parking lot servicing a strip mall and the City Hall/Central Library complex.

Although I visited the area at various times of the day, the volume of both pedestrian and vehicle traffic was always low, reflecting a trend that began during the second half of the century. During this period, retail and service establishments relocated to the north in order to be closer to the newly constructed divided highway running east to west. Families were quick to follow. Additionally, with the building of a four-lane bypass, motorists traveling along the original highway could reach inland centres without passing through the commercial centre of the city. These two factors contributed to a reduction in the number of visits to the city centre and a decline in commerce (Sommer, 1999).

In the mid-1980s, the city released a plan to revitalize the downtown core. The plan included supplying housing for all income groups and encouraging services such as coffee houses, restaurants, and specialty retail outlets to locate in the historic city centre. The opening of a senior’s centre in the mid-1990s prompted seniors to sell their homes and move to the downtown core in order to be within walking distance of the facility. Many of the seniors were housed in a series of newly constructed, self-contained apartment blocks. In addition to having
easy access to the seniors centre, these seniors were within walking distance of a number of professional medical services (including hearing clinics, medical specialists, and medical labs), retail outlets selling mobility aids, and government services within City Hall, as well as the Police Station, and the central library.

Public texts. During my many walks through the commercial district, I made note of the visual literacy environment. The most frequent use of text within the city centre was for the purpose of identification. I was able to identify buildings (e.g., government and office), institutions (e.g., schools, libraries), organizations (e.g., seniors groups), and establishments (e.g., shops, restaurants, coffee shops) by their name printed on signs attached directly to the building facade or to poles in front of or attached to the building, streets and laneways by signs mounted on poles at intersections, and bus stops by signs indicating the numbers of busses that serviced the stop. Texts used for advertisement were also common. I saw numerous signs, posters, and banners advertising businesses, services, products, and events. Most of these ads included the appropriate contact information. These textual forms were attached to windows or doors and to the facades of stores, coffee shops, restaurants, and pharmacies or to sandwich boards positioned on sidewalks immediately in front of buildings. Additionally, I noticed regulatory texts in the form of signs attached to garbage and recycling bins, to fences, and to the walls of structures (e.g., electrical transformer box), celebratory banners attached to poles along the main street, and commemorative plaques at the base of a statue in the central square of the city. All of these texts were in English.

Cultural diversity. Although Lacey City is a relatively homogenous Caucasian community with English the predominant language, at the time of the study, German, Spanish, and Sino-Tibetan languages, of which Karen is one, were the three most common mother
tongues (Statistics Canada, 2012). Over the course of the year, I noticed an increase in the number of ethnic restaurants, specialty stores, and food markets within the city centre. I also came across an English-language school housed in a small strip mall across the street from the central library. During my walks, I often passed groups of young Asian students waiting at the entrance to the language school. I also saw parents of varying ages and ethnicities and their young children playing outside in the park and playground, or inside, attending events and borrowing books from the library.

While the largest percentage of the total population fell between the ages of 15 and 64, during this study, there were a greater proportion of people aged 65 and older living within the city limits as compared to the national average (Statistics Canada, 2012). Throughout the year, I noticed seniors walking or riding on scooters through the park or along the sidewalks or catching up with each other over a coffee in one of the many sidewalk cafés.

The Karen people. In 2005, Canada began to accept applications from Karen families deemed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as being in need of protection. The Karen are an ethnic group living in South East Asia. They are thought to have migrated to the area that is now Burma from the Tibetan region and from Yunnan in China. The Karen State is located in the southern region of Burma. It consists of high mountains, forests, and valleys as well as plains areas with lower slopes.

The Karen people have their own distinct languages and culture. For the past 60 years, they have been engaged in a civil war against the Burmese military regime for autonomy and cultural rights. This conflict has resulted in many of the Karen fleeing their villages and seeking refuge in camps along the Thai-Burma border where some have remained for up to 20 years.

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2 In 1989, the ruling military regime changed the name from Burma to Myanmar. Canada does not recognize the name Myanmar and continues to refer to the country as Burma.
Communities within western Canada, including Lacey City, welcomed the first families in the summer of 2006. The refugee program ended in 2009.

In this brief overview, I described the physical setting and identified historical factors that helped shape the current context of this study. In the following section, I introduce the research context and participants.

**Research Contexts and Participants**

**Context: The Family Literacy Program**

Parents as Literacy Supporters (PALS) is a family literacy program that works with parents and caregivers to support their children’s early literacy and language development. Hannon (2003) described family literacy programs as, "programmes to teach literacy knowledge and make use of learner's family relationships and engagement in family literacy practices" (p. 100). PALS is intended to reflect a social, contextual orientation (Auerbach, 1989) to family literacy. As such, the program aims to build on the current home literacy practices of families that support children’s early literacy development while introducing them to other practices that may eventually be taken up in the contexts of their daily lives.

**Program development.** The creators, both former schoolteachers, conceived of the program in response to a request from a former Lacey City mayor to assist with a literacy initiative to meet the needs of a low-income, English-speaking population (Anderson & Morrison, 2010). In order to draft the initial modules for use in the program, the co-creators held focus groups with parents, early childhood educators, and administrators. They piloted the program in two inner-city schools in Lacey City before expanding into two inner-city schools in a neighbouring city. Shortly afterwards, those working in the program at one of the initial sites in
Lacey City modified the program to meet the needs of the Vietnamese population. In this iteration of PALS, programming was offered in Vietnamese and participating families received bilingual materials and books to take home (Perkins, 2010).

In the mid-2000s, the program co-creators received funding to pilot a 3-year project specifically for immigrant and refugee communities in five communities representing four linguistic groups: Mandarin, Farsi, Punjabi, and Karen. PALS became PALS in Immigrant and Refugee Communities. Overseeing the project was an Advisory Committee made up of representatives from each of the linguistic communities taking part in the pilot project, the funding agencies, and a local university, and a Working Committee comprised of the program coordinators from each of the participating school boards (Anderson et al., 2011). Although the core program components remained the same, the program would be delivered in both English and the first language of the participants. Additionally, families would receive a bilingual picture book as part of their take-home package.

Facilitators hired to deliver the program at each of the five sites participated in an initial training session during which they were provided resources in the form of book chapters, journal articles, and videos on constructs including “funds of knowledge” (e.g., Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), bi-literacy development (e.g., Wong Fillmore, 1991), and learning through play. Additionally, they attended a guest lecture on working in cross-cultural contexts. Sessions were held in schools in five school districts between January 2008 and June 2010. Throughout the two years in which the program was offered, the program co-creators met with the co-facilitators and the English as a Second Language (ESL) coordinators from each district for one day each school term (fall, winter, spring) to discuss any issues and concerns they may be experiencing and to highlight any new learning. Additionally, at the end of the first year, the co-
facilitators were invited to attend a day-long conference during which they listened to an address from a noted scholar in the field of family literacy and reported on their experiences over the year. At the conclusion of the project, the group met for another half-day session in which they shared their experiences from the second year of the project and provided their feedback on the project as a whole (F. Morrison, interview, March 1, 2016).

At the conclusion of the pilot project, federal funding for PALS in Immigrant and Refugee Communities was channeled through the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism, and Skills Training and through the Labour, Immigration Policy and Programs branch of the provincial government to a provincially funded agency for distribution to school districts and communities interested in offering the program. The focus of the funding was on settlement issues, with settlement being understood as the family’s successful transition into the Canadian school system (S. Brattston, interview, October 21, 2013).

Programming in PALS usually takes place during the school year. A typical program is divided into 10 monthly sessions with each monthly session lasting approximately 1.5 to 2 hours. During an initial “Parents-Only” segment, facilitators encourage the parents to link the key ideas from that session to their own experiences. Families then participate in “Parent-Child Together Time”, where parents work alongside their children in the language of their choice at activity stations that reflect the key ideas. The session concludes with the parents coming together in a second “Parent-Only” segment during which they reflect on the type of learning they observed while working alongside their children and suggest how they might transfer the experience into their own home. Each participating family receives a high quality children’s bilingual book (English and the participants’ first language) and other materials to take home following each session.
**PALS in Lacey City.** I chose to observe activity within the PALS program that took place in Lacey City after the initial three-year project had ended (see Chapter 3). The program in Lacey City was administered through the local school district and took place between October 2013 and May 2014. All 10 sessions took place in the elementary school directly across the street from the apartment complex in which many of the resettled Karen families lived. Each monthly session ran from 12:30 to 2:00 pm. Programming at this site was co-facilitated by Joanne, an English-speaking primary school teacher who was born and raised in Lacey City, and Zeyar, the Karen-speaking multicultural worker in the elementary school and member of the resettled Karen refugee community.

I was first introduced to the program through my role as research assistant on a study that ran from 2007 to 2010 that investigated the feasibility of expanding PALS to include immigrant and refugee communities. During the two years in which I was involved, I made frequent visits to all five sites of the study and, as part of my duties as research assistant, I documented the variety of activities I observed taking place. In the fall of 2011, I began to prepare my own program of research. I continued my relationship with the families by volunteering in the program at the Lacey City site for the two years following the conclusion of the pilot project and the beginning of my data collection. My duties included helping Joanne and Zeyar set up the activity centres, participating in large group activities such as singing songs and listening to stories, assisting families as needed in the centres, preparing the food, and organizing the clean-up following the session.

**Context: The Families’ Homes**

Prior to their arrival in Lacey City, a dedicated group of volunteers arranged for the majority of the Karen families to live in a cluster of low-rise apartment buildings situated across
the street from an elementary school and adjacent to the commercial centre. The complex consisted of six buildings bordering a central parking area and a small playground. Although there were a few bushes planted along the walkways, most of the space between the buildings was paved.

Within the complex, extended Karen families lived in individual two- or three-bedroom units. The units were accessible through a main entranceway. To access a unit, visitors must first find the unit number of the family they wished to visit and then press the buzzer associated with that unit. There were no names printed on the panel. Throughout the study, the main foyer of each building was devoid of furniture. The building superintendent taped notices to the tenants on the windows on either side of the main doorway. The notices were printed in English only. I often saw English-language newspapers stacked in corners of the main entrance or strewn across the floor.

During the summer of 2013, I accompanied Zeyar on visits with families living in the apartment complex. The main living space within each unit consisted of a combination living room/dining room and a small galley kitchen. Glass sliding doors separated the living room from a small balcony. The majority of the families used the balcony as storage for boxes and sports equipment or as a place to smoke. Inside, the rooms were sparsely decorated, with often the only furniture being a table and chairs and a television set. Although all the units I visited were carpeted, many families placed a large bamboo mat over the carpet in the main living area.

I chose to collect data from three Karen families within the community of resettled Karen refugees living within Lacey City who were participating in PALS (see Chapter 3 for a description of how the families were selected). Once I had received consent, I met with each of the three families individually in the spring of 2013. These initial visits allowed me to introduce
myself and gave them the chance to ask me any questions about the research. This initial visit also gave the children the opportunity to get to know me before I began regular visits in their home. At the beginning of the study, all three children were 3 years of age and lived in the apartment complex located across the street from the school.

**Hser Paw’s family**. At the beginning of the study, Hser Paw’s family lived in a three-bedroom, ground-floor apartment situated in the cluster of six buildings located across the street from the elementary school. Unlike other apartments I had visited, this unit was well furnished. There were two large sofas in the living room and a table and chairs in the dining room. Over time, the amount of furniture within the main living room grew to include a desk and room divider. In the fall of 2013, in anticipation of the arrival of extended family members from Burma, the family moved from the apartment into a rented, split-level, five-bedroom house. The set up in the living room remained the same, however the desk and room divider were moved to a dedicated space in the basement. By the time I had finished my home visits with the family, a total of 18 people lived in the house of whom eight were adults and 10 children. Although the first language of the family was Karen, in general, the older adults primarily spoke Karen and the children, English.

When Zeyar and I arrived for our first visit, there was another woman visiting along with a young Karen couple. Over the course of my research, I encountered many visitors, both Karen and Canadian, in Hser Paw’s home. Hser Paw’s husband worked for one of the immigrant

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3 Karen children may be given a Karen name, a Burmese name, or a Western name (Moonieinda, 2010). The use of pseudonyms in this study reflects this variation in naming. Although one of the children and her mother were known by their Karen names, both chose a Western name for use in this study.

4 During the study, Zeyar acted as research assistant in that she set up visits within the homes of the families and provided translation during the visits and semi-structured interviews.
services societies and was also involved in the Karen church. At the time of the study, Hser Paw was attending English-language classes and studying for her citizenship test.

I am not sure if the reason for my visiting that first day was clear to the family. I introduced myself and gave the background to my study with Zeyar translating to Karen as necessary. Although only Hser Paw participated in the study, during this first visit, both parents listened to my description of what it would entail. The father spoke briefly about his views on learning and on his role in his child’s learning. He used words like “teach them”. He also mentioned his children’s preference for English over Karen and how he had recently started up Saturday Karen language classes for children 6 years of age and older. He then excused himself to return to work. Hser Paw was less fluent in English than her husband. She seemed eager to show me the items she used that were provided by PALS (e.g., magnetic alphabet letters). When I asked her if she had any questions, she instead asked me about her children’s use of alphabet letters or about their play and learning.

Hser Paw’s daughter, Claire, a focal child in the study and the middle of three children, all of whom are girls, was born in Lacey City, as was her younger sister, Victoria. Her older sister, Kristen, was born in the refugee camp in Thailand. Throughout the study, Claire displayed an outgoing personality and spoke fluent English. I remember her as a baby attending PALS with her mother and older sister when I worked as a research assistant in the pilot project. When we arrived for our first visit, she was having her nap. As soon as she woke up, she came into the living room and started to play with the magnetic alphabet letters while her mother, Zeyar, and I continued with our conversation.

Paw Paw’s family. When the study began, Paw Paw’s family lived in a two-bedroom, second-floor apartment in the apartment complex across the street from the school. In the spring
of 2014, the family was forced to move out of their unit and into a ground floor apartment in a building on the other side of the city centre. Zeyar indicated that the reason for the move was due to noise complaints from the neighbours. The focal child, Sam was the third of four children. He and his younger sister were born in Canada; his older sister and brother were born in the refugee camp in Thailand. Although their first language was Karen, Sam and his older siblings chose to speak in English in the home.

When we arrived for our first visit, Paw Paw met us at the door, dressed in a traditional Karen skirt and holding a small baby. My first impression of their unit was that it was small and dark. There was no couch in the main room, only a large, flat screen television set on a stand in the corner. During this initial visit, the television was on and was tuned to an English-language children’s program. A large Karen mat covered the carpet. The dining room had only chairs, no table. Zeyar had told me prior to our arrival at the apartment that Paw Paw spoke no English. During the study, she stayed home, looking after Sam’s baby sister and spoke to the children in Karen only.

When I entered the main living area of the apartment, I noticed that Sam’s father was sitting on a chair in the dining room alongside an elderly Karen man. The father was dressed in shorts and a t-shirt. He was quick to greet me in English and provide me with one of the chairs. I sat down in the dining area with the parents and the elderly gentleman and described the project. The father listened to my introduction, even though he would not be a participant in the study. He indicated that he had no questions.

While I was speaking with the father, Zeyar sat on the floor and began to look through a pile of children’s books that were scattered on the mat. Sam looked at the books with her, while his older brother ran around the room. My first impression of Sam was that he was a quiet boy
with a playful personality. During this initial visit, he rarely spoke, preferring instead to point to random images in the book. At times, he would count the images in English. He seemed very shy and used actions rather than words to communicate. After speaking with the father, I joined Zeyar and Sam on the mat. Initially, Sam avoided my eyes, preferring instead to engage with a toy action figure. I noticed that one of the books on the floor was *Pete the Cat* (Litwin, 2010), so I showed him a picture of my cat on my smartphone. He responded by showing me his action figure. We then played with the action figure together.

**Isabelle’s family.** Isabelle and her daughter, Emma, lived in a three-bedroom apartment that belonged to Isabelle’s parents. The apartment was located on the second floor of the building opposite that of Sam’s family. Other members of the household included Isabelle’s parents, brothers, and her 8-year-old niece. Zeyar and I arrived for our initial visit just before noon. One of Isabelle’s younger brothers met us at the door and welcomed us into the apartment. We followed him into the main living area. The only furniture in the room was a leather couch and a small television and computer console, perched on an old entertainment stand. Almost immediately, my attention was drawn to the large number of toys stacked in the corner next to the balcony doors. I recognized many of the toys as being from the Disney Princess Collection and included a play kitchen, cradle, and stroller. Various toy dishes and small dolls were strewn throughout the pile.

Both mother and daughter were sitting together on the mat. Isabelle greeted us with a smile. I sat down, facing her, and described the project. She appeared to be interested in that she smiled and nodded in response to my questions or comments. She answered all of my questions in English. During the study, she worked part-time as a front-of-store person at a local fast-food
restaurant. In the final month of data collection, she enrolled in an English-language class in preparation for taking the citizenship test.

As I was speaking with Isabelle, Emma played with some of the toys. Midway through our visit, the young boy returned to the room, accompanied by a young girl. Emma invited her to play with the toy kitchen. Although shy when part of a large group, preferring the role of quiet observer to active learner, in the home, Emma let her imagination take over. During this initial visit, she engaged me, as well as her young visitor, in numerous play narratives. When I commented on this to Isabelle, she told me that Emma also loved to sing and perform songs and rhymes in both English and Karen.

In this section, I described the research contexts in which this study took place. These descriptions serve as an introduction only to the families and the focal children. In Chapter 6, I more fully describe the literacy beliefs and historical literacy practices that shape activity within the homes of the focal families, identify current literacy practices, those situated within other social activity domains in the home and those situated within the social activity domain of play, in the home, and provide thick description of literacy events I observed taking place in the homes.

**Significance**

The study of the literacy practices of Karen refugee parents and their children will build on current research in family literacy by focusing on the relationship between literacy practices within a bilingual family literacy program, PALS, and the literacy practices of resettled Karen refugee families in the home. In particular, it will provide insights as to whether and how these families take up the practices from the program within their sociocultural lives outside the program and if and how they bring practices specific to their culture into the bilingual family
literacy program. This research will also contribute to the literature on resettled Karen refugees by focusing on how literacy activity, in particular that of pre-school-aged children, is mediated within the homes, community, and bilingual family literacy program within one community in western Canada.

In this chapter, I have presented the purpose and rationale of my proposed research, identified the research questions, situated the study within the context of the region and the Karen people, introduced the research context and participants, and discussed the significance. I next present an outline of my proposed dissertation.

Outline for Dissertation

This dissertation describes the literacy practices of Karen refugee families in the home, community, and family literacy program and, in particular, how literacy events are arranged and how individuals engage in these events over the course of a year as they participate in a bilingual family literacy program that helps parents and caregivers to collectively support the early literacy development of their children. Six chapters follow this introductory chapter. In Chapter 2, I situate my research within sociocultural theory. I begin by identifying the theoretical constructs that shape my understanding of learning, development, and literacy in multiple learning settings. I then review the empirical research related to three strands of research: research on literacy in non-school contexts, research on family literacy programs, and research involving resettled Karen refugee populations. I describe the research methodology of my study in Chapter 3, presenting the research design and providing my rationale for employing a qualitative methodology. I then describe data collection methods and the data analysis process. Finally, I discuss my role as researcher and describe how I attempted to ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of my study. In Chapter 4, I describe the social world of the resettled Karen refugees
within the host community and highlight literacy practices embedded within the contexts of the community and early learning settings other than PALS. Next, in Chapters 5 and 6, I highlight activity in the form of literacy events that occur within the family literacy program and the family homes respectively and demonstrate how these events are mediated within the two contexts. In Chapter 7, the final chapter, I present the conclusions to the study and highlight insights from this research for families and for family literacy program developers and facilitators. This discussion focuses on how the findings contribute to knowledge regarding the ways in which literacy is socially enacted in a community of resettled Karen refugees taking part in a bilingual family literacy program. Finally, I discuss the limitations of the current study and suggest areas for future research.
CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, I situate my study within theory and research. I begin by identifying sociocultural theory as the theoretical perspective guiding the study. In this discussion, I highlight the main tenet of Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory of learning and development, also known as Activity Theory, and describe how activity was reconceptualized within subsequent generations (Engeström, 1987, 2001; Guetiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999). Next, I discuss one of the major sociocultural theories of literacy, literacy as social practice (Heath, 1983; Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Street, 1984), by focusing on how research is conducted within the tradition of the New Literacy Studies. I then identify constructs from these and other theories, specifically Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) that shaped the research questions, guided data collection, and informed my understanding of the data. In the second half of this chapter, I review empirical research related to three strands: research on literacy in non-school contexts, research on family literacy programs, and research involving resettled refugee populations and identify assertions from and voids within this research that contributed to the conceptual framework of this study.

Theoretical Perspectives

Sociocultural Theory

I situate this study within sociocultural theory wherein learning and development are understood as resulting from an individual’s participation in day-to-day activities valued within a particular culture (Vygotsky, 1978). Within this perspective, learning is understood as being ongoing throughout the lifecycle as individuals participate in local communities of practice (Lave & Wegner, 1991). Through this participation, they acquire diverse sets of cultural
knowledge and performance capacities and skills (Erickson, 2002). Children acquire these culturally specific ways of knowing and doing through their interactions with more skilled partners, either directly through child-focused activities or indirectly through their participation in the activities of the community (Rogoff, 2003). It is through these interactions that children learn to use cultural tools, including thinking, reading, and writing, for their own purposes (Wertsch, 1998).

Razfar and Gutiérrez (2003) argued that literacy learning from a sociocultural perspective “is a socially mediated process that cannot be understood apart from its context of development, the forms of mediation available, and the nature of participation across various cultural practices” (p. 34). Central to this view of learning and development is the concept of culture. Gutiérrez (2002) distinguished between culture as an independent variable in an individual’s learning and development and culture as practice. By interpreting culture as practice, Gutiérrez suggested that, “culture and individual development are interwoven in activity systems, artifacts, and other kinds of symbolic forms such as language” (p. 313) and, since practices are unobservable (Barton & Hamilton, 2000), emphasized activity as “the appropriate unit of analysis for studying culture, in that participants need to have sufficient shared understanding of the practice, as well as the sociocultural knowledge needed to perform or participate productively in the task” (p. 314).

**First generation activity theory: Mediated action.** Vygotsky (1978) understood human learning and development as arising from the individual’s participation in social interactions, which are always cultural in nature. He made the distinction between learning and development. Vygotsky understood learning as the accumulation of understanding that precedes development. This initial learning, he argued, “provides the basis for the subsequent development of a variety
of complex internal processes in children’s thinking” (p. 90). He understood development, on the other hand, as the transformation of understanding followed by action. Since developmental processes trail learning processes, Vygotsky (1978) suggested there comes to exist a zone in which individuals engage in activities that are beyond their developmental level. He referred to this as the zone of proximal development, which he defined as,

[T]he distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (p. 86).

Within this zone, through his or her engagement in social interactions or cultural activities with more skilled others or in cooperation with peers, individuals learn to use cultural tools, such as language and literacy, for their own purposes (Wertsch, 1998). As such, external knowledge is not internalized directly; rather, it becomes transformed and internalized through the use of these tools.

Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of learning and development, commonly referred to in the literature as Activity Theory, takes mediated action as a unit of analysis (see Figure 2.1). According to Wertsch (1998), actions are not simply random responses to stimuli; they are necessary steps towards the achievement of specific goals. The achievement of a goal by an agent would not be possible without the use of a tool. The tool by itself is not enough to make the task successful; the agent must use it appropriately. For example, Wertsch described how, in the sport of pole-vaulting, in order to clear the bar, athletes require a tool known as a pole. However, the simple act of holding a pole will not enable the athlete to clear the bar; he or she must approach the bar at an appropriate speed and then position the pole in such a way as to carry his or her body up and over the bar.
Wertsch (1998) argued that, with the exception of spoken language, most mediational means are material. When agents act with, or react to, the material properties of cultural tools, it signifies the development of a particular skill. For example, an individual becomes a skilled reader through his or her interaction with the material object (i.e., a book/print) over time. Time allows the individual to master the challenges this particular object represents.

Mediational means both constrain and enable action (Wertsch, 1998). For example, the material object from the above example (e.g., the printed text) could enable the agent to gain knowledge necessary for the completion of a specific task (e.g., answering exam questions). In that sense, the mediational means enabled the action. However, if the agent chose only to rely on the information contained within that particular text, then it could be seen as constraining action (e.g., trying to use this information when filling out a job application form).

Although an individual’s ability level corresponds with his or her skill in functioning with a particular tool, Wertsch (1998) argued that the ease with which an individual uses a particular set of cultural tools does not correspond with his or her general aptitude or intelligence; it simply speaks to that individual’s mastery of the use of that tool. In some
situations, an agent may not be familiar with a particular cultural tool. For example, in this study, many of the adults living in the community of resettled Karen refugees in Lacey City were not familiar with certain bureaucratic texts, such as forms to apply for a rental subsidy or forms to indicate a change of address. Additionally, these texts were printed in English only. Thus, in order to participate in the social activity mediated by these cultural tools (i.e., applying for a rental subsidy, informing others of a change in address), initially, they looked to another member of the community for assistance.

Mediational means are associated with power and authority (Wertsch, 1998). By employing certain mediational means within a given context, an agent can be recognized by other individuals. Spoken language is an example of this. An individual can command the attention of others by using language to which these individuals will listen and respect when he or she is required to speak with authority in a given context. Similarly, in the opening example of this dissertation, Cheryl positioned the Karen mother and her children around the bilingual picture book in order to reinforce for program funders the pre-conceived idea that Karen parents chose to use bilingual picture books as tools to mediate their children’s literacy learning.

Second generation activity theory: Collective activity system. In his discussion on the evolution of Activity Theory, Engeström (2001) credited Leont’ev, a contemporary of Vygotsky, with proposing the move from the triangular model (see above) of activity (subject, object, and mediating artifact) to a collective activity system with a “focus on the complex interrelations between the individual subject and his or her community” (p. 134). Within this framework, rather than viewing activity as mediated action, activity is conceptualized as the mediated three-way interaction between subject, object, and community, with the object being the sense-maker (Kaptelinin, 2005), that which “gives meaning to and determines values of various entities and
phenomena” (Kaptelinin, 2005, p. 5). Furthermore, within the activity system, these interactions can be mediated by rules (values, beliefs, and attitudes), cultural tools, and by the division of labour (see Figure 2.2). Activity systems are multi-voiced and are shaped and transformed over lengthy periods of time. Contradictions, “historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems” (Engeström, 2001, p. 137) often become the impetus for change and development.

**Figure 2.2. Activity System**

![Activity System Diagram](image)

**Third generation: Third space.** Learning within multiple contexts is complex. Guettiérrez et al. (1999) used the construct of the third space to help conceptualize the complexities of formal and informal learning environments. Working from the perspective of Activity Theory, they understood the third space as “an expanded activity in which the object of the activity is extended and the activity itself reorganized, resulting in new opportunities for
learning” (Guetíerrez et al., 1999, p. 287). In other words, Guetíerrez et al. understood third space as resulting from the subjects’ use of “multiple, diverse, and even, conflicting meditational tools” (p. 288) and roles.

John-Steiner and Mahn (1996) described research from a Vygotskian perspective as employing “methodological approaches that focus on process and document change and transformation” (p. 204). They suggested data accumulated through ethnographic methods be interpreted using frameworks developed from Vygotsky. Next, I describe the framework that informed my understanding of literacy practices within the community of resettled Karen refugees in Lacey City.

**Literacy as situated practice: The New Literacy Studies.** This study draws from the sociocultural perspective on literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 2007; Street, 1984), hence literacy is understood as a set of social practices embedded within cultural and historical contexts. Razfar and Gutiérrez (2003) argued that from this perspective, “the development of early literacy practices (and their study) is understood in relation to the contexts in which those practices are culturally, historically, and ideologically situated” (p. 35). This perspective allows researchers to consider the social situations in which individuals come to literacy. Since forms of literacy are embedded within ideologies, the focus should be on “identifying the specific social practices of reading and writing and recognizing the ideologically and culturally embedded nature of these practices” (Street, 1984, p. 2).

Researchers working within the tradition of The New Literacy Studies have added to the theory (Perry, 2012). New Literacy Studies draws on the fields of anthropology and sociolinguistics. The focus of research from a New Literacy Studies perspective is not on the acquisition of individual skills, but on contesting what counts as literacy (Street, 2003).
Researchers working in this tradition draw from Street’s (1984) ideological model of literacy. Street stated that research based on this model “concentrates on the specific social practices of reading and writing” (p. 2) and recognizes how these practices are embedded both ideologically and culturally within a particular community. According to Street (2003), data are collected using “ethnographic methods, but with new terms and new meanings for old ones” (p. 78). For example, in the ideological model of literacy, multiple literacies are recognized. Therefore, instead of selecting literacy as a unit of study, the term literacy practices was introduced and has become the unit of analysis used by researchers working within the tradition of the New Literacy Studies. In this way, researchers situate literacy events in the broader cultural and social community. New Literacy Studies researchers analyze what counts as literacy by drawing on multiple theoretical perspectives.

Barton and Hamilton (2000) suggested that we think of literacy in terms of six propositions. Like Scribner and Cole (1981) and Street (1984), they described literacy as configurations of social practices. They defined literacy practices as “the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives” (p. 7). These literacy practices are inferred from literacy activities, which they referred to as literacy events. Heath (1982) defined the literacy event as, “[an] occasion in which written language is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies” (p. 50). Drawing from Heath, Barton and Hamilton (2000) specified literacy events as, “activities in which literacy plays a role. Usually there is a written text or texts, central to the activity and there may be talk around the text” (p. 8). Some literacy events exist within the formal procedures and expectations of social institutions, such as a school, while others exist within informal expectations and pressures associated with an individual’s home or peer group.
Central to the notion of the literacy event is the idea of text. However, different participants in the event may use literacy in different ways and assign meaning to the text through means other than reading and writing. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) stated that “meaning is made in ways that are increasingly multimodal – in which written-linguistic modes of meaning are part and parcel of visual, audio, and spatial patterns of meaning” (p. 5). Thus, literacy is more than the reading and writing of printed texts; it includes the use of multiple modalities (e.g., gesture, movement) and multiple mediums (forms) of representation (e.g., dance, song).

According to Barton and Hamilton (2000), “[t]here are different literacies associated with different domains of life” (p. 11). When looked at together, literacy practices that are associated with a particular aspect of an individual’s cultural life create a coherent configuration. Barton and Hamilton called these configurations “literacies” (p.10). Specific literacies are associated with specific domains or contexts of life. Typically, an individual participates in literacy activities situated within the context of the home (home literacy), the school (school literacy) and, if applicable, the workplace (workplace literacy). Since the boundaries of each domain often overlap, allowing social activities specific to one context to take place in another, Purcell-Gates, Perry, and Briseño (2011) used the term social activity domain to “capture the social activity mediated by the particular literacy event for the participant” (p. 442).

Certain literacy practices specific to one domain are often understood as being dominant over other practices within that same domain (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). Socially powerful institutions, such as schools, will often support these dominant literacy practices at the expense of the others. Literacy practices thus become a form of cultural capital that can either support or hinder a child’s academic and social development (Bourdieu, 1991). Furthermore, Wohlwend (2011) argued that contexts, such as classrooms, consist of multiple cultures in which different
literacies are privileged. For example, within a kindergarten classroom, school culture values meaning-making practices mediated by books (such as reading and writing), while peer culture values meaning-making practices mediated by toys, dolls, and craft materials (such as play and design).

Although literacy practices are historically shaped, they are not static; practices change over time. Individuals are introduced to and take up new practices through the processes of informal learning and sense-making, and through formal education and training. In many communities, individuals create syncretic literacies rather than take up new practices (Duranti & Ochs, 1997). Duranti and Ochs defined syncretic literacy as the “intermingling or merging of culturally diverse traditions [which] informs and organizes literacy activities” (p. 4). Researchers working within the tradition of literacy as social practice have identified syncretic practices in multicultural families (e.g., Gregory, 2001; Markose, Symes, & Hellsten, 2011; Souto-Manning & Dice, 2009; Volk & de Acosta, 2001, 2003) and in family literacy programs (e.g., Pahl & Kelly, 2005).

Although both these traditions present a range of research options, neither Activity Theory (Engeström, 1987, 2001; Guetiérrez et al., 1999; Vygotsky, 1978) nor the New Literacy Studies (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Purcell-Gates, 2007; Street, 1984) should be thought of as exclusively shaping this study. In order to understand the complex nature of literacy practices within the community of resettled Karen refugees, I chose to work across traditions and draw concepts from multiple theoretical perspectives. In this way, I wove aspects of the traditions and theories together to provide a tapestry of insights with which to understand the learning that was taking place within these families and community. I now describe how constructs from both Activity Theory and the New Literacy Studies informed the current study.
Understanding the literacy event as activity. Nikolaidou (2011) argued for the use of Activity Theory (AT) as a heuristic framework within the tradition of the New Literacy Studies since, “it (AT) allows the researcher to understand and describe the multiple reading and writing processes that take place and the purposes of the texts being produced” (p.3), and, like the New Literacy Studies, Activity Theory understands context as being central to all human activity. Thus, to understand how literacy practices are socially, historically, and culturally enacted within a community of resettled Karen refugees in Lacey City and to identify changes within these practices over time, first, I draw from Activity Theory (Engeström, 1987, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978) and take as my unit of analysis the artifact-mediated, object-oriented activity system. Within this system, the primary focus is activity, specifically the mediated three-way interaction between subject, object, and community (Engeström, 2001). In this study, I draw from the sociocultural perspective of literacy and understand activity mediated by text as a literacy event (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Heath, 1983).

In the traditional activity system heuristic, activity is organized within the context of community. Since activity often crosses physical spaces, for the purposes of this study, I draw from Purcell-Gates et al. (2011) and understand the context as the social activity domain.

According to Gutiérrez and Stone (2000), when subjects “participate in literacy events, they are both creating and re-creating situated practices during the construction of literacy knowledge” (p. 159). Thus, within this study, I understand the object within the event as situated practice (Street, 1984). Drawing from Wohlwend (2011), within the social activity domain of play, I understand situated practice as reading, writing, design, and play.

I understand rules, in the form of values, beliefs, and attitudes, as shaping activity within each social activity domain by defining the participant structure within the literacy event and
making available to the subjects meditational means in the form of signs (e.g., language, action) and tools (e.g., texts) (Engeström, 2001).

**Additional Theoretical Constructs from within Sociocultural Theory**

**Tools for making meaning.** I draw from additional theoretical constructs to understand cultural tools used to mediate activity within the Karen community. Vygotsky (1978) believed language to be the premier psychological tool that children use to master their own behaviour and plan a solution to a problem prior to its execution. He concluded, “[c]ognitive and communicative functions of language then become the basis for a new and superior form of activity in children, distinguishing them from animals” (p. 29).

Similarly, Bakhtin (1986) understood dialogue as a tool for meaning-making. The focal point of Bakhtin’s theory is the individual utterance. According to Bakhtin, the utterance is the basic unit of speech communication. Composed of language units, such as words, phrases and sentences, an utterance has an absolute beginning and an absolute end and varies in size, depending on the speech plan formed by the speaker. It must have a speech subject (an author) as well as an other (an addressee) for this author’s speech. Each utterance fits in with what has been said before and what will be said after. In this sense, each utterance becomes a link in the chain of speech communication.

Likewise, Wells (2000) referred to a dialogue of knowledge building, which he defined as “the mode of discourse in which a structure of meaning is built up collaboratively over successive turns” (Wells, 2000, p. 72). Using Bakhtin’s (1986) notion of utterance, Wells described how both speaker and listener engage in the construction of a common understanding, one “that is superior to their previous understanding” (p. 74). For the speaker, this enhanced understanding comes from “the constructive and creative effort involved in saying and in
responding to what was said” (p. 74). The listener’s enhanced understanding is the result of “listening responsively and critically to the contributions of others” (p. 74).

By contrast, Kress (1997) understood meaning-making as action and argued, “[t]his action is best explained in terms of the social structures and cultural systems in which children and adults act in communication” (p. 8). Central to his theory of meaning-making is the concept of signs. Kress defined a sign as, “any combination of meaning and form” (p. 6). He viewed all individuals as sign makers who make signs in a variety of semiotic modes. He described semiotic modes as visual, verbal, written, gestural, and musical resources used to communicate. He described children as “thoroughly experienced makers of meaning, as experienced makers of signs in any medium that is to hand” (p. 8). For example, in the process of learning to read and write, a child will make meaning in any medium that is available. What is to hand is usually that which is valued within a particular culture. In western culture, such items available to young children typically include writing and craft tools such as paper, pencils, scissors, and tape, or toys such as Lego blocks. Meaning-making practices using items at hand include drawing pictures, creating artifacts, and building structures. Thus, in this study, I understand cultural tools used to mediate understanding within the Karen community to include signs, such as language (Karen and English) and action, and tools, such as writing implements and toys.

Guided participation. I also draw from Rogoff’s (1990, 2003) metaphor of apprenticeship and her construct of appropriation to understand the roles of the Karen children and their parents in meaning-making activity within the two contexts. Whereas Vygotsky (1978) emphasized internalization in the transformation of interpersonal processes into intrapersonal processes, Rogoff proposed a model based on participation. She stated, “The rapid development of young children into skilled participants in society is accomplished through children’s routine,
often tacit, guided participation in ongoing cultural activities as they observe and participate with others in culturally organized practices” (Rogoff, 1990, p. 16).

Rogoff (1990) asserted that this model is “one of routine arrangements and engagements that guide children’s increasingly skilled and appropriate participation in the daily activities valued in their culture” (p. 191). She used the metaphor of apprenticeship to describe the child’s role in learning the lessons of their culture under the guidance of their more skilled companions. As novice and expert enter into a shared activity, they develop a shared understanding based on a common focus of attention. Rogoff referred to this shared understanding as “intersubjectivity” (p. 71). Thus, children acquire culturally specific ways of knowing and doing through their interactions with more skilled partners, either directly through child-focused activities or indirectly through their participation in the activities of the community, through tacit forms of communication in verbal as well as non-verbal exchanges.

While Vygotsky (1978) wrote of “metamorphosis or qualitative transformation from one form [of a mental function] into another” (p. 73), Rogoff (1990) proposed the idea of appropriation from shared activity. She stated,

The individual then uses this shared understanding. This use is not the same as what was constructed jointly. It is an appropriation of the shared activity by each individual that reflects the individual’s understanding of and involvement in the activity (Rogoff, 1990, p. 195).

Modeling. To understand further the roles of the Karen children and their parents in meaning-making activity in early learning settings including the home, I draw from Gregory, Ruby, and Kenner’s (2010) notion of modeling. They distinguished between guided participation as a method of transfer of knowledge and/or skills taking place between children and adults and
modeling by arguing that, in guided participation, the emphasis is on the nature of the child’s participation in the event. However, in traditional societies, children often acquire knowledge and/or skills through the close observation of others. Thus, the role of the adult or older child in an activity is to model for the younger child the task to be learned.

**Play.** To understand traditional forms of learning in the Karen culture and how children learn through play in Lacey City, I draw from constructs within play theory. A sociocultural theory of learning and development understands learning as the stimulus for the child’s internal developmental processes. According to Vygotsky (1978), “[o]nce these processes are internalized, they become part of the child’s independent developmental achievement” (p. 90). Despite this assertion, multi-modal meaning-making practices in which children engage often go unrecognized by adults. For example, practices other than language, drawing, and building are often dismissed as mere play and are not taken seriously as contexts for learning (Kress, 1997). However, Vygotsky contended that it is through play that “the child achieves a functional definition of concepts or objects” (p. 99).

According to Vygotsky (1978), “play creates a zone of proximal development” in that, through play, “the child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior” (p. 101). Elkonin (2005) understood play as a special form of activity, one in which children come to understand their surroundings by taking as their topic, their own living conditions. Since a child’s action in play arises from ideas rather than things, children use everyday objects as “pivots” (Vygotsky, 1978) and detach the actual meaning from the object. In their afterword to the book, *Mind in Society*, John-Steiner and Souberman (1978) suggested that, in play, “[c]hildren depend on and imaginatively transform those socially produced objects and forms of behavior made available to them in their particular environment” (p. 126).
In early childhood, play relates to literacy in that, according to Hall (1991), “[it] provides a context within which the emergence of literacy can be manifested and explored”. Wohlwend (2011) extended this understanding by arguing that play itself is a literacy for “creating and coordinating a live-action text among multiple players that invests materials with pretended meanings and slips the constraints of here-and-now realities” (p. 2). She posited that, through play, children “mediate print texts for themselves” and produce signs, “material objects or actions that represent and communicate ideas” (p. 13). Furthermore, according to Prinsloo (2008), it is through play activity that children “creat[e] and mode[l] for each other a variety of flexible, situated ways of making and taking meaning from a range of language and other semiotic resources” (p. 1).

In the preceding sections, I identified theoretical constructs from within sociocultural theory that shaped my understanding of learning, development, and literacy and guided my research questions to study how the participants transformed literacy practices in the home and family literacy program. In the next section, I present an overview of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological Theory and identify concepts that further shaped this study.

**Ecological Theory**

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) major criticism of the way in which psychologists studied child development was that, while observations of direct behaviour took place in laboratory settings, the findings were generalized to children in natural settings. Furthermore, he suggested that researchers interested in understanding human development look beyond studying the child in his or her immediate setting and instead study the relationships among the multiple settings in which children and their families are directly and indirectly involved. He proposed an ecological theory of development. Central to this theory is the concept of the molar activity which he
described as “an ongoing behaviour, possessing a momentum of its own and perceived as having meaning or intent by the participants in the setting” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 45). He saw the ecological environment as, “a nested arrangement of concentric structures, each contained within the next” (p. 22); each structure is related to the next in that activities and events taking place in the larger structures affect the smaller ones, eventually affecting the developing person.

The first structure that contains the developing person’s immediate experiences in a setting is the *microsystem*. Bronfenbrenner (1979) identified the home as the primary setting for a child’s development, but acknowledged other settings, such as a school (or family literacy program), as other possible sites. He described each setting as having relations with others in that children participate in molar activities within multiple settings. Bronfenbrenner called this second structure of the model, the *mesosystem*. However, relationships also exist between settings in which the developing child is not directly involved. He called this third structure of the model, the *exosystem*. Examples of settings within this sphere are a parent’s workplace or the parents’ circle of friends.

In this study, I draw particularly from Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) construct of the mesosystem to understand the types of interconnections between the multiple early learning settings in which the Karen children constitute the primary link and to understand how parents obtain information about or experience from other early learning settings in which they may or may not directly participate.

**Bilingualism**

Finally, to understand the bilingual nature of the family literacy program, I draw from constructs within the study of bilingualism. Bilingualism bestows advantages to the developing brain in that it supports the development of enhanced executive control. As such, bilinguals
develop the ability to manage higher cognitive processes, including problem-solving, thought, and impulse control (Bialystok, 2011). The use of the child’s heritage language during interactions within the zone of proximal development maximizes the child’s cognitive engagement and assists with the development of higher mental functions. Cummins, Chow, and Schecter (2006) suggested that maximum cognitive engagement is realized during interactions that provide opportunities for children “to focus on meaning, language itself, and on the use of both oral and written language” (p. 306). In addition, their concept of *additive bilingualism* (Cummins, Chow, & Schecter, 2006) suggests that children are able to retain their first language while learning a second due to *interlinguistic* resources common to both first and second language (Cummins, 1981).

To sum up, in this first section, I identified sociocultural theory as the theoretical perspective guiding the study, discussed the main tenet of the theory, mediated action, and described how activity was reconceptualized within subsequent generations of Activity Theory (Engeström, 1987, 2001; Guetiérrez et al., 1999). Next, I discussed the sociocultural perspective of literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 2007; Street, 1984), a perspective developed from Vygotsky, and described how research is conducted within the tradition of the New Literacy Studies. I then explained how aspects of Activity Theory and New Literacy Studies informed the current study and identified constructs from Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1978) that shaped the research questions, guided the data collection, and informed the analysis of the data. In the next section, I review empirical research related to three strands, research on family literacy in non-school contexts, research on family literacy programs, and research involving resettled refugee populations that also contributed to the conceptual framework of this study.
Review of the literature

In my review of literacy research in non-school contexts, I focus on the major findings arising from the past thirty years of research with culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse families. I focus my review of research of family literacy programs on the impact of family literacy programs on the participating children and parents and on the design of programs for immigrant and refugee families. Finally, in my review of research with resettled refugees, I focus on research with resettled Karen refugees and review the key findings of literacy research within their homes and family literacy programs in which they participate.

Literacy Research in Non-school Contexts

Early research in non-school contexts has documented how the communicative and literacy practices of families in the home shape children’s understanding of oral and print language. In the 1970s, Shirley Brice Heath lived and worked within three distinct communities in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. She wanted to determine what effects the pre-school and community environments of these three groups had on the learning of the language structures in settings such as the classroom or the workplace (Heath, 1983). Her unit of analysis was the literacy event with a focus on the communities in which children were socialized as talkers, readers and writers. Heath found that features of a child’s specific cultural setting affected the ways in which he or she learned to use language and that this ability was a powerful determinant in that child’s success in school. Heath concluded that children who grew up in middle-class homes within the town were exposed to a language and culture that best prepared them for their future classroom experiences.

Regardless of their socioeconomic status or cultural background, researchers have found that most parents support their children’s literacy development by providing them with a literate
home environment. Two widely cited studies on out-of-school literacy, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) and Purcell-Gates (1996), discredited the myth that a rich home literate environment is a by-product of the middle-class. Both studies found that families of low socioeconomic status used print for various purposes as they engaged in their daily activities, although the frequency of these literacy events and the range of literacy (in terms of texts, purposes, and functions) varied across families. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines found variety in the types and uses of literacy (reading and writing) in the homes of young Black children living in urban poverty. Purcell-Gates also found that the low-income families representing different ethnic groups used print for various purposes and that these frequent print-focused interactions provided children with the important conceptual basis for literacy development.

Researchers working within a sociocultural framework understand the contribution parents make to a child’s literacy development as being influenced by their beliefs about literacy learning (Anderson, 1995). These beliefs can be more holistic or more skills-based (Lynch, Anderson, Anderson, & Shapiro, 2006). Since not all parents share the same beliefs of how literacy learning is best fostered, the way they choose to support their children’s early literacy development varies. Early research revealed two trends in the ways that parents indicate how they support the literacy development of their children. Sonnenschein, Baker, Serpell, Scher, Truitt, and Munsterman (1997) found parents who believed children learn literacy in a more holistic way tended to adopt an entertainment approach to literacy development. These parents tailored home literacy instruction to the interests and experiences of their child. They engaged in shared storybook reading opportunities with their children and encouraged their children to play with print. In contrast, they found parents who believed that literacy is a skill to be learned tended to adopt a skills-based approach to literacy development and presented their children with
opportunities that required the direct teaching of specific literacy skills. These children practiced writing the alphabet and responded to flash cards.

Likewise, Anderson (1995) found variations in perceptions of literacy acquisition among parents from three different cultural groups. The Chinese-Canadian parents in his study had a more traditional perception of literacy learning than either the Euro- or Indo-Canadian parents and tended to engage their children in the direct teaching of literacy skills. Li (2009) attributed this perception to the instructional and learning techniques that these Chinese-Canadian parents had experienced in their native country. This connection between the type of support parents offer their children and their own experiences with learning to read was also found in Mexican-American (Volk & de Acosta, 2001) and African-American (Compton-Lilly, 2009) homes. Educators and theorists caution that there is no one appropriate practice for all children (Souto-Manning & Dice, 2009). Each child learns differently and this learning takes place as children grow and develop in different sociocultural contexts. Regardless of their perceived role in their child’s education, immigrant parents understand the value of their children acquiring mainstream literacies and will “tap into whatever ‘funds of knowledge’ they possess to ensure mainstream literacy acquisition for their young” (Markose, Symes, & Hellstén, 2011, p. 264).

In her study on how Mexican-American parents convey the value of education to their children, Delgado-Gaitan (1992) observed six Mexican-American families from a small, working class community. Data were collected over a 9-month period in which she made six 2-hour visits with each family. During each visit, Delgado-Gaitan observed the day-to-day parent-child interactions and made note of the household circumstances and conditions. She found the homes of the children she studied to be “total learning environments” (p. 512) in that the parents shared with their children their own aspirations and motivations about education, provided them with
physical resources, and participated in face-to-face interactions regarding school-related activities. Gillanders and Jiménez (2004) came to a similar conclusion. Their examination of the home environment of immigrant Mexican kindergarten children of low socioeconomic status in the United States revealed that, despite being poor and belonging to a foreign culture, the focal children developed the early literacy skills that enabled them to perform well in school. The authors attributed this success to the fact that the parents provided their children with both informal and formal learning activities in the home. For example, the parents supported their children informally by inventing stories before going to bed and writing letters to family members in Mexico, and formally by writing the names of family members and completing workbooks.

Further, families are powerful agents of adaptation; the traditional ways in which they support their child’s early literacy development can change as they participate in new communities of practice. For example, Reese and Gallimore (2000) carried out a longitudinal project in two Spanish-speaking communities in Southern California. Data were drawn from two studies developed from this project. The first was an ethnographic study of 10 families of Spanish-speaking kindergarten students, the second, a case study involving 29 families selected at random from a larger survey sample of over 120 immigrant, Spanish-speaking families with kindergarten-aged children. In both studies, the parents were first generation immigrants who had come to the United States from Mexico. In addition to describing the parents’ cultural model of literacy and identifying any post-immigration changes within this model, the study aimed to highlight within-group variation and changes. Reese and Gallimore found that the immigrant parents shared a common view of literacy development, one that understands reading as something that is learned through repeated practice in school. This view was largely influenced
by the experiences of their grandparents’ generation. However, the study also revealed that this belief was not static. In fact, beliefs and practices shaping the parents’ view of literacy had begun to change pre-immigration in response to changing circumstances in Mexico. For example, as families shifted from rural to urban areas of Mexico, adults acquired more free time and children achieved higher levels of schooling. Furthermore, it did not appear that the parents regarded these changes in practices to be an abandonment of traditional values. Reese and Gallimore (2000) speculated that the beliefs and practices that the young children were likely to develop would differ from those of their immigrant parents.

Building largely on early ethnographic work, researchers working from multiple research designs identified specific factors that they believed contributed to a child’s home literacy environment. Researchers often gathered data about literacy activity within the home from parents through self-administered questionnaires (Christian, Morrison, & Bryant, 1998; Griffen & Morrison, 1997; Phillips & Lonigan, 2009; Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006) in which parents provided information on such features as the quantity of print materials in the home (books, newspapers, and magazines), the frequency of activities in which they engaged with their children (television viewing, shared book reading, and visits to the library), and the focus of interactions that took place between themselves and their children during shared book reading (pointing to words while reading) or language play (playing rhyming games with child). These findings contributed to an understanding of the home literacy environment in terms of literacy artifacts (paper and pencils), experiences (checking the TV guide), events (seeing parents reading), and interactions (engaging in shared storybook reading) (Fitzgerald, Spiegel, & Cunningham, 1991).
In their correlational study, Senéchal, Thomas, and Daley (1998) examined the relationship between two types of parent-child interactions: shared storybook reading and direct instruction about reading and writing. One of the aims of the study was to determine if these types of home literacy experiences had long-term implications for reading achievement. Parents were asked to complete a checklist of home literacy experiences and report the frequency with which they taught reading and spelling to their child in the home. The child’s oral- and written-language abilities were assessed through standardized reading tests administered in both kindergarten and Grade 1. Senéchal et al. found that, in kindergarten, a child’s exposure to storybooks in the home was significant in explaining the variance in the children’s oral-language, whereas, the significant variance in written-language factor could be explained by the frequency of parent teaching. Although these trends were carried into Grade 1, the authors found that the effects of these two home practices on the children’s oral- and written-language skills at the end of the year were non-significant. Variance in the children’s word reading was instead linked to their oral- and written-language skills, leading them to conclude that a child’s oral- and written-language skills mediated their early home literacy experiences and later reading skills.

In contrast, researchers working within a sociocultural tradition have highlighted the home literacy practices of non-mainstream families. For example, in her 2013 study with migrant farmworkers in the upper mid-west of the United States, Purcell-Gates documented the ways that literacy mediated the lives of those families whose children attended a Migrant Head Start Program. Drawing on data from her observations of and conversations with the parents in the home and community as well as from her semi-structured interviews with them in the home, Purcell-Gates determined that literacy mediated the lives of the families as they responded to rules and regulations imposed on them by various regulatory agencies including the Migrant
Head Start Program, maintained relationships with other family members, and as they practiced their faith. Texts included form-filling texts such as those required to apply for a green-card, activity reports from the pre-school, celebratory texts including greeting cards and the text on cakes and cupcakes. Although the children were exposed to multiple early literacy experiences in the community involving these texts (e.g., reading/signing consent forms, writing banners, reading the Bible), literacy learning practices within the pre-school were based on “practices that are predominant in Western educated families” (Purcell-Gates, 2013, p. 92), specifically, storybook reading. Purcell-Gates attributed this cultural mismatch between the home and the school to “a profound lack of knowledge on the part of curriculum developers, program directors, and teachers of the lives and activities of the migrant farmworkers, and how they are mediated by literacy practices” (p. 92).

Sociocultural research has also documented joint (parent-child, adult-child, sibling-child) or child-only engagement in structured practices with texts within the home that promote the foundational concepts of emergent literacy. For example, Li (2009) and Mui and Anderson (2008) found that, among other strategies, the Chinese and South-East Asian parents within their respective studies encouraged their child’s engagement with skill and drill worksheets and workbooks. Volk and de Acosta (2001) shared that the Puerto Rican parents in their study directly taught the children letters and numbers and how to write their names.

Perry and Moses (2011) expanded the definition of text to include television and other media. In their ethnographic study of the literacy practices among a group of Sudanese refugee families, they chose the television event (an activity that occurred around television programming) as their unit of analysis. Among their findings, they reported that the parents identified television as a learning resource through which they learned English, and their children
were introduced to new practices, such as reading sports scores, as well as providing them an opportunity to develop print literacy skills.

Sociocultural research has also documented how children engage in literacy activities alongside siblings, cousins, or parents. In some cases, it was found that parents structured these activities to facilitate their young children’s participation. For example, in a study documenting the language and literacy practices of a young Indo-Canadian girl and her family, Mui and Anderson (2008) described how the mother would create mini-projects for the young child to complete alongside her older siblings while they worked on their homework. Other parent-structured writing events identified in the literature include the making of and writing in cards to mark a significant event, such as a birthday or wedding (Hirst, 1998; McTavish, 2007; Volk & de Acosta, 2001). Researchers have also shown that parents routinely initiate non-print related events that support children’s early literacy development. For example, the parents in McTavish’s (2007) study examining the ways in which a working class family supported the literacy development of their youngest child reported that they sang nursery rhymes and pointed out environmental print while driving.

Researchers have also documented how family members, including siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, draw from a number of communicative modes and cultural practices in their role as literacy teacher to young children (Kenner, 2005). For example, grandparents often use their first language (Gregory, Arju, Jessel, Kenner, & Ruby, 2007; Ruby, 2012) or touch, gesture, and gaze (Kenner, 2005) during literacy activities with their grandchildren. In addition, their pattern of interaction often reflects their own experiences of storybook reading. For example, Gregory et al. (2007) described a Bangladeshi grandmother as she engaged in two literacy activities with her grandson. The first literacy activity was that of
reading moral and religious rhymes in the form of a chora, while the second involved reading a European fairy-tale. Gregory et al. (2007) described how, during the reading of the chora, the grandmother read the text line-by-line in Bengla, in a low, devout voice, while seated beside her grandson. The grandson was expected to listen to his grandmother as she read the line of text and then to repeat each line after her. During the reading of the fairy tale, also in Bengla, the grandmother used her “ordinary” voice and allowed the child to move freely around the room while he listened. The authors commented on how the grandmother’s engagement with the fairy tale text reflected the form of engagement (e.g., holding book as the focus of attention between them, pointing to the text while reading) modeled by the teaching assistant in her grandson’s preschool class.

In her widely cited study, Gregory (2001) reported on the literacy activities within 16 low socio-economic status families, 8 Bangladeshi and 8 Anglo-Londoners, living in East London. Whereas Vygotsky (1978) speculated that children acquire knowledge through their interaction with a more competent member of society, Gregory argued that there might exist a more equal sharing of roles between participants during informal learning situations. Over the course of the year, she focused on the interactions between siblings during their informal play. In order to contextualize her observations of home and school literacy practices, Gregory conducted interviews with the children, their caregivers and teachers and collected literacy diaries of the families’ literacy activities from the older siblings. Information on the literacy activities taking place between siblings in the home was gathered through audio recordings made by the siblings themselves. For example, siblings were recorded participating in story-reading sessions, playing clapping games and rhymes, and role-playing school-like lessons. Gregory found that play presented the children the opportunity to practice different roles together in a non-threatening
environment and to mediate their own learning. For example, older siblings took on the role of teacher as they translated their understanding of literacy to the younger siblings or as the younger siblings repeated their discourses and imitated their actions. Older siblings adopted the role of learner as they practiced what they already knew. Through their play, the children practiced the literacy strategies and skills that they were learning in school.

Research has also demonstrated how symbolic tools mediate children’s learning. For example, Henning and Kirova (2012) described a young Sudanese girl’s spontaneous engagement with a cultural object (a pestle and mortar) placed within an early learning program. The girl sang in English as she engaged with the object in order to enact the identity of a Sudanese woman preparing grain for baking. Ruby (2012) described a young child’s structured engagement with a cultural object placed within the home. Verbal scaffolding supplied by her grandmother in both English and Urdu, assisted the young girl in successfully locating and assembling the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Following the activity, the grandmother further mediated her granddaughter’s understanding by connecting the images of animals from the jigsaw puzzle to their recent trip to Bangladesh.

Gregory, Choudhury, Ilankuberan, Kwapong, and Woodham (2013) referred to this blending of cultural, language, and literacy forms and the recreation of these cultural practices during shared reading activities in multilingual communities as “syncretic literacies” (p. 32). The term has also been used to describe the literacy learning experience of a young bilingual boy whose parents come from two different cultures – Latino and North American (Souto-Manning & Dice, 2009) and the literacy events of three young Puerto Rican boys (Volk & de Acosta, 2003). In the latter study, the parents drew from school texts and contexts as well as from family-
and culture-related texts and contexts (i.e., church) to construct literacy events to support their children’s learning at home.

Sociocultural research in the homes of linguistically, culturally, and economically diverse families has also found that some parents understand the role of play in the development of their young children’s early literacy skills. For example, when asked by researchers, parents have identified child-initiated activities such as playing with words while skipping rope (Gillanders & Jiménez, 2004), playing on the computer keyboard or playing Nintendo games (Volk & de Acosta, 2001). Additionally, researchers have observed imaginary play with siblings (McTavish, 2007) and nannies (Mui & Anderson, 2008) as means through which children make meaning. In contrast, based on their interviews with 60 parents of elementary-aged students representing multiple cultural and linguistic groups, Anderson and Gunderson (1997) found that many immigrant parents believed that children learn through their acquisition of facts through rote memorization. Additionally, some of the Asian parents they interviewed felt the western approach to learning actually infringed on their child’s right to learn.

In addition to these structured activities, based on research documenting children’s solitary or joint engagement in self-initiated, book-related, dramatic play, sociocultural researchers have come to understand play as a child’s mode of inquiry. For example, in her study of child-initiated uses of book-related dramatic play in two settings, the home and the pre-school, Rowe (1998) established that, through dramatic play, children were able to “reconsider book meanings from the perspectives offered by new sign systems” (p. 30). Similarly, based on her analysis of a young girl’s play narrative in the home, Kendrick (2005) concluded that play was used as “the mode of inquiry and autobiographical expression for her to bring her imagined future life into view” (p. 22).
Lastly, although ethnographic and sociolinguistic studies have documented families engaging in a range of literacy activities with their young children, a prevailing view in the field of family literacy is that adults, primarily mothers, transmit literacy to their children through the shared reading of books (Anderson et al., 2007; Kendrick et al., 2005). The parents in Hirst’s (1998) study in the homes of bilingual families of Asian origin reported that the children shared books with family members or looked at books on their own and pretended to read them. During these book-sharing sessions, the parents reported that children would ask questions, label images and repeat the labels parents supplied to them. They would also engage in non-verbal behaviour such as pointing. It is interesting that, by relying on the parents’ oral reporting of their children’s behaviour, the authors were not able to provide specific information regarding to which aspects of the book, the images or the text, the adults or children pointed. However, they did report that family members engaged in events alongside the children would ask the child questions or make comments in both their home language, Urdu, and in English.

Hammer (2005) identified four book-reading styles in which parents engage during shared-reading events with their young children. Drawing from audio transcripts of book reading events between 10 African American and 10 Hispanic mother-child dyads (the average age of the children was 53 months) attending an urban Head Start program in the eastern United States, Hammer found that about half of the mothers in both cultural groups engaged in a reading style that most closely resembled that of mothers from mainstream culture. She called this a “combinational style” (p. 219) in which the mothers read the text of the book to the children, stopping periodically to comment on the book or to ask the child a question. As for the remaining dyads, Hammer found that more Hispanic mothers than African American mothers engaged in a child-centred style in which the children contributed more to the conversation (e.g., labeling
images, making comments) during the book-sharing event than did the mother, while half of the African American mothers engaged in a text-reading style in which they produced a larger proportion of the utterances during the event than did their children. Only one mother-child dyad engaged in the labeling style. The mother in this dyad was a single mother from a Spanish-speaking community. She had a high-school diploma and worked outside the home. During the book-reading event, she spoke to her child in a combination of Spanish and English. The child responded to her prompts primarily in English, but used Spanish labels on occasion. Hammer (2005) determined that, in this mother-child dyad, book reading resembled more of a vocabulary lesson for the child. Because of variations between cultures in terms of interactional styles during literacy activities and in the uses and meaning of literacy events, Hammer suggested program providers understand the parents’ beliefs prior to developing literacy intervention programs.

**Family Literacy Programs**

Although evaluating the impact of family literacy programs is difficult (Purcell-Gates, 2000), empirical research has shown the positive impact family literacy programs have on participating children. Using various methodological approaches, researchers have concluded that, through their participation in programs or initiatives, young children experience immediate growth in both literacy and language performance levels (Anderson, Friedrich, & Kim, 2011; Anderson, Purcell-Gates, Jang, & Gagné, 2010; Brooks, Pahl, Pollard, & Rees, 2008; Cairney & Munsie, 1995; Hirst, Hannon, & Nutbrown, 2010; Morrow & Young, 1997; Phillips, Hayden, & Norris, 2006).

Jordan, Snow, and Porche (2000) reported on their evaluation of Project EASE, an intervention program designed to model “effective” parental language interactions. In this program, parents were coached in “effective” language use and then encouraged to use these
language patterns during structured parent-child activities. Children were tested on various measures of language and emergent literacy both pre- and post-intervention. Although the children who took part in the intervention made statistically significant gains in language skills (i.e., language, sound, and print) than the control group, the authors’ described the effect size on gains in the Language composite as moderate (.64) and those on Sound (.32) and Print (.07) as small (Jordan et al., p. 532).

Very few studies have documented the long-term effects on children’s academic experience as a result of their own or their family’s participation in a family literacy program. Paratore, Krol-Sinclair, David, and Schick (2011) documented the effects of participation in a family literacy program on the academic experiences through to high school graduation of children in participating families. The program targeted new immigrant families by offering the parents and children the opportunity to read, write about, and discuss books in English. The researchers analyzed data from 298 children who participated in the program between 1996 and 1999. Drawing primarily on anecdotal data from report card grades, state assessment scores, special services placements, and post-secondary education enrollment, they found positive indications of the long-term effects of participation in the program on the children’s academic experiences as compared to that of the general school population. For example, the authors reported the mean GPA of participants consistently exceeded that of the general school population, higher assessment results in both English Language Arts and Math at Grades 4, 8, and 10, and a higher high school completion rate (80%) for program participants than for the general school population (p. 273).

In contrast, St. Clair, Jackson, and Zweiback (2012) investigated the long-term impact on young Spanish-speaking elementary children, whose families had participated in a family
involvement component of a Migrant Education Even Start (MEES) family literacy program. As parents of children enrolled in MEES, parents were invited to attend a series of training sessions held throughout the school year. During the training sessions, facilitators modeled how parents might use various materials (e.g., Play Station, Leap Pad, Leap Desks, books) in support of their child’s early literacy development. Parents were encouraged to sign out the materials and use them with their child in their own home. St. Clair et al. (2012) found that, at the end of kindergarten, although children in the intervention group scored higher than children in the control group on measures of English language skills, the difference was not significant. However, six years later, they found that the scores of children within the original intervention group on state reading assessments, although lower than the state average, were significantly higher than the control group and fell into the “meets standards” category (p. 15).

Research has also determined that participation in family literacy programs influences how children perceive literacy as taking place within their own homes. For example, Nutbrown and Hannon’s (2003) evaluation of a family literacy program came from the children themselves. During a structured interview, children were asked about the family literacy activities that they observed taking place within their home. The children identified activities and indicated that these activities involved all family members, including fathers and brothers. Nutbrown and Hannon concluded that the family literacy program had a positive impact on the family literacy practices as perceived by the children.

Furthermore, research reveals that parents, in general, value family literacy programs and indicate that they benefit personally from their participation in them. Parents reported that, through their participation in the program, they have developed a greater understanding of both their children’s early learning and their role in supporting this learning (Anderson et al., in press;
Anderson et al., 2011; Anderson & Morrison, 2007; Fleer & Raban, 2007). For example, Anderson and Morrison (2007) asked parents and caregivers participating in a 1-year family literacy program that assisted parents and caregivers in supporting the early language and literacy development of their children to write down their thoughts of the program. Parents and caregivers indicated that they valued the learning that took place in the program and that they believed their own understanding of their children’s learning and how to support it was greatly enhanced.

Parents also reported that, as a result of their participation in the family literacy program, they have increased the quality and frequency of interactions with their children. For example, they have developed new strategies for talking to their children about reading and writing (Cairney & Munsie, 1995) and have altered the choice and frequency of activities in which they engage with their children (Hannon, Morgan, & Nutbrown, 2006; Jay & Rohl, 2005; Singh et al., 2013). Parents who participated in bilingual family literacy programs believed that they were better able to provide literacy opportunities, recognize their children’s achievements, interact with their children, and provide models of literacy as a result of their participation (Hirst, Hannon, & Nutbrown, 2010; Singh et al., 2015). Parents also reported personal growth in terms of their own language and literacy skills, English language proficiency and self-confidence (Anderson et al., 2011; Shanahan, Mulhern, & Rodriguez-Brown, 1995). It is the expectation of learning that motivates parents to participate in programs (Swain et al., 2014). Parents reported that, through their direct participation, they learned how to support their own children’s learning (Swain et al., 2014; Doyle & Zhang, 2011). Parents also understood the direct educational and social experiences family literacy programs afforded their children (Doyle & Zhang, 2011).
However, not all family literacy programs have been found to have a positive impact on the participants. For example, St. Pierre, Ricciuti, and Rimdzius (2005) evaluated 18 Even Start programs for a period of two years. The researchers measured various literacy outcomes of children and parents and the impact of the program on parent-child interactions at three time points between 1999 and 2002. They found no statistically significant differences or impacts on the participating families as compared to families in a control group. They speculated that this lack of impact on the individual skills of parents and children might be due in part to the lack of full participation by the participants.

When educators work with economically, linguistically, and culturally diverse families, a lack of participation may be due to an inappropriate curriculum. Tett and Crowther (1998) argued that family literacy programs marginalize the cultures of working-class communities. In so doing, they fail to recognize how literacy is practiced within these communities and create curriculum that reflects the values and beliefs of the mainstream culture. For example, the participation rate of the Spanish-speaking families in the Janes and Kermani (2001) study declined when the caregivers were asked to read stories in a manner that they considered to be culturally inappropriate. Similarly, Reyes and Torres (2007) found that the immigrant Latino families who were participating in a relative-care family literacy program refused the training. Through repeated dialogues with the participants, the facilitators found that this refusal reflected the fact that the curriculum was based on a business practice model and did not reflect the participants’ culture, a culture in which familial values were highly regarded.

Family literacy educators have responded to critics who characterize family literacy programs as reflecting the practices and values of white, middle-class families by creating family literacy programs that respect and value the knowledge and practices of the participating
families. For example, Tett and Crowther (1998) demonstrated how a group of economically disadvantaged parents in Scotland became empowered through their participation in a family literacy program. The program’s curriculum was built from parent input. Parents took pictures of texts they encountered on a daily basis and then, working as a group, critically assessed these texts in terms of audience and message. In addition, the parents were encouraged to reflect on their own school experiences in order to problematize their “internalized understandings of failure” (p. 453). As a result of their participation in the program, parents gained confidence in their ability to take a more active role in their children’s education.

Additionally, recent research demonstrated how family literacy programs have attempted to reflect the sociocultural realities of immigrant and refugee families. Through the use of authentic texts (Anderson et al., 2010; Paratore et al., 2011) and bilingual books (Hirst et al., 2010; Hope, 2011), the provision of instruction in the first language of the participants (Iddings, 2009; Zhang et al., 2010), and the incorporation of cultural practices into the curriculum (Iddings, 2009; Hirst et al., 2010), researchers found these programs to have positively impacted children’s language and literacy skills and the parents’ ability to support the development of such skills within the home.

**Research with Resettled Karen Refugees**

The resettlement of Karen refugees from refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border to various western countries began in 2005. Research documenting issues associated with their resettlement is beginning to appear in the literature. For example, Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny (2011) documented the migration and resettlement process of a group of Karen refugees in the United States in order to assess the ability of the resettlement process in meeting the needs of the resettled families and to highlight key features of resettlement, that being the post-resettlement
secondary migration of the people along pre-existing ethnic and kinship networks and the role of unofficial organizations, such as churches, in the resettlement of families in host communities.

Yarris, Stassium, Musigdilok, and Win (2015) problematized the use of the category “refugee” as it was applied to the Karen community in San Diego, California. They distinguished between the lived experiences of the older (45 years and older) members of the community and that of the younger (35 years and younger) members. The authors stated that the United Nations defines refugees based on their “personal experiences of political violence” (p. 119). Drawing from the experiences of older and younger members of the Karen community shared through interviews, the authors agreed that this definition applied to the older generation of Karen. However, for members of the younger generation, the decision to leave Burma for the camps in Thailand was largely influenced by the parent’s desire to provide their children with an education in the Karen language. Similarly, the younger generation’s decision to seek resettlement in a host country reflected their desire to pursue educational opportunities in the hope of securing economic self-sufficiency. Since the impetus for resettlement was driven by educational and economic factors rather than by experiences of political violence, the authors suggested that the younger generation of Karen in the United States could be understood as “economic migrants” rather than refugees.

This distinction between older and younger members of the Karen community was also evident in Harkins’ (2012) case study of the integration stage of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. This program oversaw the resettlement of Karen refugees in the United States. Through interviews and focus groups with members of the Karen refugee community in St. Paul, Minnesota, Harkins assessed the impact of the program on the integration of the refugees into the community. He found that the rate of an individual’s integration into the community was largely
determined by his or her educational level, language ability, and vocational skills. In general, integration into the community by older members was slower due to their apparent struggle “with acceptance of American culture, speaking English, and the psychological transition to embracing the US as their home” (Harkins, 2012, p. 194).

With the exception of the above studies, much of the research with resettled Karen refugees is situated within the field of health and focuses on how language and culture act as barriers that prevent individuals from accessing health services within the host community (e.g., Niner et al., 2013; Riggs et al., 2012; Ussher et al., 2012). The exception to this is a study by Oleson et al. (2012). Instead of looking at language and culture as barriers, they argued that the health needs of the Karen people would be better met through the integration of cultural and spiritual practices within the western medical system. The researchers conducted focus groups (Elders, women, and mixed age/gender) and key-informant interviews (traditional healer, community health worker) to determine the beliefs and attitudes of the Karen people towards the use of traditional medicine and if and how traditional medicine was being used following resettlement in the United States. The results indicated that the Karen understood good health to be “a balance between physical, mental and spiritual health” (p. 46). Due in part to their lack of access to doctors and other health care providers in the host community and in part to the high costs of healthcare, many Karen refugees turned to traditional cultural and spiritual practices, such as consulting traditional healers within the community for medical advice and accessing traditional medicines, such as leaves, roots, and herbs, for treatment. Oleson et al. (2012) argued that these culturally based practices should be viewed as complementing Western practices, thus allowing the Karen people access to quality health care in the host community. Although Oleson
et al.’s study is not directly related to literacy, it is important to understand how research in other fields addresses the issue of cultural and linguistic diversity.

Sociocultural research into the literacy practices of the Karen people is slowly beginning to appear in the literature. In an ethnographic case study, Quadros and Sarroub (2016) investigated the literacy practices of three Karen women living in the US mid-west who attended an English as a Second Language family literacy program within the elementary school in which their young children were enrolled. Their findings suggested that the current literacy practices of the Karen women, both in the program and in the home, reflected their historical practices within schools in both the refugee camps and villages. Specifically, the women learned vocabulary through memorization, recited written text to improve their pronunciation, and looked to the community for support with adapting to the new school system.

Recent research with Karen teens has documented how digital literacy tools in the home and community help teens overcome feelings of isolation in their new community (Gilhooly & Lee, 2014; Omerbašić, 2015). Through digital literacy practices such as chatting and sharing photos and music on social media sites (e.g., Facebook), accessing music videos on YouTube, creating digital texts, photos, videos, and music and sharing them on the web, resettled Karen teens uphold their relationships with friends and family, establish new relationships with other resettled Karen teens, connect to their language and culture, and preserve their Karen identity.

Research with the youngest members of the community is situated within studies of bilingual family literacy programs. The primary focus of this research is to document and describe the pedagogical practices within the program that support the understanding of the Karen parents taking part in the program. For example, Friedrich, Anderson, and Morrison (2014) drew from observations of the activity they observed taking place during the parent-only
segment of the bilingual family literacy program, Parents as Literacy Supporters in Immigrant
and Refugee Communities, and triangulated the observations with information obtained during
parent focus groups and debriefing sessions. They concluded that the co-facilitators supported
the parents’ understanding of the key concepts presented during this segment by using culturally
appropriate pedagogical tools such as relevant content (e.g., nursery rhymes and songs), the use
of the first language (Karen) and English, and culturally appropriate instruction (e.g., parents
working together in small groups and in some contexts, more direct explanation of concepts).

Singh et al. (2015) reported on an intergenerational family literacy program for resettled
Karen families. Although the purpose of the study was to understand the literacy practices of the
participating families, a secondary purpose was to understand the pedagogical practices of the
program and how parents participated in these practices. Data were drawn from observations of
and interviews with parents and staff. In terms of the literacy practices of the participating
families, the authors concluded that there was a contrast between the language and literacy
practices at home and those at the program. In the home, parents described practices rooted in
oral and cultural traditions. This included oral retellings of Bible stories and songs as well as
telling children stories and singing songs from Burma. Although the parents reported that they
introduced their children to early childhood concepts such as colours and body parts, they were
not familiar with the practice of discussing such concepts during shared book reading events
outside of school. In terms of the pedagogical practices within the program, Singh et al. found
that both facilitators and parents served as language brokers for the other. Although simultaneous
direct translation was provided during the program, the facilitator assisted the parents’
understanding through the use of non-verbal communication. The parents assisted the
facilitator’s understanding of the Karen language by providing her with the Karen term for specific English words used frequently in the program.

In sum, in this section, I highlighted key findings in three strands of empirical research related to my study of literacy as it is enacted within a community of resettled Karen refugee families participating in a bilingual family literacy program. In addition to the theoretical constructs I described above, the following principles from within the literacy research with culturally, economically, and linguistically diverse families in non-school contexts, also shaped my research questions, guided my data collection, and informed my understanding of the data: (a) Children develop an understanding about print before they enter school, (b) the type of early literacy support that parents provide to their children is molded by their own cultural histories, school experiences, and understandings of learning to read, (c) literacy practices within the home and community shape children’s early literacy experiences, (d) family literacy programs can and some do reflect the sociocultural realities of immigrant and refugee families, (e) many parents value family literacy programs for the learning opportunities that arise from their families’ participation in the program, and (f) through their participation in programs or initiatives, young children can experience immediate growth in both literacy and language. Furthermore, based on my review of research within communities of resettled Karen populations I conclude that there is a dearth of research into the literacy of young Karen children, specifically those Karen children who were born in the host community.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the conceptual framework guiding this study. Specifically, I described constructs from Activity Theory (Engeström, 1987, 2001; Guetiérrez et al., 1999), the New Literacy Studies (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Purcell-Gates, 2007; Street, 1984), and
Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), assertions from literacy research with culturally, economically, and linguistically diverse families in non-school contexts, and findings from the research on the literacy learning of young Karen children, that shaped my research questions, guided my data collection and informed my analysis of the data. In the next chapter, I describe the research methodology used in this study.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the research methodology of my study. I begin by presenting the rationale for selecting qualitative methods in the research design. Following, I discuss data gathering and data analysis methods. Finally, I describe my role in the research and discuss issues of trustworthiness and authenticity. I conclude this chapter with a brief summary.

The Research Design

I chose to carry out an ethnographic case study with boundaries of the case (Yin, 2009) drawn around the community of resettled Karen refugees living within an urban area in western Canada to investigate the phenomenon of if and how families with young children take up the literacy practices of the bilingual family literacy program, Parents as Literacy Supporters (PALS) in Immigrant and Refugee Communities in the home and if and how they bring cultural practices from the home and community into the program. To help me “see a local configuration [of activity] in some depth” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 29), I carried out within-case sampling. That is, my study of parents and their children was nested within the family (home), within PALS, within the community. My choice of families, informants, events, and interactions were theoretically driven. My sampling was investigative in that, as the study progressed, I added participants and expanded the research context to include other early learning settings to help me clarify patterns and see contrasts in my data.

Research data for this study were drawn from interviews with three mothers and two cultural support workers from within the community of resettled Karen refugees, from observations of activity within and the homes, PALS, and community, from expert interviews
with individuals from various community agencies, from the literature, and from secondary sources.

Rationale for Research Design

As stated in Chapter 1, the following questions framed the data collection and analysis of this study:

1. What were the historical literacy practices of the Karen families?
2. What are the current literacy practices of the Karen families?
3. Do families “take up” the literacy practices introduced to them through their participation in the bilingual family literacy program, Parents as Literacy Supporters in Immigrant and Refugee Communities?
   - Are these practices transformed in the cultural context of the home and community? If so, how are they transformed?
4. Do the families bring literacy practices from the home to the program?
   - Are these practices transformed in the cultural context of the family literacy program, and if so, how are they transformed?

The nature of the research questions required a research methodology suited to developing a detailed understanding of the issue. Creswell (2007) stated that this level of understanding “can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes, and allowing them to tell their stories” (p. 40). In other words, this level of understanding can best be achieved through a qualitative research design. He identified two research designs, ethnographic research and case study research, within the qualitative tradition and argued that the difference between them is in their intent. Whereas case study research seeks “to understand an issue using the case as a specific illustration” (p. 73), ethnographic research aims to determine how the
culture works. To understand the phenomenon of how literacy is culturally enacted within the bilingual family literacy program and in the homes of the participating Karen families, I chose to carry out a case study using ethnographic methods.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, I was interested in understanding how literacy was practiced in the homes of Karen families with pre-school aged children and in the bilingual family literacy program in which they participated. Since literacy practices are unobservable (Barton & Hamilton, 2000), my focus in the study was the literacy activity of the parents and their children within the contexts of the family home and the bilingual family literacy program, PALS. As I described in Chapter 2, I understand activity mediated by text as a literacy event with the subjects being the participants in the individual literacy events, the object being transformed during the event as situated practice (Gutiérrez & Stone, 2000), and the structured context within which literacy is used, the social activity domain (Purcell-Gates et al., 2011).

The case is understood as the unit of analysis through which a particular phenomenon is studied (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) stated, “[each] case study and unit of analysis either should be similar to those previously studied by others or should innovate in clear, operationally defined ways” (p. 33). Much of the research reviewed in the previous chapter used an individual or multiple-case study design in which each child and/or family represented a single case. Fewer studies employed a single case design in which the case was comprised of a community of individuals. For example, Purcell-Gates (2013) presented her research as “an ethnographic case study with boundaries drawn around the community of migrant worker families with young children enrolled in a Migrant Head Start (MHS) program in the northern Midwest of the United States” (p. 73). From this community, Purcell-Gates identified four informants with whom to conduct her interviews and carry out her
observations within the home. Similarly, two of the studies involving resettled Karen refugees also employed a single case study design. In the study by Harkins (2012), the Karen community in St. Paul, MN was identified as the case, while Gilhooly and Lee (2014) set the family as the case.

In this study, the case is the community of resettled Karen refugees living in Lacey City and the unit of analysis, the community as an activity system. To reiterate, I understand activity (literacy events) as the three-way interaction between subject (participants), object (situated practice), and context (social activity domain). Furthermore, I understand rules, in the form of values, beliefs, and attitudes, as shaping activity within each domain by defining the participant structure within individual literacy events and making available to the subjects meditational means in the form of signs (e.g., language) and tools (e.g., texts).

Selection of Contexts and Participants

Selection of the Family Literacy Program

The selection of PALS in Immigrant and Refugee Communities as the family literacy program for this ethnographic case study fit the requirements of a sample of convenience. Many of the refugee families within this community had participated or were participating in the program. As I described earlier, PALS is a family literacy program that helps immigrant and refugee parents and caregivers support the early literacy and language development of their children. The bilingual program is offered in both the first language of the families, Karen, as well as in English and is co-facilitated by an English-speaking teacher, Joanne, and a Karen-speaking community cultural worker, Zeyar. The bilingual format of the program allows parents and children to meaningfully engage in activities throughout the session in the language of their choice. For example, in Lacey City, Zeyar regularly translated Joanne’s questions and comments...
orally during the “Parent-only” segments in order to support the parents’ understanding of the key ideas and to facilitate the exchange of ideas between them (the parents) and Joanne. Furthermore, prior to each session, in order to assist the parents in reading with their children in the home, Zeyar wrote the Karen translation of the text in each of the picture books given to the families as part of their take home package. Finally, both co-facilitators encouraged the families to engage in the language of their choice as they participated in formal activities within each of the activity stations. This resulted in the parents speaking to their children in Karen with the children responding in English or the children engaging with other children or adults in English. In addition, the content of bilingual family literacy programs needs to include the cultural knowledge of families and encourage parents and caregivers to use the strategies of supporting children's learning and development that they are familiar with.

Selection of site. PALS in Immigrant and Refugee Communities operates in various communities throughout the Lower Mainland area; however, only five sites representing four cultural groups were selected for inclusion in an initial research study that involved assessing the children’s growth in literacy development over the course of the program (see Anderson et al., 2011). The Karen families participated in one of the sites included in the research study. This site was selected for inclusion in this study because: (a) The families were a part of a resettled refugee population, (b) some of the parents were unschooled, (c) other parents were schooled in refugee camps, and (d) there was an established rapport between the community cultural worker and myself and between the families and myself.

Selection of Participants

The families. The sampling strategy I used in this study meets the criteria of a convenience sample in that I had access to this community. Participants were drawn from the
refugee community in Lacey City. All Karen families with pre-school aged children who attended the bilingual family literacy program (PALS) and who had a demonstrated capacity with the English language were considered for inclusion in this study as participants. Families excluded from consideration included: all families who are not members of the Karen-refugee community; Karen families without pre-school aged children; Karen families with pre-school aged children, but who do not intend to participate in the family literacy program; and those families who had no capacity with the English language. The latter was included as an exclusion factor because I have no command of the Karen language.

Since the literature suggests a child’s early literacy and language development is not shaped exclusively by parent-child interactions (e.g., Gregory, 2001), I chose participants that allowed me to see what Miles and Huberman (1994) described as “different instances” of literacy learning (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 29). Although each of the families were members of the Karen community, each differed in terms of composition as follows: one family in which the middle child would be attending the family literacy program, one family in which the child attending the program was not the oldest sibling, and one family that included extended family members. This assisted me in detailing the many specifics that gave the context its unique flavor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In her role as research assistant, Zeyar nominated three families as participants in the study using the inclusion criteria outlined above.

Following ethics approval for the study in January 2013, I presented Zeyar with a letter of introduction. At this time, I reviewed the inclusion criteria presented above. Zeyar contacted families she believed fit the inclusion criteria and gave them a letter of introduction translated into Karen. If the family agreed to participate in the study, Zeyar then presented them with the consent forms written in their first language. She drew their attention to the fact that they had the
right to withdraw at any time from the study and that their anonymity would be maintained throughout all phases of the study through the use of pseudonyms for both the setting as well as the individual participants. Participants completed the consent/assent forms. A sample of the consent/assent letters (written in English) are included in Appendix A. Additionally, at the conclusion of the study, each focal family received a $100.00 gift certificate from a local business as a gesture of appreciation for their willingness to participate.

**Cultural workers.** In keeping with a within-case sampling method (Miles & Huberman, 1994), over the course of the study, it became apparent that cultural workers played a role in literacy events within the community of Karen refugees. Perry (2009) described how the Sudanese families in her study would seek out members of the host community to assist them with English texts and activities involving these texts, such as registering their children in school. During my observations within the community, I noticed the cultural workers in the school assisting members of the Karen community with similar tasks. In March 2014, I asked for and received approval from the Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) to invite these two workers to participate in the study by consenting to take part in a single semi-structured interview and allowing me to observe them as they engaged with individuals from the community. Zeyar was a member of the Karen refugee community. She arrived in Canada in the fall of 2006. She spoke both Karen and English. During the study, she was employed as a multicultural worker with the local school district. Additionally, she co-facilitated the PALS program and served as my research assistant during this study. Susan was a member of the larger, English-speaking community. She was born and raised in the area. Previously, she worked as an outreach worker for a local social service agency. Although her primary language was English, because of her work within the Karen community, she developed a working
knowledge of Karen. At the time of the study, she had been recently hired as a Settlement Worker by the local school district. In that capacity, she worked with school and community personnel to provide the Karen families with school-based settlement services to facilitate their engagement in both the school and community. A sample of the consent letter is included in Appendix B. Additionally, at the conclusion of the semi-structured interview, each received a $15 gift certificate from a local business as a gesture of appreciation for their willingness to participate in the interview.

Table 3.1 provides a description of the participants in this study:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Country of Birth</th>
<th>Home Language</th>
<th>Highest Level of Education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hser Paw (mother)</td>
<td>31-55</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Burma</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Post-10</td>
<td>Thailand: medic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire (daughter)</td>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Canada: student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paw Paw (mother)</td>
<td>31-55</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Burma</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Adult language class in camp</td>
<td>Stay at home mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam (son)</td>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabelle (mother)</td>
<td>19-30</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Burma</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Grade 11</td>
<td>Front of store worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma (daughter)</td>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeyer</td>
<td>31-55</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Burma</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Post-10</td>
<td>Multicultural Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>31-55</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Post secondary</td>
<td>Settlement Worker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection and Analysis

I used qualitative research procedures grounded in the ethnographic tradition of Hymes (1964), Heath (1983) and Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988). My aim was to develop a
description of how literacy was enacted within the community of resettled Karen refugees to document how these practices evolved (or remained static) over the course of their participation in a bilingual family literacy program within their community. Data collection included participant observation and expert interviews in the community, semi-structured and informal interviews with two community cultural workers and the mothers from the three focal families, and participant observations and photographs of the participants’ (both children and mothers) engagement in shared activities around literacy (i.e., literacy events) in the home, community, and in the family literacy program. Due to my inability to speak or understand Karen, I relied on Zeyar to provide translation. However, she was not always available to provide translation nor was it always practical or appropriate. For these reasons, I chose to rely on observation as my primary method of data collection. Data collection took place over a period of 15 months. A summary of the data collection methods and how they relate to the research questions is presented in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2. Data Collection Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Focus of Data Collection</th>
<th>Data Collection Method and Frequency</th>
<th>Details (Type of information obtained from source)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What were the historical literacy practices of the Karen families?</td>
<td>Literacy events</td>
<td>• Semi-structured interviews with focal parents: 1 1-hour interview</td>
<td><strong>Semi-structured interviews</strong>: type of text, purposes of reading or writing, the social context in which the activity took place, who else was involved in the activity, and the importance of the activity <strong>Secondary sources</strong>: physical context, historical practices within village and refugee camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Secondary sources (e.g., books, journal articles)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the following section, I expand on the information presented in Table 3.2. I begin by defining the research process.
Defining the Research Process

My analysis of the data drew from Lincoln and Guba (1985), Miles and Huberman (1994), and Le Compte and Schensul (1999). Data analysis began on the first day and continued throughout the study as I looked for recurring themes and emerging patterns in the activity of the Karen families. My interpretation of the data was informed in part by insights developed through prolonged engagement in the community, persistent observation of and conversations with the participants, by constructs identified in the literature, and from secondary sources.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that a study be carried out in three phases. The focus of the first phase is on preliminary data collection and analysis. In this phase, the researcher gathers enough information in order to determine what is salient. From these data, the researcher creates categories and codes individual incidents from the data into the appropriate category. Early on in the process, the researcher relies mainly on tacit judgments to determine an individual incident’s inclusion in a category. In the second phase of the study, the researcher builds on what was discovered during the first phase by carrying out a focused exploration of the salient issue(s). This involves further data collection and analysis. In this round of analysis, the initial categories become integrated as the researcher compares incidents to categories and refines his or her rules of inclusion. During the final phase, the researcher confirms the findings with the participants in the study to ensure that the intended meanings of the participants have been portrayed fairly and accurately and carries out the final analysis of the data. It is in this final analysis that the researcher states the theory that emerges from this comparative process.

Miles and Huberman (1994) defined data analysis as three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During the data reduction stage, the researcher sharpens, sorts, selects and discards data so that conclusions can be drawn
and verified. This process begins prior to the collection of data as the researcher chooses his or her conceptual frames, research questions, and approaches to data collection. The process continues through the data collection stage as the researcher writes summaries, codes field notes, and teases out themes. In the data display stage, the researcher organizes the data into a form of display that will assist in drawing conclusions and planning for the next steps of the inquiry. The final stage, conclusion drawing and verification, occurs throughout the data collection process as the researcher interprets the collected data and notes regularities and patterns. Verification may consist of a simple re-check of field notes or may involve a lengthier review by colleagues. Any meanings to emerge from the analysis must stand up to checks for validity.

Le Compte and Schensul (1999) described qualitative research as a two-step process. The first step involves the analysis of the data. In this step, the researcher turns large amounts of raw data into smaller portions that will facilitate the description of what happened in the study. They understood analysis to be a recursive process, involving three sets of procedures which include making notes in the field, tidying up after fieldwork, and managing the data and producing results. The second step of the process involves the researcher interpreting the data. This step is achieved as the researcher attaches meaning and significance to the patterns identified during the analysis of the data.

In the following sections, I describe how I collected and analyzed the data in each of the three phases of the research process.

**Phase 1: Data Collection and “In the Field” Analysis**

Phase 1, or “In the Field Analysis”, took place between April and September 2013. During this phase, I completed a minimum of two in-home observations within the homes of each of the focal families, three observations within the family literacy program, and multiple
observations within the community. I also carried out semi-structured interviews with each of the three focal mothers and expert interviews with three individuals who had worked with the Karen families.

**Observations.** The protocol I observed for data collection during participant observations within the home and community in all phases of the study was as follows: (a) I entered each location with my notebook and smart phone stored in my shoulder bag, (b) I chose or was directed to a location in which I could observe the activities taking place (in public settings, this location changed in response to the natural flow of activity), and (c) I engaged in activity with others only when invited or directed to do so by the initiator of the activity. Additionally, during participant observations within the PALS program, I assisted the co-facilitators with the distribution of food and materials, participated in large-group events (e.g., singing a song), and responded to the children’s and parents’ questions or requests for assistance.

Data collection within the homes, community, and family literacy program began in April 2013. Since PALS did not operate during the summer, I did not carry out any home visits over the summer months. Home visits resumed in the fall of 2013. My observations within the homes and family literacy program during this phase of data collection allowed me to develop a system for taking field notes and for the families to move past the *performing* phase. For example, in the reflective notes I made following an early visit to the family literacy program, I had remarked how one of the focal mothers had watched me as I took extensive notes of her interactions with her son. Thus, rather than writing notes directly in a notebook during my observations of parent-child interactions in the various settings, I engaged in the process of *inscription* (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). This involved me repeatedly reviewing in my mind the sequence of events I was witnessing. If the opportunity permitted, I jotted down key words or phrases in my notebook.
or took photographs. I created descriptions (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) of the activity I observed taking place by recounting the visit as a voice memo on my smartphone or wrote notes to outline the visit in a small notebook immediately after leaving the home, but prior to leaving the area. In addition to creating descriptions of the observed activity, I included information from ethnographic conversations with the mothers, Zeyar, and Susan, and my reflections on my relationship with the participants and my reaction to things that were said during the visit, on the meaning of the forms of arrangement and engagement I had observed, on my thoughts regarding the quality of the data I had collected, and on how those data connected to data I had collected previously. I also recorded suggestions as to what I might do differently during the next visit. I then transcribed the notes onto my home computer immediately following my return.

In general, I began each field note with a brief description of the context in which I was observing. I noted the types of texts within the area, who was present during the observation, and what they were doing. However, the bulk of the note was devoted to creating descriptions of individual literacy events as I observed them taking place over the course of my visit. I turned to constructs in the literature to guide my observations. Drawing from Barton and Hamilton’s (2000) definition of literacy events as “activities in which literacy plays a role and usually involves texts” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 8), I made notes of all activities involving texts. To describe the roles of the participants in the activity, I drew from Rogoff’s (1990) model of guided participation and made notes of the “routine arrangements and engagements that guide children’s increasing skilled and appropriate participation in the daily activities valued in their culture” (Rogoff, 1990, p. 191). As such, for each literacy event I observed, I attempted to make

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5 Because of the nature of my research questions, I requested and received approval from BREB for the observation of activity only. I did not request approval to make voice recordings of the individual literacy events.
reference to who was involved, how they were participating, the physical location, the language or languages spoken by the participants, the type of text, and the language of that text.

Originally, I had intended to carry out observations within the home so as to observe a composite day. However, observing the families in their homes at different times of the day was not possible. At the outset of the study, Zeyar told me that the Karen people are private people. Zeyar chose to respect their privacy by scheduling our visits during times of the day in which visiting between families normally took place (e.g., mid-morning and all afternoon, weekdays only). In addition, the focal children attended various structured programs during the day, meaning that they were not present in the home at all times of the day. Fortunately, I was able to observe the focal families on those weekends in which there was a special event or while they were attending the Karen church.

Between April and September 2013, I spent time observing literacy activity in a variety of community contexts. These contexts included: (a) A Karen wedding, (b) a cane-ball tournament sponsored by a local service provider, and (c) a traditional wrist-tying ceremony, and (d) the community cultural workers’ office located within the elementary school. The purpose of these observations was to observe literacy as it was enacted within various social activity domains and to document the arrangement of and individual engagement in these literacy events. I only attended events to which I was formally invited. For those events in which English was the primary language, I did not require translation. For those events in which Karen was the primary language, to support my understanding of the activity I was observing, I asked Zeyar to translate what was being said. In September, I shadowed Zeyar in her office as she assisted the families with school and after-school registration.
Additionally, during this phase of data collection, I spent time *casing the joint* (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). I made a series of informal visits to the community during the summer of 2013. During these visits, I took pictures of print in the commercial centre of the city. I also created an inventory of the retail and service establishments within this same area, including such literacy resources as a bookstore, toy store, and library. I jotted down the names and locations of the establishments directly in a small notebook. In addition, I created a sketch of the layout of the central core. In late July, Zeyar accompanied me on one of these walks through the community and identified those establishments the Karen families tended to frequent. I noted these directly on my map.

**Interviews.** To understand the role of literacy in the daily lives of members of the Karen community and to ascertain the types of early literacy experiences which the children either observed or participated in, I carried out a semi-structured interview with each of the three focal mothers within the first three months of data collection. A sample of the interview protocol is found in Appendix C. The general procedure for conducting the semi-structured interviews with the focal mothers was as follows: (a) I asked the questions in English and Zeyar translated them orally into Karen, (b) the parents responded either in English or Karen (note: If they responded in Karen, Zeyar translated their response into English.), (c) the entire discussion was audiotaped and transcribed in English, (d) an English summary of the transcription was produced from the transcription, (e) as a form of member check, Zeyar and I discussed the summary with each mother with Zeyar providing translation as required.

The purpose of the initial interview was to obtain a “here-and-now construction” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the kinds of texts members of the Karen community read and wrote in their daily life as well as the kinds of texts people in their family and community read and wrote in
their daily lives while they were growing up in their homeland. In particular, I asked the mothers about the purpose for reading or writing, the social context in which the activity took place, who else was involved in the activity, and the importance of the activity. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. During the interview with Hser Paw, Zeyar was called away. With Hser Paw’s permission, I continued the interview in English.

To further understand the lived literacy experiences of the Karen families, in the spring of 2013, I carried out expert interviews with two individuals who had knowledge of the Karen refugee community in Lacey City. The first interview was with a settlement worker who had also been a member of the original group of volunteers who helped to settle the newly arrived families in their new homes, and the second, with the director of operations for a sports and literacy program for Karen youth. The focus of these two interviews was on the types of reading and writing their organizations required of the families or those literacy practices for which they provided assistance. The interviews took place in a public setting as chosen by the individual being interviewed. The interview was conducted in English. Due to the high level of background noise, it was not possible to audiorecord the interviews. In this case, I wrote the responses to my questions directly in my notebook and then transcribed the notes on my computer once I returned home.

**Phase 2: Further Data Collection and Further “In the Field” Analysis**

Phase 2 began in September 2013 and continued through to the end of June 2014. During this phase, I carried out observations of literacy events in various locations within the community, in the homes of the three focal families, and in the family literacy program, conducted semi-structured and informal interviews with the two community support workers and the three focal mothers, and an expert interview with the program manager of a provincial
literacy organization. During this phase of data collection, I followed the same protocol for data
collection during participant observations and semi-structured interviews as I had during the first
phase of the study (see above) with one exception. When I was observing in PALS, in addition to
observing literacy events involving the focal parents and their children, I made notes on the
discussion that took place in the “Parent-Only” segment. During the discussion, I recorded in my
notebook the types of questions asked by the facilitator and the parents, the type of response
given by either the facilitator or the parent, and how the parents engaged in the discussion. I also
made note of the type of materials available to the families within the setting as well as any
material that was included in their take-home package. Finally, in this phase, I took photographs
of significant other/child interactions and collected or photographed artifacts produced during
these interactions.

**Observations.** Regular visits within the focal homes resumed in October 2013. These
visits were fairly consistent through to December. In January 2014, I was unable to visit with the
three families in their homes since many of the children fell ill and the families’ schedules did
not line up with Zeyar’s availability. I began a regular schedule of home visits between February
and May 2014. I spent a total of 45.75 hours observing the children within their homes.
Additionally, I observed all 10 sessions of the family literacy program. The purpose of the visits
within these two contexts during this phase of the study was to observe literacy events in the
social activity domain of play and to document the arrangement of and the participants’
engagement in these events. To further understand how literacy was enacted within other social
activity domains, between September 2013 and June 2014, I spent time observing and
documenting literacy events in a variety of contexts. These contexts included: (a) the Karen New
Year, (b) a movie première sponsored by a local service provider, (c) the Karen church, (d) a
Sunday school class (e) a municipal pre-school program, (f) a drop-in program for parents and children run by a local service provider, and (e) community cultural workers’ office located within the elementary school.

As an on-going practice, during this phase of the study, I read and re-read the narrative version of the field note and annotated it with comments. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested researchers write memos while coding incidents. These memos assist the researcher in determining the properties of each category, allowing the researcher to replace tacit judgments with rule-guided judgments. In general, I read through the narrative and identified any activity that would qualify as being a literacy event as defined by Barton and Hamilton (2000). In the attached annotation, I identified the participants of the event, the text being used in the event, and made note of the language of both the event and the text. The following is an example of a literacy event as described in the field notes I made following a visit within the home of one of the focal children:

Paw Paw took out *Pete the Cat* (Litwin, 2010) and put it on the floor for Sam to look at. Sam glanced down briefly, but preferred to play with his top. Paw Paw pointed at Pete’s shoes and said something to Sam in Karen. Sam answered, “black”, even though they were white shoes. Paw Paw said something else and pointed to another part of the picture, but Sam had lost interest (Field notes, March 14, 2014).

This activity was identified as a literacy event as there was a text involved and there was talk around this text. The event was a shared reading event within the social activity domain of play involving the mother and child. As her child played with a toy in the living room, the mother left her seat on the couch and joined him on the floor. She structured the reading event by selecting and then positioning the text. She guided her son’s engagement in the reading event by
pointing to images in the text and asking him specific questions in her first language. The child engaged in the reading event by looking at the book and responding to his mother’s question in English.

Drawing from Miles and Huberman (1994), I created a Contact Summary Sheet using the information from the annotations. The summary sheet allowed me to relate my observations directly to my research questions. It also allowed me to pinpoint what to watch for during the following visit and reflect on how I was collecting and thinking about the data. From these notes, I began to identify possible patterns of activity within and across locations.

**Interviews.** To clarify the observed behaviour and to obtain a “here-and-now construction” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the ways in which parents and others supported the children’s early literacy learning in the home, I also carried out a series of informal interviews (conversations) with the three focal mothers. These conversations took place before and after each in-home observation and were conducted in English. If the mothers were unable to understand my questions or comments, Zeyar provided the Karen translation. Similarly, when the mothers answered or commented in Karen, Zeyar translated their responses into English. I jotted down their responses in my field notebook during the discussion.

In June 2014, I conducted a second semi-structured interview with the three focal mothers. A copy of the interview protocol is included in Appendix D. The purpose of this second interview was to obtain demographic information. Each interview lasted between 10 and 20 minutes. Two of the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Since it was not possible to audio-record the third interview, I took notes during the interview and transcribed the notes in their entirety. In this set of interviews, only one of the mothers, Paw Paw, required the questions to be translated. In this case, Zeyar provided the translation of both my questions and her
responses to my questions. Hser Paw and Isabelle both agreed to complete the demographic survey questions in English.

Additionally, I conducted two semi-structured interviews with the cultural workers, Zeyar and Susan. The focus of the interview was on the types of texts individuals engaged with in the community and the type of support Zeyar and Susan provided to these individuals as they engaged with these texts. The interviews were carried out in English, audiorecorded, and transcribed in English. The interview protocol is included in Appendix E.

**Photographs and artifact collection.** To assist with obtaining a complete record of what I observed, I took photographs of literacy events and collected or took photographs of print produced by the child during literacy events within the home and family literacy program. In addition to providing me with a complete record of my observations, these photographs were occasionally shown to the parents during the informal conversations immediately following the observation period for clarification or to act as a prompt to elicit further discussion. Neither the photographs nor the artifacts were included in the data analysis.

**Phase 3: Post Field Work Analysis**

**Initial phase of analysis: Item level of analysis.** At the conclusion of the data collection phase, I “tidied up” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 43) the data by uploading the transcribed interviews and field notes to the qualitative analysis software program, Atlas Ti, and by reading and re-reading each individual note, using the corresponding Contact Summary Sheet as a guide. This tidying up of the data allowed me to identify items (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) in the form of literacy events. For each literacy event I observed or that had been reported to me during the semi-structured interviews, I coded for the following: Participant, Situated Practice, Domain, Time, Event, Location, Location Sub, Participation Structure, Participation Sub, Role, Mode (of
engagement), Language of Event, and Actions. For those events involving printed texts, I also coded for Text Type (Purcell-Gates et al., 2011) and Language of Text. In keeping with within-case sampling, these codes are theoretical codes, informed in part from Activity Theory and from constructs within the literature. My coding of the field notes and interview transcripts using Atlas Ti took place between October 2014 and March 2015.

Once I had coded all the field notes and transcriptions, I generated reports for all literacy events, both observed and reported, within the activity system using the Query feature of Atlas Ti. I converted the summary outputs to individual excel tables that displayed all coded quotations along with their corresponding codes. The following is an example of the coded field note described above.

**Figure 3.1. Coded Field Note**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quotation</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Situated Practice</th>
<th>Social Activity Domain</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>LocSub</th>
<th>Part, Structure</th>
<th>PartSub</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>LtEvent</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Tx</th>
<th>LtText</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P2_0000_FNL_Mar_14_24_c.docx - 200.18 [Paw Paw pointed at the Pete's s.] (14.14)</td>
<td>PAW</td>
<td>reading picture books</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>CUR</td>
<td>RE</td>
<td>inside</td>
<td>floor</td>
<td>Dyed</td>
<td>Random</td>
<td>Initiator</td>
<td>Kin</td>
<td>English/Karen</td>
<td>asks a question</td>
<td>picture storybook, book</td>
<td>English/Karen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This resulted in data display tables being created for the following: **Community**: Karen-historical, Karen-current, Lacey City; **PALS**: Home: child 1, child 2, child 3, All 3 children.

I then re-read each of the field notes of my informal conversations with the focal mothers and the cultural support workers and identified information pertaining to the rules and regulations of the activity system. These rules include the customs, values, and beliefs of the
community as well as any policies that would support or prohibit activity. I took these quotations from the notes and displayed them in another excel table. I labeled these tables, “Appendices”.

Drawing from Activity Theory, I coded each quotation as to which element of the activity system (e.g., Participants, Situated Practice, Domain) or mediator type (e.g., Participant Structure (arrangement, engagement), Cultural Tool) it represented.

**Second phase of analysis: The pattern level of analysis.** For each data display table, I created a summary table with a two-fold purpose. First, it allowed me to review all activities and to confirm my interpretation of the activity as a literacy event. Second, it allowed me to understand the literacy event in terms of the tools used to mediate the activity. Since the focus of my data analysis was the activity system, for each literacy event, I identified the subjects (participants), the object (situated practice) and the context (social activity domain). I then summarized how the activity was mediated. The following is an example of the coded field note described above.

**Figure 3.2. Coded Field Note Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Situated Practice</th>
<th>Social Activity Domain</th>
<th>Arrangement</th>
<th>Engagement</th>
<th>Cultural Tools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mother child</td>
<td>reading picture book</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>living room floor random</td>
<td>mother points to image mother asks question (Karen) child answers question (English)</td>
<td>picture storybook, book (bilingual) speech (Karen)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the summary tables complete, I looked across each table and noted regularities and patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994) in the forms of activity and mediation within each location.

**Third phase of analysis: Interpretation and verification of findings.** Drawing from my field notes and from the transcriptions of the semi-structured and expert interviews, I
attached preliminary meaning and significance to the emerging patterns of activity within each domain. To reiterate, throughout the data collection phase, as a way to clarify my observations, I engaged in ethnographic conversations with the focal mothers during my visits in the home and with Zeyar immediately following the visit. I included this information in my field notes and in my reflections and drew from these notes as a way to interpret and verify my findings.

Furthermore, during one of my last visits in the focal homes, I asked the mothers for their feedback regarding their PALS experience. At this time, I presented them with a book of pictures I had taken during each of the 10 sessions of PALS and asked them what they found helpful and what they liked about the program. The pictures served as prompts. I recorded their responses directly in my field notebook. Additionally, during my second interview with them, I confirmed with them how they engaged in shared reading experiences with the children as part of the child’s bedtime routine (see Chapter 6). Again, these notes helped me to interpret and verify my findings.

It was my intention to meet with each of the three focal mothers at the conclusion of the study to discuss my findings with them. However, it was difficult to arrange to meet with the families once the data collection phase had come to an end. In February 2015, I attempted to meet with the families. I was only able to meet with two of the focal mothers, Isabelle and Hser Paw. During these meetings, I verified with them my preliminary findings regarding their own activity within PALS and the home. I scheduled another visit to the community in October 2015. Although Zeyar had scheduled time for me to meet with all three of the mothers, neither Hser Paw nor Paw Paw were able to keep the appointment. Prior to my meeting with the third mother, Isabelle, I printed a summary table for her child, Emma, in which I identified literacy events in the social activity domain of play, who was participating in the events, and how the event was
mediated. I also printed four photos of Emma engaged in literacy events within the social activity domain of play. Since Emma was present during my visit with Isabelle, I asked Emma to tell me what was happening in each of the pictures and recorded her responses in my field notebook. Since I was not able to see two of the children, I left the photos with Zeyar and asked her to show them to the families or at least to pass the photos on to the children. I also asked her to video the event and suggested she and I look at the video and discuss the meaning together. Zeyar was unable to connect with the families in order to complete the verification.

**Role of the Researcher**

**Entry Procedures**

As noted previously, I was first introduced to this community through my work as a research assistant in a study looking into the feasibility of implementing a family literacy program with immigrant and refugee families. In this role, I made frequent visits to the site of the program in which the Karen families participated. Once the research study was completed, I maintained contact with the program by becoming a volunteer. As a volunteer, I assisted with the preparation and clean up of the food and participated, along with the other volunteers, in large group activities. Prior to the 2011-2012 school year I approached the co-facilitators of the program with my proposed study. In the fall of 2012, I received support for my program of research from the school district.

**Role**

Although I entered into this research as a doctoral student working in the field of family literacy, I brought with me a wide range of experiences that undoubtedly influenced my interpretations. To begin with, I am a white, English-speaking female who grew up in a middle class home. I am the younger of two children. My parents are second generation Canadians of
European descent. I was a good student who enjoyed going to school. I graduated from university with a degree in teaching. I spent the majority of my career working as a tutor. My primary role was to support children of all ages who were experiencing difficulty learning in the classroom. Initially, I visited with students in their own home, working at the table in their kitchen or dining room. Near the end of my tutoring career, I created a small space in my own home fully equipped with a computer, desk, table, and school-related resources (e.g., picture books, information texts, flash cards, games, writing supplies).

During this time, I became a mother of two girls. The type of support I offered my own daughters was influenced by my experiences as a teacher. For example, we regularly engaged in storybook reading, played games, sang songs and rhymes, and went on outings. When my daughters were older, I completed a Masters of Arts with a specialty in Reading. Part of the requirement for this degree was to participate in two Reading Clinic courses. This gave me the opportunity to continue to support children as they developed their skills in reading. As a reading clinic teacher, I followed an instructional sequence rooted within the psycho-linguistic tradition.

Early in my doctoral program, I was fortunate to work with immigrant and refugee families in the PALS program. This opportunity allowed me to observe how families from other cultures support their children’s early literacy and language learning in a formal early learning setting. These experiences undeniably shaped how I interpreted the behaviours of the focal families in my study.

Although the focal families came from a different culture and spoke a different language, my expectations regarding activity in the home and family literacy program were certainly influenced by previous literature in family literacy. For example, the literature describes families engaging in shared book reading from a collection of picture books. As well, in the home, the
literature identifies the family calendar as playing an essential organizational role in keeping track of dates and events. Finally, the literature portrays parents engaging in their own routine activities within the home with mothers taking on the task of coordinating their children’s activities outside of the home.

Furthermore, I am aware that my inability to speak the Karen language and my lack of experience with Karen culture may have affected the quality of the data I collected and may have biased my interpretation of that data. For example, I may not have recognized the children’s activity as play if it did not involve materials and resources other than books and toys. Similarly, I may have overlooked the usual ways the mothers supported their child’s language and literacy development using meditational tools other than the English language and printed English texts. Finally, when the mothers addressed their children in Karen during an activity, I was unable to document the specific language used during the interaction if their language of choice was Karen. It is for these reasons that I chose to work closely with Zeyar, a member of the resettled Karen refugee community. She worked with me at each step in the research process in order to develop a rapport with the participants, to help me understand the context, and to help verify my interpretations and understandings. However, I am cognizant that she, too, brought to the research process her own experiences and biases. It is for these reasons that I kept a reflexive journal for the duration of the research study.

I am also aware that this research came from outside of the Karen community. The phenomenon of if and how families take up literacy practices from the family literacy program and if and how they bring practices from the home to the program was not a phenomenon identified in the community as being in need of examination. Thus, over the year, I felt that the focal families did not understand the need for me to regularly visit their home, nor were they
anxious to discuss the meaning of their own actions or those of their children. Furthermore, as I described above, I made numerous attempts to meet with the families once I had analyzed my data. In the end, I was only able to meet briefly with two of the mothers.

Finally, I am aware of how our presence in the community may have influenced the participants. Both Zeyar and I were associated with the family literacy program. This may have placed us in a position of power in the eyes of the participants. As such, initially, the families may have believed that it was our desire to see them taking up the practices of the program and may have behaved accordingly during our visits. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation should have helped ameliorate or overcome these potential risks.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity of Study

Researchers address the issue of trustworthiness through the design of their study. They can establish trustworthiness by maintaining a reflexive journal, by establishing credibility, and by carrying out member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this section, I begin by explaining how trustworthiness is established within a study and describe how I addressed it. I then describe how I addressed the issues of confirmability, credibility, transferability, and application in my study.

Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), to establish trustworthiness, throughout the course of the inquiry, the researcher should maintain a reflexive journal. Reflexive journals can contain three types of information: a log of day-to-day activities, a personal log containing reflexive and introspective entries, and a methodological log detailing methodological decisions.

Furthermore, a researcher establishes credibility by carrying out activities to increase the probability that credible findings will be produced. To provide scope to the research, the
researcher ensures prolonged engagement in the field. A longer term of engagement will help the researcher learn the culture and build the trust of the participants. Similarly, while in the field, the researcher will engage in persistent observation. Persistent observation will provide depth to the study by allowing the researcher to identify those characteristics that are most relevant to the problem. Finally, to ensure that interpretations are not a reflection of the researcher’s own experiences and biases, researchers carry out the triangulation of both methods and sources of data.

The trustworthiness of a study is also enhanced through the use of member checks. A member check involves the researcher taking the data, analyses, interpretations and conclusions back to the participant (Creswell, 2007). The participant is then asked to provide feedback to the researcher on the accuracy and credibility of the statement. Through member checks, researchers are made aware of erroneous facts and interpretations and are afforded an overall assessment of the adequacy of the study. Participants are provided with a chance to volunteer additional information and assess the intentionality of the researcher.

**Confirmability**

Throughout this study, I made every effort to ensure trustworthiness. As I described above, I regularly attached memos to the narratives of my field notes and maintained a reflexive journal. I used the journal to record my impressions regarding how my study was progressing and to identify any methodological issues that I needed to bring to the attention of my supervisor. I also used the journal to record my impressions of individual visits in terms of my role in individual literacy events and my concerns regarding my ability to capture what was being said during the visit. I referred to these entries during my conversations with Zeyar to ensure that I had correctly interpreted behaviours specific to the Karen culture.
Next, to ensure that my interpretations were informed by the data and not by my own biases, I triangulated both my methods and sources and maintained a reflexive journal. During Phase 1 of my study, I carried out semi-structured interviews as well as observations to learn of the literacy practices within the home and community. This is an example of triangulation of methods. Instead of relying solely on what the adults said they did, I observed what they in fact did with reading and writing in the home and community. Furthermore, I confirmed my findings through member checking by discussing them with each of the three mothers following the interview and with Zeyar. To understand the ways in which literacy was historically situated within the families and the community, I included questions to address these practices in the semi-structured interviews with the three participating mothers. By interviewing the mothers from each of the families, I was able to gather information about the historical practices of literacy from more than one source.

Similarly, in Phase 2 of my study, I carried out observations of the three focal families in their homes and in the family literacy program. I also engaged with the mothers in informal conversations both during and following these in-home visits. Zeyar translated both the questions asked and the answers provided during these ethnographic conversations when needed. During the observation periods, I observed all three children as they engaged in literacy events, either on their own, with another child, or with an adult. Not only did the interviews serve to clarify the observed interactions, they provided me with the opportunity to hear the parents construct meaning of the events in their own words. Taken together, these data collection methods serve as an example of the triangulation of sources.
Credibility

To help me establish credibility, in addition to triangulating both my methods and sources, I gathered data during a period of prolonged engagement and through persistent observation. Data collection began in April 2013 and carried through until June 2014. During this time, I completed multiple visits with each of the families in both the home and the community. I observed the families during all 10 sessions in the family literacy program during the 2013-2014 school year. In addition, I carried out a series of member checks. These checks allowed the participants to review the raw data (e.g., summary of interviews) for errors of fact or omissions. During the final phase, the participants were invited to review the analyses, interpretations, and conclusions in order to confirm individual data points and to give their overall assessment.

Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that researchers working in the qualitative tradition cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry. They can only provide the reader with the database “that makes transferability judgments possible” (p. 316). To help me investigate the phenomenon of how literacy was enacted within the bilingual family literacy program in Lacey City and in the homes of the participating Karen families, I used a within-case sampling method. This sampling method allowed me to see the phenomenon in some depth. To increase confidence in my findings, I collected data from families who differed in terms of composition. Additionally, as the study progressed, this sampling method allowed me to add informants and expand the research context in order to clarify patterns and see contrasts in my data. Furthermore, throughout this dissertation, I described characteristics of the focal families and settings and included thick description of the findings in order for readers to assess the potential
transferability for their own settings. Finally, throughout my discussions, I connected my findings with prior research and theory. Nonetheless, the uniqueness of the contexts in which the data were collected makes the conclusions presented in Chapter 7 specific to this one setting. In Chapter 7, I discuss settings in which the study could be replicated and those in which the findings could be tested further.

Application

It is my hope that educators, administrators, facilitators, and families associated with the PALS program in Lacey City will benefit from insights generated by this study. Program administrators may use the findings from this study to support future requests for government funding by highlighting the connection between the literacy practices structured and sustained within the program and literacy as it is practiced in the homes of the refugee families who take part in program. Facilitators may benefit from an expanded insight into the ways parents from this community support the literacy development of their children and may receive clarification of how this type of support may (or may not) change during their participation in the family literacy program. Parents may draw from the findings to understand the strengths they bring from the community that support their young children’s early literacy development.

Summary

In this section, I have described the methodology of my proposed study. I have provided a detailed description of the design of the study and my rationale for carrying it out. I have included an explanation of the data collection and data sources for analysis as well as how I completed the analysis of the data. Finally, I have discussed the quality of my proposed study in terms of its trustworthiness and authenticity. In the next chapter, I begin my discussion of the findings by describing the social world of the resettled Karen refugees within the host
community and highlighting literacy practices embedded within the contexts of the community and early learning settings other than PALS. To reiterate, descriptions of activity within each social activity domain were based on information from secondary sources (see Chapter 4) and from observational data drawn from my field notes and from my photographs of the activity (see Chapters 4, 5, and 6). My interpretation of the data was drawn in part from ethnographic conversations, from semi-structured and expert interviews, from the literature, and from secondary sources.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE SOCIAL WORLDS OF YOUNG KAREN CHILDREN

Introduction

In order to develop an understanding of how literacy was enacted within the contexts of the bilingual family literacy program, PALS, and the homes of Karen families with pre-school aged children, in this chapter, I describe how literacy was enacted within the activity system of the resettled Karen refugee community and how the system responded to contradictions (Engeström, 2001). I begin by describing historical cultural practices within the Karen villages and in the Thai refugee camps and discussing the beliefs that shaped these practices. Next, I describe literacy as it was practiced within the activity system. Then, I describe an innovative form of activity (Engeström, 2001) within the system, one that resulted from the introduction of bureaucratic texts as a mediating tool within different social activity domains. I conclude by describing the children’s activity within two English language early learning settings and discussing how this activity represented a new element within the system.

Activity within the Karen Refugee Community in Lacey City

In Chapter 2, I defined activity as the three-way interaction between the participants (subject), situated practice (object), and social activity domain (context). To reiterate, using the framework of the activity system, I understand individual literacy events within a social activity domain as activities shaped by the values, beliefs, and attitudes of the participants and culture and mediated by cultural tools and the division of labour.

As I described in Chapter 3, to inform my understanding of current literacy practices within the community, I drew data from semi-structured interviews with the three focal mothers and two cultural support workers, from an expert interview with a settlement worker in the school, from my observations and documentation of literacy events within the cultural support
workers’ office, an English pre-school program, an early learning program for refugee families, and from my observation and documentation of literacy events within the community and church. I entered each site as a participant observer and took field notes of the families as they engaged in literacy events within the different settings.

I begin this chapter with an overview of historical literacy practices of the Karen people in various social activity domains that helped shape values, beliefs, and attitudes within the activity system of the Karen refugee community. To create this overview, I drew primarily from secondary sources, including the book, *Little Daughter: A Memoir of Survival in Burma and the West* (Phan & Lewis, 2009). The first author, Zoya Phan, is Zeyar’s friend. Zeyar recommended this book to me as a source to inform my understanding of the historical experiences of the Karen families. Additionally, I drew information from the literature and data from transcriptions of semi-structured interviews.

**Historical Practices of the Karen People**

Many adults within the Karen community in Lacey City were born and raised in small Karen villages in Burma. A typical Karen village consists of approximately 200 families living in bamboo huts set on stilts along the banks of a river (Phan & Lewis, 2009). Inside, they slept on rush matting arranged on a floor made of bamboo. The kitchen, located at the back of the house, consisted of a simple stone hearth arranged on an earthen floor. Women cooked the meals in pots over an open flame and preserved foods by drying them on a shelf above the hearth. The front end of the house often included a front porch that the families used for socializing. The families used the space below the houses to store their wood and house their animals. Most of the villagers were rice farmers. Farmers woke at 2 am to the sound of the cockerel crowing and, by 4 am, had eaten and were making their way to the rice field.
Celebrating Community

Communal activities were the social glue that held the village together (Phan & Lewis, 2009). Villagers of all ages would come together for gatherings, such as cultural celebrations and family weddings. In general, these gatherings were oral events mediated by symbolic activity. For Karen communities, the most important event during the year was the wrist-tying ceremony, an Animist-rooted celebration held annually in August; entire villages often took part in the celebration (Phan & Lewis, 2009). The purpose of the ceremony was to ensure good fortune for children and youth in the coming year. The following description was drawn from www.drumpublications.org/wrist.php. During the ceremony, Elders tie a white cord around the wrist of the young person, thus protecting him or her from misfortune and evil spirits. There were seven materials used in the ceremony, each of which had symbolic meaning: Water represented the cleansing of the mind and spirit; the white threads represented protection from misfortune and evil spirits; seven rice balls served as a reminder that there is strength in unity; the use of a triangular-shaped banana-leaf package to bind the lumps of sticky rice symbolized sharpness and solidarity; the bananas represented discipline and loyalty; the seven branches of flowers reminded the Karen people of their ability to put down new roots and thrive, regardless of the situation; finally, sugar cane represented the sweetness that comes with living a moral and ethical life. During the wrist-tying event, Elders recited the blessing, sprinkled the young person with drops of water, and placed small amounts of rice and banana on top of their heads before tying the white threads around their wrists.

Another significant event in the Karen calendar was the New Year celebration. This event, first held in 1938, takes place in early January and marks the end of one rice harvest and

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6 I received a hard copy of this description as an attendee of the wrist-tying ceremony organized by the Karen community in Lacey City in August 2013.
the beginning of the next. Karen communities in Burma, Thailand, as well as communities of resettled Karen refugees around the world continue to celebrate the event. Traditionally, the ceremony began with a blowing of the horn and oral reciting of a poem by a member of the community, followed by a welcoming speech delivered in multiple languages, including Karen and English. In the speech, a member of the Karen community explained the importance of tradition to the Karen people, provided a brief history of the civil war in Burma, and described how the Karen people fought to defend their culture and homeland (MacLachlan, 2014).

Following the speeches, members of the Karen community performed two traditional dances, the Don Dance and the Bamboo Dance. Karen singers and musicians accompanied both dances. The event may also have included a demonstration of Karen fashion and usually concluded with the community sharing food.

Both the wrist-tying ceremony and celebrations around the Karen New Year helped to reaffirm Karen culture and identity (Phan & Lewis, 2009). Practices such as the blowing of the horn, the sharing of poems, the delivery of speeches, the performing of dances, and the singing of Karen songs, were rooted in traditional culture. The Karen people blew the horn during the harvest in order to signify hope and happiness for the coming year (Barron et al., 2008). They delivered speeches in multiple languages to inform all attendees as to the important ideas attached to the dances (MacLachlan, 2014). Adults and teens performed the dances to demonstrate Karen history and culture to the non-Karen audience and to remind the Karen audience of their significance (MacLachlan, 2014); accordingly, the young dancers “learn to be Karen” (MacLachlan, 2014, p. 71). Finally, singing has long been a practice in the Karen culture. Munck (2012) described singing together as “choir singing” (p. 40). Traditionally, individuals sang songs in order to forget their worries and to demonstrate the strength of their people. Today,
the practice allows young Karen children and teens to strengthen and maintain their traditional language and establish their Karen identity (Munck, 2012).

**Maintaining Spirituality**

Although Karen villages in Burma were a mixture of Christians, Animists, and Buddhists, the majority of the resettled families in Lacey City were Christians and members of the Karen-speaking Baptist congregation. Christian missionaries converted many of the Karen people from Buddhism and Animism during the British colonization of Burma in the 19th century. As part of the conversion process, these missionaries also taught the Karen people how to read and write in English and Burmese. An American Baptist missionary is often credited with developing a written script adapted from the Burmese alphabet for the Karen people (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010). Karen Christians read from Bibles that were translated into Karen using this modified Burmese script. Of the 15% of the Karen population who identify as Christian, most are Baptist and, although the majority of the Karen people identify as Buddhists, there is a higher proportion of Christians than either Buddhists or Animists in the refugee camps (Mooneida, 2010).

Due to the large proportion of Christian Karen within the refugee camps, much of their life in the camp revolved around the Baptist church and Bible school. Baptist churches in the Thai refugee camps are part of the Karen Baptist Convention (KBC). According to Horstmann (2010), the KBC “holds a privileged position in the camps and provides the basis on which the Christian Karen base their identity” (Horstmann, 2010, p. 17). Christian Karen living in the camps attended church services in the Baptist church and classes in the Bible school where they read and copied passages from the Karen Bible and sang hymns from Karen hymnals. Many participated in Bible study circles and large choruses. In homes in both the camps and villages,
parents read or told Bible stories to their children in Karen as part of the bedtime routine (Field notes, November 19, 2013). Additionally, schools in Karen villages and Thai refugee camps were often Christian mission schools. As such, the curriculum included Bible study in which children memorized Bible verses and learned stories about different characters from the Bible. Sunday school, as it is practiced in the Karen church today, is a Christian tradition only and does not exist within the Buddhist or Animist religions (Phan & Lewis, 2009).

As children, adult members of the Karen refugee community learned the cultural practices of their community by watching or participating in activities within their community (Susan, interview, April 17, 2014). For example, by attending community celebrations, they learned that materials, such as those used in the wrist-tying ceremony, had meaning and that this meaning could be expressed orally through song or embodied within gesture and dance. As members of the Christian community, they learned the value of religion within the Karen culture by observing adults read and copy Bible passages, sing hymns, recite Bible verses, and tell Bible stories. Karen children demonstrated their understanding by learning and reciting Bible passages. Thus, historically, Karen parents structured their children’s opportunities to learn by providing them with opportunities to observe and participate in the cultural and spiritual activities of the community.

**Literacy Practices in Other Social Activity Domains**

However, the social organization of the Karen village may have prevented children from participating in practices situated within other social activity domains. For example, each village had a village headman. In many of the villages, the headman was the only person to own a television. However, because of the remoteness of some of the villages, televisions were only used to play videos. Since there was no electricity in the village, power for the television came
from a generator. Phan and Lewis (2009) described how, as children, Phan and her friends
structured their own opportunity to watch the videos once they heard the generator come to life.
They wrote, “We knew we weren’t very welcome, so we’d wait outside to see what started
playing. If a good movie came on, we’d sidle in pretending we were innocent children with no
idea that we weren’t wanted” (p. 98). Thus, as children, many of the Karen parents in Lacey City
may have had limited opportunities to engage in television events (Perry & Moses, 2011).

Furthermore, as children, the Karen parents may have had limited opportunities to
observe their parents engage in bureaucratic literacy practices. Within villages, homes did not
have an address. Individuals did not have a family name, only a given name. Additionally, Karen
born in mountain villages may not have a recorded date of birth (Moonieinda, 2010). Thus, there
was little need for individuals to document their existence using printed texts.

Although the typical Karen family did not engage with printed texts on a daily basis,
certain villagers, deemed “knowledge holders”, were responsible to make decisions for the
village by means of printed materials (i.e., signing forms and documents) (Zeyar, interview,
April 7, 2014). As such, it was not considered necessary for villagers to be informed of issues
nor was it necessary for them to act on these issues by signing their name to a document. For
example, most villages did not have a resident doctor. Medical practitioners, mainly nurses,
traveled between the villages and administered medication when required. The villagers
understood these individuals to be experts in their field and afforded to them the responsibility of
deciding on what the best course of action was when one was ill. Villagers did not want to be
informed about the pros and cons of a particular treatment; they just wanted to be treated (Zeyar,
interview, April 7, 2014)
Similarly, although parents of school-aged children were required to register their children for school and sign their child’s report card, in general, they left the majority of the decisions regarding their children’s education to the teacher (Zeyar, interview, June 20, 2013). For example, there was no need for teachers to send home request letters and notes or newsletters and notices to inform parents of matters involving their child’s schooling. Similarly, teachers did not require the parents to indicate their approval or consent by signing forms, letters, or agendas. Thus, as children, many of the Karen parents may not have regularly observed their own parents engage in literacy events mediated by a signature.

**School.** According to Barron et al. (2007), “many Karen place a high value on education” (p. 35). With the arrival of the British in the mid 19th century, the Karen people came to relate education with independence, thus Karen parents were eager to obtain educational advantages for their children (Naw, 1989). However, due to the high cost of attendance, the economic costs to the family of keeping their children registered in school, and the constant displacement due to military attacks, not all Karen children were able to attend schools (Karen Human Rights Group, 2008). As a result, some, but not all, of the Karen parents who participated in the PALS program in Lacey City attended school in Karen villages in Burma or in Karen refugee camps in Thailand. For those who did, as children, they learned, through rote, how to read and write individual letters and numbers, recite poems and rhymes, and write their name in Karen during the first three years of formal schooling. Rote learning reflected the Buddhist influence (Lwin, 2000, Concluding section, para. 3). In later years, as students, the Karen parents in this study memorized material, which they then recited orally for the teacher or reproduced in writing on tests and exams. The goal for all students attending Karen schools was to learn the material in
order to pass the end of year exam and move onto the next level (Hser Paw, interview, June 13, 2013).

Regardless of age, the first level of schooling for all students was nursery\(^7\). As I discussed in Chapter 1, because of the conflict with the Burmese military, many Karen families were forced from their villages, thus delaying their children’s entry into formal schooling. For example, during my interview with Zeyar, she shared, “I started school late because we were always on the run. I began my school when I was seven” (Zeyar, interview, September 18, 2013). The nursery program was spread out over three years. During this time, students learned basic literacy and numeracy skills. For example, they learned the letters of the alphabet, basic numbers, and short poems and rhymes, all in Karen and again, learning was achieved through rote memorization.

Children learned to read printed texts in the form of books as part of the general education curriculum. These books had few pictures, a lot of text, and were written in Karen. During my interview with Hser Paw, she described a typical book she had to read in school:

We don’t have the picture, only the word. We need to read only the word. We don’t have a dog or children. We don’t have any pictures… A story is only story, no pictures… We had to read it and then they make us answer questions (Hser Paw, interview, June 13, 2013).

Children also learned how to write during the first three years. While attending class in a village school, children wrote on slates using soft stones. The teacher would guide them through the proper formation of individual letters using the hand-over-hand method. One of the first words children learned to write was their name. They would then practice writing their names

\(^7\) Although all Karen students, regardless of their age, began their formal schooling at the nursery level, Lwin (2000) described the organization of the Burmese school system after Independence (1948-1962) by age as follows: Nursery (ages 3-5), Primary School (ages 5-10), Middle School (ages 10-13), High School (ages 13-16).
while playing outside. Zeyar indicated that she often wrote her name in the mud using her finger or formed her name by outlining each letter in small dots on leaves (Zeyar, interview, 18 September 18, 2013).

Lwin (2000) described education in Burma as being dominated by, “subject-oriented teaching and children’s rote learning” (Conclusion section, para. 3). The Karen people understood that it was the teacher’s responsibility as knowledge holders to teach their children, rather than the parents’ task within the home (Zeyar, interview, April 7, 2014). Additionally, during our interview Hser Paw shared that it was not uncommon for teachers to beat children with a bamboo stick if they fell short in their learning. She told me punishments began in kindergarten and continued throughout her schooling. She said, “Oh, start when in kindergarten to Grade 7, maybe 8 or 9. They punish. Oh, I remember being cut here (shows me her forearm) and here (shows me her leg)” (Hser Paw, interview, June 13, 2013). Prinsloo and Stein (2005) came across a similar link between literacy and violence in pre-school and schooling contexts in South Africa.

To sum up, although there was little need for villagers to read and write within the village, they understood education as the key to a better way of life. Thus, many Karen parents went to great lengths to provide their children with the opportunity to participate in formal schooling. During the first three years of schooling, as children, many of the Karen parents living in Lacey City read and wrote individual letters and numbers and recited short poems and familiar rhymes. In contrast, they practiced writing their name while playing outdoors. The purpose for reading and writing in the nursery level was to master basic literacy and numeracy skills in preparation for the subject-oriented teaching they would receive, beginning in Grade 1. Failure to master these skills resulted in physical punishment.
In this section, I identified and described historical cultural and literacy practices of the Karen people and highlighted how, through their observation of and participation in the various activities as children, adult members of the Karen community in Lacey City may have acquired values, beliefs, and attitudes specific to their culture. In the next section, drawing from descriptions in my field notes of observed literacy events, I describe how similar values, beliefs, and attitudes have helped to shape current activity within the Karen community in Lacey City and how elements (Engeström, 2001) from outside the community were transforming this activity.

**Current Literacy Practices of the Karen Families Living in Lacey City**

**Celebrating Community**

The resettled Karen refugee families in Lacey City maintained certain cultural traditions in their new community. As discussed earlier, during my data collection in the community, they performed a wrist-tying ceremony in August and celebrated the Karen New Year in January. They also performed a traditional Karen wedding ceremony in July. Zeyar invited me to attend these ceremonies as her guest. My role during each ceremony was that of participant observer. During the individual ceremonies, I took pictures and jotted down notes in my field notebook. I drew from these data sources to create the following description of how the Karen community celebrated their culture in Lacey City.

Although the ceremonies took place in Canada, activity within each ceremony reflected the historical practices of the Karen people (see above). I observed Karen Elders dressed in traditional Karen clothing perform the wrist-tying ceremony in accordance with descriptions of how it was traditionally practiced. For instance, the Elders recited the blessing, sprinkled the young person with drops of water, and placed small amounts of rice and banana on top of their
heads before tying the white threads around their wrists (Field notes, August 3, 2013). Similarly, during the Karen New Year celebration, I observed the traditional blowing of the horn to open the program, listened to a Karen Elder deliver the Welcoming Speech in Karen, and watched a group of Karen teens perform the Bamboo Dance (Field notes, January 11, 2014).

The enactment of traditional ceremonies in Canada involved a mixture of oral and printed texts in both Karen and English. In general, Elders recited oral texts in English or Karen to bless individuals and celebrate community. For example, during the Karen wedding ceremony, the Karen minister blessed the couple orally, in English, prior to the exchanging of rings (Field notes, July 27, 2013). In the same vein, a female Elder participating in a fashion show of traditional Karen clothing as part of the New Year’s celebration, described the cultural significance of her outfit to the audience in Karen (Field notes, January 11, 2014).

Members of the Karen community living in Lacey City often used print to support their own performance during public gatherings. At the Karen wedding I attended in July, the traditional ceremony included a performance by the family choir. The choir, composed of members from the families of both the bride and the groom, sang a number of songs in Karen while reading from printed lyric sheets (Field notes, July 27, 2013). Similarly, Karen teens sang from printed song lyrics in Karen as they led the congregation in the singing of the song to close the formal program during the Karen New Year, and later, as they performed a mixture of Karen, Thai, and Burmese songs as part of the live entertainment that followed the celebration (Field notes, January 11, 2014).

In addition to using printed texts to mediate their singing of traditional songs, members of the Karen community also read from printed speech notes when addressing large audiences. During the Karen New Year celebration, I observed a Karen Elder read from his printed notes
while welcoming the audience in Karen (Field notes, January 11, 2014). I also observed the Master of Ceremonies for the Karen wedding read from the pamphlet in English in order to guide the congregation through the service (Field notes, July 27, 2013).

Since Karen community gatherings in Lacey City were open to English-speaking visitors, the Karen organizers often created printed pamphlets to inform visitors of the meaning and structure of the ceremony/celebration and to guide their participation in the ceremony/celebration. For instance, when I arrived at the Karen New Year celebration, I received such a pamphlet printed in both English and Karen. The purpose of the pamphlet was to acknowledge donors, inform the audience of the order of service, and to provide lyrics to a traditional song. The front of the pamphlet included a thank-you to the event’s donors and sponsors. Inside, the agenda was written in both languages. On the back of the pamphlet were printed the Karen lyrics to a song (Field notes, January 11, 2014). I had received a similar pamphlet when I attended the Karen wedding (Field notes, July 27, 2013). In contrast to this bilingual guide, at the wrist-tying ceremony, I received a printed sheet only in English describing the history of the event and the significance of the materials used during the ceremony (Field notes, August 3, 2013).

Celebrating Karen culture was not restricted to gatherings within the Karen community. Members of the Lacey City community also organized gatherings in celebration of the Karen people and their culture. During my year in the community, I observed activity during a combination caneball/volleyball tournament as well as during an event to celebrate the making of a film featuring Karen Elders. The tournament, sponsored by a local teen sports and literacy program, took place in August in conjunction with the wrist-tying ceremony. The tournament was held annually in memory of a young Karen girl who passed away from cancer shortly after
her family resettled in Lacey City. The gathering with the Karen Elders took place in January 2014 and was sponsored by the local social service agency. My role during both gatherings was that of participant observer. I took pictures and jotted down notes in my field notebook to capture the activity I observed taking place during the events. I created field notes from these data immediately following the events. I drew data from these notes to create the following description of how the Karen culture was celebrated within the Lacey City community.

In contrast to the oral and symbolic mediation of activity during traditional gatherings within the Karen community, print literacy mediated activity within gatherings structured by members of the Lacey City community. I observed gathering organizers use printed texts to organize the movement of participants, such as during the caneball/volleyball tournament where the organizers displayed the names of the teams in English on a schedule of play printed on a large piece of Bristol board. Throughout the day, participants were expected to read the poster in order to learn when they were required to play. Likewise, the Master of Ceremonies of the event celebrating the Karen Elders read the names of each Elder from a printed list to indicate when they should proceed onto the stage. Organizers also used print to recognize the accomplishment of the participants. For example, the winning team in the Tournament of Champions received a trophy on which was engraved the name of the tournament. Similarly, each of the Elders was presented with a trophy engraved with his/her name in recognition of their contribution to the making of the film. Finally, both gatherings concluded with the sharing of a celebratory cake on which was printed the name of the gathering (e.g., Tournament of Champions) or the name of the film (e.g., The Karen Culture).

Thus, while members of the Karen community living in Lacey City continued to mediate traditional activities using oral texts and symbolic actions, printed texts were visible during many
of these activities. These texts functioned as supports in that they assisted individuals during oral performances in both languages or informed non-Karen visitors in English as to the meaning of cultural events. In contrast, printed English texts were dominant during gatherings organized by members of the Lacey City community. These texts structured the individual’s participation in the gathering and celebrated individual accomplishment and community.

**Maintaining Spirituality**

In Lacey City, Karen Baptists worshipped weekly in a space they shared with an English-speaking congregation. The English service took place on Sunday morning and the Karen service, during the early afternoon. Since the English-speaking congregation owned the church, English texts dominated the space. Large cloth banners printed with inspirational sayings in English were displayed on each of the exterior walls within the nave of the church. Instead of wooden pews, the congregations sat on free-standing chairs arranged in rows facing the Alter. Attached to the underside of each chair was a basket that contained a version of the Holy Bible, also in English. Small pockets were attached to the back of each chair. Members of the English-speaking congregation had placed donation envelopes for the larger church in each of these pockets. The envelopes were printed in English. Boxes of offering envelopes, also printed in English, were stored on a side table. The formal alter had been removed and in its place were microphones, a drum set and an electronic keyboard. The drum set was contained within some type of glass or plastic compartment, presumably to reduce noise during the service.

I attended two Karen church services during the data collection phase of this study. The visits took place in February and March 2014. Similar to my role during cultural events in the community, my role during visits within the church was that of participant observer. Immediately following each visit, I created field notes to document the activity I observed taking
place during the visit. I drew from these notes to create the following description of how spirituality was practiced in the Karen Baptist Church.

During both visits, I observed print and oral texts mediate literacy events within the Karen service. Both services began with the Duty Elder delivering the greeting and sharing oral announcements in Karen. It is customary for a member of the congregation to lead the congregation in the call to service and introduce individual singers or speakers in Karen. On the days I attended the service, this individual read from speech notes printed on a small sheet of paper. Other members of the congregation took part in the service by reading scripture passages in Karen from printed booklets, and reading prayers and verses from single sheets of paper, from booklets, or from the screens on smart phones. The general congregation joined in the singing of hymns, songs, and responses. The title and lyrics to many of the songs and hymns were projected on screens above the Alter and printed in the language in which the song was sung (e.g., English, Karen, Thai, or Burmese). Each week, the church welcomed musical contributions from individual members of the congregation. I observed children, teens, and adults singing the lyrics to songs in various languages, (e.g., Karen, Burmese, Thai, English) while reading from printed song sheets or from lyrics displayed on smart phones. Members of the congregation who played various musical instruments accompanied the singers at the front of the church. Hser Paw shared later that singing songs during the service was a common practice; during services within the camps, however, the singing was to guitar music only. She speculated that the teens selected songs from the Internet for inclusion in the service (Field notes, March 14, 2014). Finally, elder members of the community delivered the sermon and final blessing orally, in Karen.

All three focal children, Claire, Sam, and Emma, were enrolled in the Karen Sunday school class that took place during the weekly church service. During my second visit to the
church, Hser Paw arranged for me to observe the children as they participated in the Sunday school class. Again, my role during the visit was that of participant observer. I made field notes describing the literacy events I observed taking place during the session immediately following the visit.

Unlike other learning settings, programming in the Sunday school class was delivered in Karen by a Karen-speaking parent from the community. During the session, the Karen teacher structured the children’s opportunities to participate in spiritual lessons in Karen and English (Field notes, March 23, 2014). Similar to the learning within the churches in the camps, learning within the Sunday school was achieved through the children’s intent participation in spiritual activities. The teacher structured their opportunities to participate. For example, the teacher shared Bible stories with the children orally, in Karen. She structured their participation in the activity by seating them individually on the floor in front of her before beginning the story. She structured their contributions to the storytelling event by asking them specific questions in Karen and having the children answer them, also in Karen. She structured their participation in learning Bible passages and songs by saying a line in Karen and instructing them to repeat the line to her, in Karen. This process was repeated until the children could repeat the passage or sing the song. In contrast, the children chose the picture they wanted to colour during the work period. During this period, the children chose to engage each other as conversational partners in English (Field notes, March 23, 2014).

During my first visit within the church, the children remained with the congregation for the duration of the service instead of being dismissed to attend Sunday school classes (Field notes, February 9, 2014). Rather than participating directly in the service, the children roamed freely around the space, observing activity within the service while playing with their toys or
with other children. I noticed many children, including the three focal children in this study, arrived at the church with some type of toy; on this visit, Sam brought an action figure, Emma, her princess mirror, and Claire, a red folder. The school-aged boys sitting in front of me spent the entire service playing games on a smartphone. At times, the focal children ran out of the main area and congregated in the foyer. I could hear them running around and playing in that area while speaking to each other in English. There were also small clusters of children playing on the floor in the main area. Additionally, I noticed other children completing individual colouring sheets or drawing their own pictures on the back of these sheets.

Near the end of the service, I observed the following event involving one of the focal children, Claire:

Claire left the rest of the group and came over to sit with me. She picked up one of the donation envelopes from the back of the chair and looked at it for a while. She gathered three of the Bibles from around us. She placed them on the chair and then played, “Eeny, Meany, Miney, Mo” with them. She then opened one of the Bibles, placed it on the chair in front of her, leaned over it and “read” a story from the text in English. Finally, she opened each of the Bibles, propped them up side-by-side on the chairs, and read/sang from them in English as she “played” the piano. When she had finished, she placed an envelope in each of the Bibles (like a book mark) and put the Bibles back in the baskets (Field notes, February 9, 2014).

In this event, initially, Claire chose to play a game with the donation envelopes. She then proceeded to reenact the practice of singing hymns in English from printed lyrics. She concluded the activity by using the donation envelope as a book mark to mark the place of the hymn before storing the Bibles were they belonged.
In sum, members of the Karen community participated in the practices of their spiritual community within a space organized by another community, one in which spiritual activities were mediated by English (print) texts and musical performances. Similar to the childhood experiences of their parents, the Karen children learned the value of religion by observing their parents read Bible passages, sing hymns, and listen to the words of Elders in Karen. The parents further structured their children’s spiritual learning by enrolling them in Sunday school, where the children listened to Bible stories and learned and recited Bible verses and songs in Karen. Additionally, by observing the musical performances of members of the congregation, the children continued to develop an understanding of the Karen language and identity.

Thus, despite the inclusion of printed texts, the enactment of activity within the social activity domains of community and spirituality was consistent with how activity was enacted within these domains prior to the families’ arrival in the host community. In the next section, drawing from descriptions in my field notes of observed literacy events and from the transcriptions of my semi-structured interviews with Zeyar and Susan, I describe how literacy activity in the community was transformed when new elements were introduced into the system.

**Changes Within The Activity System**

**Bureaucratic Texts**

Earlier in this chapter, I described how, as children in Burma, Karen parents living in Lacey City had little to no opportunity to observe adults within Karen villages respond to texts issued by large institutions such as government. However, currently, as members of the Lacey City community, they were required to engage with a variety of these bureaucratic texts in a number of social activity domains. For example, they must read official letters and complete forms to apply for, or renew, rental subsidies, to apply for health insurance, citizenship, old age
pensions, and/or to indicate a change in address. Each spring, they were required to fill out income tax forms in order to file a personal income tax return. Individuals of working age were required to write resumés and letters and fill out application forms in order to apply for a job. As parents of school-aged children they were required to fill out and sign forms in order to register their children for programs or to place an order for their child’s school lunch. Since the program registration forms were only available online, the parents needed access to a computer and to the Internet. Furthermore, in order to begin the registration process, the parents then needed to obtain an email account and/or activate a personal education number (PEN).

Thus, activity mediated by this type of text represented a contradiction (Engeström, 2001) within the activity system. Engeström defined a contradiction as, “historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems” (p. 137). In this study, the primary contradiction of activities was that between the historic and current role of the adult or parent in activities mediated by text. In contrast to their life as villagers (see above), as a member of the resettled Karen refugee community living in Lacey City, adults were required to read and respond to texts generated by institutions within three levels of government: municipal, provincial, and federal. This type of text represented a new element within the activity system of this Karen community and created a secondary contradiction within the system. Although secondary contradictions can generate conflict within systems, Engeström suggested that they also lead to “innovative attempts to change the activity” (p. 137). Drawing from my field notes of observations of literacy events within the office of and from my semi-structured interviews with the two cultural support workers, Zeyar and Susan, and from my expert interview with a settlement worker in the school, I now describe the Karen community’s attempt to change activity within the system.
Initially, members of the Karen community simply looked to others for support with unfamiliar texts. When the families arrived in Canada, front line workers engaged in textual practices on their behalf. For example, they completed application forms so that the families could receive government issued identification cards, open bank accounts, or apply for subsidized housing (L. Sadler, interview, April 17, 2013). Although some members of the community increased their level of engagement in these textual practices over time, many continued to experience difficulties with understanding the texts. Consequently, these individuals came to the community multicultural workers for assistance.

During individual literacy events within their office, Zeyar and Susan acted as literacy brokers in that they assisted others with texts (Perry, 2009). For example, Zeyar described an interaction she had with a parent regarding a consent letter the child had brought home from school. The letter was from the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, requesting the parents’ permission to take the child out of the regular classroom in order to receive ESL support in a separate classroom. Zeyar told me she began by explaining to the parent in Karen that the letter was requesting their permission to enroll the child in the ESL program where she would receive instruction in the English language. After explaining the contents of letter to the parent, Zeyar informed the parent of her (the mother’s) expected role in the event, that being to sign the letter in order to indicate her approval of the provision of ESL support to her child (Zeyar, interview, June 20, 2013).

Perry (2009) identified three categories of literacy brokering: lexico-syntactic/graphophonic, culture, and genre. In this example, Zeyar explained to the parent the function of the text (genre brokering). In addition to clarifying the meaning of individual words (lexico-syntactic/graphophonic brokering), during this discussion with the parent, she also
explained that, in Canada, parents were required to participate in decisions regarding the type of program in which their child would participate in school (culture brokering). By explaining the latter, she was also explaining the purpose of the text.

Not only were the families unfamiliar with the function and purpose of texts, such as forms and notices, they were also unfamiliar with the text’s specific features. Families often had difficulties with forms when the order of presentation of the individual’s name was inverted. For example, Susan described how on some forms, the individual was required to provide their surname first, followed by their first then middle name, while other forms requested the given name followed by the surname (Susan, interview, April 17, 2014).

Over the years, Zeyar and Susan’s role in individual literacy events shifted from broker to teacher. Zeyar and Susan took on the role of the more experienced other as they scaffolded (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978) the participation of the less experienced individual in literacy events. As a result, the text began to function differently for the individual as he or she increased his or her level of engagement with it. Zeyar scaffolded reading events by writing notes in the first language directly on the paper or by highlighting key words (English) as they appeared in the text. For example, Zeyar shared that she read prescriptions individuals brought to her and then wrote notes to remind them how the medicine was to be taken. She explained, “Like the prescription, like how to take it. I just read it for them. Sometimes, I wrote the note for them so they will remember” (Zeyar, interview, September 18, 2013).

In terms of writing events, Zeyar and Susan filled out forms while the individual sat beside them and handed them the required documentation. For example, during one of my visits to their office, Paw Paw arrived with her three children. She sat down next to Zeyar and handed her the form to register her children in an after school program. She then produced a small wallet
in which she stored government issued identification cards. As Zeyar filled out the form, she periodically asked Paw Paw for specific information in Karen. In response, Paw Paw handed over the relevant card so that Zeyar could copy the information onto the form (Field notes, September 13, 2013).

In sum, responding to requirements of western institutions represented a contradiction within the activity system of the resettled Karen refugee families. Initially, members of the Lacey City community completed this type of activity on their behalf. However, as time went on, individuals recognized the need to act, but were unable to do so because of their lack of familiarity with the mediating text. Thus, they brought the text to cultural workers for assistance. In their role as brokers, the cultural workers explained the purpose and use of the specific genres of texts, as well as the cultural practice within which the text was embedded and assisted with vocabulary. Over time, the community multicultural workers took on the role of expert and scaffolded the participation of the novice until the novice gained the knowledge and skill to participate in the literacy event alone. In the next section, I conclude this chapter by describing literacy events within the social activity domain of play in two English language early learning settings and discuss how this activity also represented a new element (Engeström, 2001) within the system. I drew data from the field notes I made during my visits within these two early learning settings to create the following descriptions.

**Early Learning Settings**

**The Drop-In program.** All three of the focal families attended a Drop-In program for immigrant and refugee families that was sponsored by the local social service agency. Karen parents and their pre-school aged children could attend the program four mornings a week. An English-speaking early childhood educator facilitated the program. She structured the children’s
opportunities to participate in school- and non-school related activities in English. During the session, the parents could choose to participate in the activities alongside their children or to observe them as they engaged in play on their own, with the other Karen children, or with the teacher.

Although the early childhood educator structured the children’s learning by choosing which materials and activities she made available to them each day, for much of the session, the children structured their own participation by choosing the activities in which they would engage and then selecting which of the materials they would use to complete the activity. When left on their own, the focal children chose to engage in meaning-making events in English using a variety of materials. During my visits to the program, I observed them explore concepts by mixing together various colours of Play-doh. For example, Claire cut and shaped mounds of home-made Play-doh using various Play-doh tools and cutter (Field notes, March 4, 2014). Additionally, they practiced adult roles by dressing up and playing house. I observed Emma participate in pretend conversations in English using a toy cell phone and prepare and serve food to her doll using plastic food and dishes (Field notes, March 3, 2014). The children also issued directives in English to their peers as they animated toy figures. For example, I observed Claire direct the other children in a game involving a toy school bus and the figures of school children (Field notes, March 4, 2014). At times, they engaged the teacher in their play, as when Emma initiated a game of hide-and-seek with some of the other children (Field notes, March 3, 2014).

For most of the session, the parents chose to sit together at the tables and converse with each other in Karen. At times, the children engaged them as peers in play. For example, Claire made a cake in the shape of an igloo. She announced, in English, that the cake was for her father’s birthday. She then served the cake to her mother, engaging her in conversation in
During the final half hour of the session, the teacher engaged both the children and their parents in a Circle Time session. During this time, she read stories in English to the children, structuring their participation in the reading event by engaging them in school-like conversations in English about the book. For example, during my initial visit to the program, she read the big book, *The Little Mouse, The Red Ripe Strawberry, and the Big Hungry Bear* (Wood & Wood, 1999) in English. Throughout the reading, she continuously asked them questions about what was happening in the story (Field notes, March 3, 2014). She also led the children in singing songs (English) and performing actions. During my second visit to the program, she encouraged the children to participate in the actions with their parents. For example, she instructed them, in English, to pair up with their parent and carry out the actions, either while sitting on their laps or sitting directly behind them (Field notes, March 4, 2014). Each day, she dismissed the children individually, in English, to the craft table where they could complete the day’s craft on their own before leaving for home. For example, during my first visit to the program, the teacher had supplied each child with a piece of paper on which she had printed his or her name (in English). The children could choose from a variety of small sponge rollers and cut out shapes with which to create a painting.

**The pre-school.** Two of the three focal children, Claire and Sam, attended an English language pre-school program, but at two different sites. Although I requested permission from each pre-school to observe both children in their respective programs, I only received permission to observe Claire. However, I did receive an information booklet that described the structure of Sam’s program. Both pre-school programs took place in the morning. Claire attended her
program three mornings a week, while Sam attended all five mornings. Programming in both pre-schools was delivered in English by English-speaking early childhood educators (ECEs) and both espoused a “learning through play” philosophy. As such, each ECE structured the children’s opportunities to participate in school and non-school related activities in English. During each session, the children could choose to participate in activities on their own, alongside the other children, or with the teacher.

Similar to the Drop-In program, the ECE structured the children’s learning in Claire’s pre-school by choosing which materials and activities she made available to them each day. Further, the children structured their own participation for much of the session by choosing the activities in which they would engage and selecting which of the materials they would use to complete the activity. When left alone, Claire chose to engage primarily in school-related activities in English, using English texts. For example, at numerous times during one of my visits, I observed her select and arrange the letters of the alphabet to construct a puzzle. Each time she selected a letter, she said its name in English before positioning it in the frame (Field notes, April 7, 2014). She also read English picture books on her own or to other children. For example, I observed her at various times during my second visit sitting beside other children on the couch in the reading centre and attempting to read a book to them in English (Field notes, April 14, 2014). Additionally, she chose to explore concepts at the water table. For example, I observed her transferring water from a watering can into various sized containers and then adding glitter to the containers (Field notes, April 7, 2014).

Claire’s program also included Circle Time. During this segment, the ECE read an English picture book to the children. At times, she would make comments in English about what

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8 My description of activity within the pre-school comes from field notes made during my visits to Claire’s program. However, these descriptions are similar to those included in the Information for Families booklet from Sam’s pre-school program.
she was reading or would ask the children a question in English about what was happening in the story. Throughout the morning, the ECE structured the children’s movement in the room by singing them songs in English. For example, she would sing a song to dismiss them from the carpet following Circle Time (Field notes, April 7, 2014) or when she wanted them to line up to go outside (Field notes, April 14, 2014). She also structured their participation in outdoor games. For example, during my second visit to the program, she led the children in a game of “Red Light, Green Light” in the park adjacent to the school (Field notes, April 14, 2014). Finally, during each of my visits to the program, the ECE had arranged for the children to complete a craft. For example, during my first visit, she had the children contribute to a group picture (Field notes, April 7, 2014) and during the second, construct and decorate an Easter egg out of construction paper (Field notes, April 14, 2014).

To sum up, literacy events within both of these settings were situated within the social activity domain of play. In both settings, an English-speaking early childhood educator organized the children’s opportunities to participate by choosing the materials (e.g., English texts) and activities they made available to the children and by shaping the children’s contributions to school-like conversations in English during reading events. Additionally, the children structured their own participation in literacy events by choosing the specific activity in which to engage and then selecting materials to complete that activity or by participating in the event with other children as peers in play where they engaged in child-focused conversations in English.

Summary and Discussion

A child’s acquisition of early literacy concepts and skills through play in settings outside of formal schooling represented a new element (Engeström, 2001) within the activity system of the Karen community. As I described above, as children in Burma, Karen parents traditionally
learned these skills during the first three years of formal schooling through rote memorization. In contrast, the community of Lacey City recognized the parents’ role in young children’s literacy learning. Historically, Karen parents did not have a direct role in this form of learning. During this study, Karen parents attended the Drop-In program with their children. During the sessions, they learned about early learning activities (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) by participating in activities alongside their children or by observing them engaged in play. However, for those Karen parents who chose to enroll their children in English language pre-school programs, they might only gain information about how to support their children’s learning through face-to-face correspondence with the teacher in English or through written notices, also in English (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

In this chapter, I described how literacy was enacted within the activity system of the resettled Karen refugee community and how the system responded to contradictions (Engeström, 2001) within the system. Drawing primarily from secondary sources, I began by describing historical cultural practices situated in multiple social activity domains and discussed the beliefs that shaped these practices. Next, I described current literacy practices I observed within the community. From this discussion, I identified an innovative form of activity (Engeström, 2001) within the system that resulted from the introduction into the system of a new type of mediating text, bureaucratic text. I concluded by describing the children’s activity within the social activity domain of play in two English language early learning settings, discussed how this activity also represented a new element within the system, and speculated on how Karen parents learned of their role in this new type of activity.

In the next chapter, I discuss how, through their participation in a bilingual family literacy program for immigrant and refugee families, Karen parents learned to take on a new role
in their young children’s literacy learning and describe how they transformed activity within the system.
CHAPTER 5: LITERACY PRACTICES WITHIN THE SOCIAL ACTIVITY DOMAIN OF PLAY IN PALS

Introduction

In this chapter, I first re-introduce the research context, Parents as Literacy Supporters (PALS) in Immigrant and Refugee Communities by describing the physical setting in which the program took place and outlining the structure of the program at this site. I then highlight the underlying beliefs of the bilingual family literacy program and identify literacy practices within the program. Next, in order to understand the role culture plays in these practices, drawing on observational data from my field notes, I describe individual literacy events and identify the cultural tools and the participant structures that mediate activity within the event. I conclude by summarizing the form of learning supported within the PALS program.

The Research Context

As I described in Chapter 1, the research context was the PALS program situated in an elementary school in Lacey City. The local school district administered the program. The program was co-facilitated by Joanne, an English-speaking elementary school teacher, and Zeyar. I received permission from the school district to observe activity within the program. I also received permission from the program facilitators to use their classroom as a site within my study. In this section, I draw on observational data from my field notes to describe the physical setting in which programming took place and explain how the co-facilitators structured the program at this site.

The Setting

The majority of the sessions were held in the multipurpose room; however, due to scheduling conflicts, some of the sessions had to be moved to an empty classroom. Whenever I
entered the multipurpose room, I was struck by how disorganized it was. As the name suggests, the room was used for multiple purposes. However, at times, it seemed as though its primary purpose was storage. For example, the custodian continually stacked miscellaneous cardboard boxes and plastic, bucket-shaped chairs in the corner to the right of the doorway. Additionally, the various groups who used the room tended to scatter the mismatched wooden tables randomly around the room (see Figure 5.1).

**Figure 5.1. Multipurpose Room**

![Multipurpose Room Diagram]

The music teacher used the far left corner of the room to store a variety of musical instruments, including a piano, xylophone, and a drum set, as well as a large television set on a metal trolley, and numerous black metal music stands. The instruments, trolley, and stands were pushed together against the back wall. In an attempt to discourage children from playing on the instruments, someone had placed a portable chalkboard adjacent to the piano. These two pieces blocked the children’s access to the drums. Additionally, portable keyboards were stored on top of built-in cupboards lining the inside wall, and a class set of ukuleles, in a portable cubby holder.
positioned to the left of the door leading to the hall. The floor was partially covered by a low-grade carpet.

It appeared as though the room was also used to host events that included food. In the back corner, along the outside wall, stood an old refrigerator. There was an outside door to the right of the fridge and a counter to the left. Perched on the counter beside the fridge was an old microwave oven. There was a sink at the far end of the counter, and beyond that, another outside door. Two rectangular folding tables were set up in front of the counter.

The room contained very little print. Other than the customary exit signs above the two outside doors, the only other print in the room was a set of quotes in English about music someone had printed and taped to the front doors of the storage cupboards. The room did include a chalkboard. Joanne often used this board to display the day’s agenda and the key ideas for the session.

Prior to the arrival of the families for each session, Joanne, Zeyar, and I set up the chairs so that they formed a semi-circle facing the chalkboard. We moved any freestanding tables to the periphery of the room, usually against the stacks of chairs and boxes. Joanne set up the craft and writing activities on the tables and distributed the books for reading on the floor around the periphery of the carpeted area. Joanne also printed the agenda for the session in English on the chalkboard and attached chart paper on which were printed the key ideas immediately alongside the agenda. Only the key ideas for the first session, “ABCs and Learning”, were translated into Karen. During the second “Parent-Only” segment in each session, volunteers took the snacks from the refrigerator and set them up on the tables in front of the counter.

At various times during the year, the multipurpose room was in use, meaning that PALS was relocated to the Aboriginal Studies classroom (see Figure 5.2). This room faced the front of
the school. Families could enter the room from the outside without having to go through the school. The room was similar to the multipurpose room in that it had a counter and sink. However, since it was used primarily as a classroom, the space included a teacher’s desk, numerous round tables, student sized chairs, filing cabinets, and a portable white board. The counter running under the windows was used to store large desktop computers. The classroom teacher had decorated the walls with Aboriginal art and cultural posters. On the set of shelves to the right of her desk, she stored classroom supplies such as books, worksheets, and writing tools.

**Figure 5.2. Aboriginal Studies Classroom**

The set-up routine in this space was similar to that in the multipurpose room. Prior to the arrival of the families, we did our best to push the tables away from the centre of the room. We took the students’ chairs and formed a small semi-circle facing the chalkboard. As she did in the multipurpose room, Joanne printed out the day’s agenda on the chalkboard and pinned up chart paper with the key ideas alongside the agenda. We set up all of the centres on tables around the room. Since there was no refrigerator, volunteers brought the snacks into the room and set them out on one of the tables during the second “Parent-Only” segment.
The Structure of the Program

To reiterate, PALS in Lacey City was a bilingual family literacy program; each session was conducted in English with translation into the first language of the participants, thus it reflected an additive bilingualism environment (Cummins et al., 2006). Each session began with parents and facilitators coming together to engage in what Wells (2000) called a knowledge building dialogue, while the children played in another room under the supervision of an English-speaking caregiver. The facilitators also used this time to introduce the key ideas for the session. During the segment, Joanne asked the parents questions in English, with Zeyar providing translation into Karen. In general, she asked questions to elicit information from the parents. For example, during the first session, she asked the parents for suggestions as to what they would like to see included in the PALS program during the season (Field notes, October 9, 2013). At other times, she prompted the parents to reflect on their childhood experiences or on their experiences with their own children in the home. For example, she asked parents to share the names of rhymes they remembered from their childhood (Field notes, December 11, 2013) and the types of things their children liked to play with (Field notes, April 9, 2014). The parents would reply in Karen with Zeyar translating into English. The Karen parents also asked questions of Joanne in Karen in order to better understand their child’s literacy behaviours in the home. For example, one mother asked Joanne how to help a child who pronounced words incorrectly (Field notes, February 5, 2014). Joanne replied to the questions in English with Zeyar translating into Karen. The segment ended with Joanne describing the activities available to the families within the various activity centres.

Immediately following the “Parent-Only” segment, the children were brought back into the room to participate in “Parent-Child Together Time” (PACT). At this site, Joanne chose to
begin this segment by reading the bilingual picture book that the families would receive at the conclusion of that session. She referred to this as “All Together Time”. In general, Joanne read the text in English to the children who were seated on the floor directly in front of her while the parents observed from their chairs around the periphery. Following Joanne’s reading of the book, the families were free to visit any or all of the centres and engage in the activities in the language of their choice. To conclude the session, parents and facilitators came together a second time to talk about the parents’ experiences working with their children. At the conclusion of each session, participants were presented with a variety of take-home materials, including the bilingual picture book shared in the PACT.

**Literacy Practices within the Program**

In this section, I drew information from *PALS: Family Literacy Resource* (Anderson & Morrison, 2010) and from my expert interview with one of the co-creators of PALS to identify literacy practices promoted within the program. I begin by highlighting the underlying beliefs of the program. I then review the activities within the individual sessions and infer the literacy practices that arise from these activities.

**The Underlying Beliefs of the Program**

Parents as Literacy Supporters (PALS) in Immigrant and Refugee Communities is a bilingual family literacy program that works with families to support the early literacy development of their young children. PALS supports a “learning through play” approach (Vygotsky, 1978), in which children acquire early literacy and numeracy skills as they participate in activities under the guidance of a more skilled other, namely an adult. In their introduction to *PALS: Family Literacy Resource*, Anderson and Morrison (2010), the co-creators of the program, shared the following belief:
That children learn literacy by participating in a wide variety of literacy activities and events, and that there is no single or indeed “best” way for children to learn literacy. Thus, while we value storybook reading, we believe there are multiple pathways into literacy and we attempt to reflect this in the PALS activities and strategies (p. 13).

Hence, PALS is based on the assumption that, although families provide early learning opportunities in the home, many parents want to learn how to support their children’s acquisition of literacy in ways that are consistent with literacy practices they will encounter once they enter formal schooling (Anderson & Morrison, 2010). Accordingly, the activities to which the families have access in the program focus on lettered representation (Kress, 1997). Parents are encouraged to organize their children’s opportunities to participate in school-related activities by shaping their contributions in school-like conversations and engaging with them in activities as peers in play (Rogoff, 2003).

**Literacy Practices**

PALS as a program consists of early literacy topics organized into 10 individual sessions. As I described in Chapter 1, these topics were identified by a series of focus groups with parents, caregivers, early childhood educators, and administrators. One of the program’s creators then worked with two kindergarten teachers to select activities for inclusion in the program. They deemed an activity to be appropriate for inclusion if it was research-based, developmentally appropriate, and supported early literacy learning (i.e., open-ended, multisensory, and play based) (F. Morrison, interview, November 13, 2013).

Facilitators at each site draw ideas from *PALS: Family Literacy Resource* (Anderson & Morrison, 2010). This resource contains support materials for each of the 10 sessions of the program. The support materials provide a list of suggested centres for each session along with a
description of activities and a list of materials needed to complete the activities. There is no set order to the presentation of the sessions during the program year. Site facilitators are free to arrange the sessions as they see fit. The sessions I observed were arranged in the following order:


In order to ascertain the literacy practices within PALS, I read through the list of suggested activities for each of the 10 sessions and made a list of the mediating texts within each activity. I then read the description of the activity to clarify how the text functioned within the activity. For example, in the session, “ABCs and Learning”, one of the suggested activities was “Read Alphabet Books” (Anderson & Morrison, 2010, p 52). For this activity, I identified the text as being an alphabet book and the mediating activity as reading. The results are presented in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1. Suggested Activities in PALS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Activities</th>
<th>Writing Activities</th>
<th>Design “Making” Activities</th>
<th>Play Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• reading alphabet books</td>
<td>• scribbling</td>
<td>• making “o”-shaped cereal names</td>
<td>• performing with puppets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• reading/singing nursery rhymes</td>
<td>• building names</td>
<td>• making name bracelets</td>
<td>• playing with play-doh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• reading big books</td>
<td>• tracing letters</td>
<td>• making “I Can Read” books</td>
<td>• playing with Lego</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• reading familiar books</td>
<td>• forming letters</td>
<td>• making stop signs</td>
<td>• exploring websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• reading picture books</td>
<td>• writing letters</td>
<td>• making door hanger</td>
<td>• playing with bubbles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• telling oral stories</td>
<td>• writing words</td>
<td>• making bookmark</td>
<td>• playing with scarves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• reading individual letters/words</td>
<td>• stamping letters</td>
<td>• making crafts</td>
<td>• playing outdoors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• copying words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• dictating stories</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• writing stories</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• conducting surveys</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Activities</td>
<td>Writing Activities</td>
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<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>• making a little book</td>
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<td>• making a pointer</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• making a musical instrument</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• making a mask</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Thus, within the activity centres, the facilitators provide families the opportunity to read, interact with, and produce printed text in English. For example, families can read different genres and forms of printed text including picture books and alphabet letters, build, scribble and write individual letters and words, and create artifacts using a variety of craft materials. Additionally, they can explore a variety of props both in and out of the classroom. To reiterate, F. Morrison (Interview, November 13, 2013) stated that they selected for inclusion in the program only those activities which research had shown support a child’s early literacy learning. My review of the suggested activities from the PALS resource book suggests that literacy practices within the PALS program include parents and children reading books, interacting with letters, forming and writing individual letters and words, and creating artifacts. The language of the texts is English. Non-print practices allow families to engage with materials that promote different cognitive levels of play (Christie, 1991) and include parents and children playing with props (e.g., toy cars, toy dinosaurs), construction materials (e.g., blocks, crayons, and scissors), and Play-doh. Facilitators encourage parents and caregivers to support their children by participating directly in the activity alongside them (e.g., reading book with child) or by scaffolding their involvement in the activity (e.g., directing child how to print letter) (Rogooff, 2003). In the next section, I describe how literacy was enacted within the “All Together” and the “Parent-Child Together” segments of the program.
Observed Literacy Events within PALS

In this section, I describe literacy events I observed taking place during PALS. In Chapter 2, I defined activity as the three-way interaction between participants (subject), situated practice (object), and social activity domain (context). Since PALS espouses a “learning through play” philosophy, I understand the social activity domain to be play. Within the framework of the activity system, I understand activity in the form of literacy events to be shaped by values, attitudes, and beliefs of the culture and mediated by cultural tools and the division of labour during the event. Since the roots of the PALS program were situated within the Lacey City community (see Chapter 1), activities promoted in the program were shaped by the values, beliefs, and attitudes of the Lacey City community.

As I described in Chapter 3, I attended all 10 sessions of the family literacy program during the 2013-2014 program year. I entered the site as a participant observer and observed and documented literacy events within the program. I engaged in literacy events only when asked. The following discussion includes descriptions from my field notes and organizes literacy events by event type, beginning with reading.

Reading Events

During reading events, I observed facilitators, parents, and children engage with various genres of printed texts using multiple modes. In the following section, I describe the structure of reading events within two segments of the program, “All Together Time” and “Parent-Child Together Time”.

Group reading events. This first excerpt from my field notes demonstrates how the co-facilitators shared a bilingual picture book with the children and parents in “All Together Time” during the ninth session, “Literacy and Play”.
The children were brought back into the room. Before they were reunited with their
moms, Joanne invited them to sit on the floor in front of her. She held the dual-language
take-home book, *The Three Billy Goat’s Gruff* (Barkow & Johnson, 2004), so that it was
facing the children. The parents remained seated in their chairs around the periphery,
facing Joanne. Although the book was translated into Karen, Joanne did not make
mention of this. She read the text, pointed to some of the pictures, asked the children the
odd question, and prompted the children to say the repeated text with her. During the
reading, Zeyar “acted it out” silently by placing felt shapes on the board according to the
story. After the story was finished, the children returned to their parents and spread out
among the various centres. (Field notes, Session 9, April 9, 2014)

In this example, the book mediating the event was the translated book, *Three Billy Goats Gruff*
(Barkow & Johnson, 2004). Joanne sat on a chair, facing the children. Zeyar sat alongside her,
also facing the children. This arrangement allowed the co-facilitators to model an approach to
book reading for the parents, who were seated around the periphery. Joanne’s approach to book
reading reflected the didactic-interactional approach described by Dickinson and Smith (1994).
In this approach, interaction between the adult and the children during book reading is based on
immediate recall. Joanne read the text, in English, as it was printed. During the reading, she read,
used gesture (e.g., pointing), and asked the children questions in order to engage them in the
reading event. For example, while pointing at the pictures, she asked questions, (e.g., “What’s
that?”, “What did the troll say?”, “What does flower start with?”), and prompted the children to
respond to the text (e.g., “Can you guys say it like that?”). As Joanne read the text, Zeyar placed
the felt figures on the felt board. Although the felt figures were part of the take-home package
the parents were to receive, at no time during the reading event did the co-facilitators draw
attention to the felt figures. Throughout the event, the children’s role was to listen to the story and respond to the questions and prompts in English. The parents became peripheral participants to the event as they watched Joanne read the text and prompt the children.

The provincial coordinator for PALS, Cheryl, had organized a facilitator’s workshop in September, prior to the start of the school year. Joanne and Zeyar invited me to attend the workshop with them. In response to the theme of the day, during one of our informal conversations, Joanne mentioned that she would like to incorporate more traditional Karen practices within the sessions. She suggested that they share oral and print-based stories with the children and parents. Two months later, in the second session, “Storybook Reading”, instead of taking the children to the library for Storytime as was suggested in the curriculum resource, I observed the following event during “All Together Time”:

The children returned to the room. Joanne invited them to sit on the floor, facing the large felt board. She then stood off to the side. Zeyar was sitting on one side of the board. One of the mothers was sitting on the other side. Zeyar and the mother engaged the children in retelling the story, *Little Red Riding Hood* in Karen using the felt board. The Karen mother narrated the story while Zeyar manipulated the felt images. The children listened and watched quietly. The other parents, seated around the periphery of the room, also watched and listened. (Field notes, Session 2, November 6, 2013)

In this example, the Karen mother modeled the telling of the story while Zeyar placed the felt pieces on the board. Similar to the reading event I observed taking place in the Karen Sunday school (see Chapter 4), this event included the simple retelling of the story. However, unlike the storytelling event in the Sunday school, the mother did not use questioning during or after the story. The children listened while the parents watched from the periphery. Interestingly, similar
to other group book-reading events, this event took place in only one language but this time, in Karen.

In addition to sharing bilingual picture books and re-telling traditional fairy tales during “All Together Time”, Joanne and Zeyar also shared picture books that were based on familiar childhood rhymes. For example, during the fourth session, “Rhythm, Raps, and Rhymes”, Joanne introduced the parents to the different ways of sharing this genre of picture book with children. I described the event in my field notes as follows:

Joanne mentioned to the parents that there were books that were actually texts of popular songs and suggested that this might be a good way to have the children ‘read’. When the children came back, she had them sit on the floor in front of her as she sat on a chair. The parents remained seated around the periphery. Joanne led the children in singing, “If You’re Happy and You Know It”. She then showed them the book with the printed text and sang the song again, this time, pointing at the words as she sang. The children watched. Next, she showed them the teddy bear book. Instead of reading through the book, she had the children stand up and sing the song with her. (Field notes, Session 4, December 11, 2013)

Although the arrangement of this event was the same as the two previous events, the way in which Joanne engaged the children in talk during the event was different. Instead of reading the text and asking the children questions, Joanne engaged in a less cognitively demanding form of talk Dickinson and Smith (1994) term, “skill routine” by delivering the text first in the form of a song and then by connecting the words she was singing to those printed in the text of the book. Joanne invited the children into the event by encouraging them to sing along with her in English
and perform the actions. Throughout the event, the parents remained seated on their chairs around the periphery.

Finally, during the ninth session titled, “Print in the Community”, the focus was on environmental print. Prior to taking the families on an environmental print walk through the community, during “All Together Time”, Joanne shared the non-fiction, wordless picture book, *I Read Signs* (Hoban, 1987). The book is comprised of a series of photos of actual road signs common to urban communities. The following excerpt from my field notes describes how Joanne engaged with the photos within the book in order to prepare the children for the walk:

Once the children were seated on the floor, Joanne announced that today, we would be going for a walk to look for signs. She then showed them the book, *I Read Signs* (Hoban, 1987) and read the title. The book was wordless. On each page, there was a picture of a sign from within the community. Joanne would point to the sign as a whole and speculate on what it meant. She then asked if the children saw any letters in the sign. The children responded by yelling out individual letters. Joanne then read the sign and explained the meaning. As she made her way through the book, her focus switched from letters to words. She asked the children to identify the sign. For those the children could not identify, she read the sign while gesturing to the word and then asked the children to repeat it. (Field notes, Session 9, April 30, 2013)

In this example, in addition to modeling for parents how to read the text, Joanne modeled cognitively challenging talk (Dickinson & Smith, 1994) to prompt the children to think about the meaning of the sign. For example, each time she turned the page, she would say, “I wonder what this sign means?” She would then focus on the individual letters within the word (e.g., “Do you see any letters in this sign?”) or on the word itself (e.g., “It says …”, “Can you say …?”). The
children would yell out individual letters or make suggestions as to what they thought the sign said. The entire event took place in English only. Thus, Joanne engaged the children in a literate form of discourse (Rogoff, 2003), similar to that to which they would encounter once they entered formal schooling.

**Individual reading events.** During the “Parent-Child Together Time”, parents and children were free to visit each of the centres and engage informally in the activities in the language of their choice. Shared book reading between adults and children is promoted in family literacy programs as an activity to prepare children for the form of reading instruction they will receive in school (Bus, van IJzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995) and has been identified as a literacy practice in other bilingual family literacy programs (e.g., Singh et al., 2015). Not surprisingly, many of the sessions within the PALS program focused specifically on reading (e.g., “ABCs and Learning”, “Print in Our Community”, “Storybook Reading”, “Learning to Read”). Additionally, throughout the year, the families had access to print in the form of books at individual activity centres. The following example took place during the second session, “Storybook Reading”. This session was held in the classroom setting, thus the texts were arranged on tables instead of on the floor, as was custom when the session was held in the multipurpose room. I made the following observation of an event involving one of focal children, Sam and his mother, Paw Paw:

Sam and his mom, Paw Paw, made their way to the Big Book centre. Although the space was rather crowded, mother and son were able to look at three of the books (English-only) made available to them at the table. In general, Paw Paw selected the book, opened it, positioned it on the table, and then pointed at various images on each individual page. From where I was standing, it sounded as though she was asking Sam questions in Karen,
perhaps what the name of the image was. Sam would say the name of the object in English before Paw Paw turned the page. (Field notes, Session 2, November 6, 2013)

As a child living in a Karen village, Paw Paw did not attend school (see Chapter 6). As I mentioned in Chapter 1, she did not speak any English. During this reading event, she guided Sam by selecting the book, opening it, and positioning it on the table in front of them. Then, in contrast to the group reading events in “All-Together Time”, she did not read the text to Sam. Instead, her attempt at reading the English text was governed by the pictures within the book and not by the story (Sulzby, 1985). At first glance, her actions appeared to reflect the type of engagement Joanne had modeled during group reading events in that she structured Sam’s contribution to the conversation by pointing to individual images and asking him rote-like, known-answer questions before turning the page. However, instead of asking the questions in English, as had been the case in the group event, Paw Paw asked the questions in her first language, Karen. Sam participated in the event by looking at the text and by responding to her questions orally, in English.

At other times during “Parent-Child Together Time”, I observed the parents engage in these same behaviours (e.g., pointing, labeling, asking questions) with texts that were not in the form of a book. In PALS, families had access to print in a variety of textual forms, such as magnetic alphabet letters, alphabet puzzle pieces, and various digital texts such as educational games on the computer. I observed them engage in a similar form of rote practice with the objects. For example, I observed the following event involving another one of the focal children and her mother during the first session, “ABCs and Learning”:

At one point, Isabelle was sitting by herself, on the floor, putting together one of the alphabet puzzles. Emma joined her once the puzzle was assembled. The two of them
reviewed the letters together, with Isabelle pointing to the letter that accompanied the picture and the two of them saying the name of the letter together, in English. (Field notes, Session 1, October 9, 2013)

Isabelle and Emma similarly engaged with alphabet text and pictures while playing a game on a laptop computer during the seventh session, “Tiny Techies”:

Emma sat on the chair directly in front of the computer. Isabelle had pulled up a second chair so that she could sit beside her. I observed them as they were playing a game of concentration using letters and pictures. The instructions on the screen were in English. Emma clicked on a card and it turned over. Her mother then pointed to another card. Emma would click on this card. Once Isabelle discovered that they were looking for matching pairs (letter to word), she started to direct Emma as to which card to turn over. Isabelle spoke to Emma in Karen except when identifying the letter by name. This she did in English. (Field notes, Session 7, February 26, 2014)

In both of these examples, Isabelle and Emma were participating in an event in which the mediating text was an instructional material associated with play (Christie, 1991). In the first event, the alphabet letters were in the form of a jigsaw puzzle. Isabelle had assembled the jigsaw puzzle by herself prior to her daughter’s arrival at the centre. She then sat alongside Emma on the floor, and pointed at each individual letter, as they said the English name of the letter in unison, in a fashion similar to the parent-child dyad engaged in a book-reading event in the study by Quadros and Sarroub (2016). The language of the event was Karen. In the second event, the alphabet letters were in digital form. Here, Isabelle and Emma played the game together, with Isabelle assisting Emma with the selection and identification of the card and Emma controlling
the mouse. Again, although Isabelle identified the letters in English, she spoke to Emma throughout the event in Karen.

Over the year, I began to notice that not all reading events involved parents guiding their child’s engagement with texts. Children often arrived at the program in the care of another one of the participating families or moved freely through the space, engaging with others in events within the various centres. The latter reflects the structure of activity I described within the church (see Chapter 4). In terms of the former, as I described in Chapter 4, not all of the Karen parents attended school prior to their arrival in Canada. Thus, rather than scaffolding their child’s engagement with the text, these parents often engaged with the text as a learner alongside their child. I observed the following event involving my focal child, Sam, during the ninth session “Print in the Community”:

Sam, his friend, and his friend’s father made their way to the area in which were placed a grouping of small books. All the books were English-only texts. The two boys sat side-by-side on the floor, while the father crouched beside them. All three looked at the books individually. Sam looked at each page. Occasionally, he would point to pictures and say something. At one point, his friend’s father tried to show Sam something from his own book, by pointing at the page and saying something in Karen. (Field notes, Session 9, April 30, 2014)

I noticed that Sam had come to the session with a friend and was under the supervision of the friend’s father. Joanne and Zeyar told me later in the session that this father had not attended school in Burma and had little facility with English (Field notes, April 30, 2014). Here, he participated as a learner in the event alongside his own son and Sam. The three arrived at the centre together and attempted to read the easy-to-read books from the pictures rather than from
the print (Sulzby, 1985). They each selected a book and positioned it on the floor. The boys sat side-by-side, while the father crouched beside them. Instead of the father guiding the children through the text, all three engaged with their own texts, sharing them with each other by pointing to individual images and speaking in a combination of English (Sam) and Karen (the father). This arrangement reflects an aspect of the Karen education system in that students are placed in a level that reflects their ability, not their age. The father in this example did not attend school in the village or camp. His actions suggest that he understood himself to be a learner and, thus, participated in the event as a learner alongside his son.

During the third session, “Early Math”, Sam, who had been working alongside his mother at the centre that prompted children to count and record the number of objects on a tally sheet, found the math-themed books and engaged me in the following event:

Sam saw me, so he brought his book over to me. He opened it, put it down on the table, and then proceeded to identify in English the different shapes he saw on each page. When he finished, he jumped down and said that he wanted another book. He returned with a counting book. I helped him turn the pages. He counted in English the number of drinks that the father poured on each page. I assisted by pointing to the glasses. Once this book was finished, he returned with the book, *Pete the Cat and His Four Groovy Buttons* (Litwin, 2012). He turned the pages, counted the buttons, vocalized the equation and provided the total number of buttons in each picture. (Field notes, Session 3, November 27, 2013)

Sam initiated the event, while his mother remained at the counting centre. Similar to the reading event I described above, we stood side-by-side at the table, with the book open in front of us. Sam demonstrated book-handling practices similar to those he had observed during other reading
events. I assisted him by helping him turn the individual pages. Again, his reading attempt was focused on the pictures rather than on the print (Sulzby, 1985). He labeled shapes, counted and totaled the number of objects in the image, and vocalized the equation. I assisted him by pointing to individual objects while he counted.

To sum up, reading events took place in two segments of the program. In general, during group reading events in “All Together Time”, the facilitators demonstrated for parents an interactional approach (Dickinson & Smith, 1994) to book reading. Although the program was offered in both English and the first language of the participants, reading events in this segment of the program were conducted in only one language, with English being the predominant language, and promoted the reading of picture books over the sharing of oral stories and the singing of rhymes and songs. Regardless of the genre of text, each event was similar in terms of the arrangement of participants and their method of engagement with the text. Specifically, the English-speaking facilitator read the English text of the bilingual book to the children and structured their participation in the event by focusing their attention on the picture or the print and asking them questions, again, in English. In contrast, during individual reading events at the various activity centres within the “Parent-Child Together” segment, parents structured their child’s participation in a form of rote practice with texts by pointing to images and prompting the children for the label in their first language or remained on the periphery as the child made meaning of the texts on their own in English or under the guidance of another adult. In the next section, I discuss writing events within the program.

**Writing Events**

Although the program devoted a full session on learning to write, Joanne regularly stocked individual activity centres with a variety of implements (e.g., pencils, felt tip markers, chalk) and
forms (e.g., whiteboards, piece(s) of paper, chalkboard). Activities within these centres followed Clay’s (1979) sequence of early letter concepts (i.e., scribble, mock hand-writing, mock letters, real letters plus inventions, acceptable English letters) and reflected the belief that early printing activities should involve high interest texts, such as the child’s own name. Thus, within the centres, adults encouraged children to form letters and numbers, build or print their name, and copy or write individual letters or words. For example, during the third session, “Early Math”, families had access to number stencils with which they could create rubbings of numbers (Field notes, November 27, 2013). During the sixth session, “Learning to Write”, the children were encouraged to form Roman letters using concrete materials such as Play-doh and bendable wax strips and to form letters with their fingers on bags of paint and on plastic tactile letters (Field notes, February 5, 2014).

The child’s name was a popular genre of text within the program. Names convey to children the understanding that print carries a message (Clay, 1979). During the first session, “ABCs and Learning”, I observed Isabelle demonstrate for Emma how to build her name by selecting and positioning magnetic alphabet letters on the door of the refrigerator in the multipurpose room (Field notes, October 9, 2013). Other Karen parents took a more interactive approach to name building. During the seventh session, “Tiny Techies”, I observed the following event involving Claire and her mother, Hser Paw:

Claire sat on the chair in front of the computer while Hser Paw crouched to her right. Hser Paw had selected one of the websites from the list Joanne had provided. The game they had selected was a word-building game, in which they were presented with letters of the alphabet with which they could build words and display them on an image of a refrigerator. Hser Paw would say the letter name (“Where is ‘R’?”). Claire would then
point to the letter from the list and Hser Paw would drag it over to the fridge. She chose all upper case letters. They spelled the names of all their family members. Initially, Hser Paw placed the letters on the freezer door, just as they did at home. However, due to space constraints, she had to continue on the fridge door. They spoke to each other in English, including saying the individual letter names in English. (Field notes, Session 7, February 26, 2014)

At the beginning of the session, Joanne had guided the parents in English through the steps required to access this particular site. She had also provided each parent with a list of websites in English from which they could copy the web address. In this event, Hser Paw and Claire sat side-by-side at the computer. Hser Paw initiated the event by accessing the website and choosing the game. Their goal was to build the names of each member of their family using the letters on the screen and then to display the names on the image of the refrigerator. Instead of having Claire engage in close observation during the event (Gregory et al., 2010), Hser Paw structured Claire’s participation by asking her in English to locate the specific letters. Hser Paw then positioned the letter on the screen in order to complete the name. Hser Paw and Claire spoke to each other in English throughout the event.

Many times, the opportunity for children to build individual names happened during the making of a craft. For example, I observed the following event during the first session, “ABCs and Learning”:

Sam and his mom went to the Cheerios centre first. They positioned themselves side-by-side at the table. Paw Paw formed the letters of Sam’s name with glue and then directed Sam to place the cheerios onto the glue to form each letter. (Field notes, Session 1, October 9, 2013)
In this event, Sam and his mother assembled the craft together, silently. The purpose of the centre was to create a nameplate using o-shaped cereal. Joanne had prepared the cardstock ahead of time, thus providing families with *what is to hand* (Kress, 1997). With Sam watching, Paw formed each letter of his name in English with glue. She then pointed to where Sam needed to place the individual pieces of cereal in order to complete each individual letter. Sam’s role was simply to place the cereal on the glue.

Throughout the year, I observed the children engaged in scribbling. For example, I saw Claire, Sam, and Emma scribble on the chalkboard using a paintbrush and water (Field notes, February 5, 2014), and Sam draw shapes and squiggles on rolls of paper using sidewalk chalk (Field notes, February 5, 2014) and on white boards using a felt-tip marker (Field notes, October 9, 2013). Children engage in scribbling activities on their own in order to practice forming letters (Clay, 1979) and to represent meaning (Kress, 1997). I observed Claire engage in similar attempts at writing in the pre-school (see Chapter 4). However, while we were waiting for families to arrive for the fifth session, “Learning to Read”, I noticed Emma investigating one of the centres on her own while making similar marks on paper using a felt-tip marker. I made the following entry in my field notebook:

> While we were waiting to start the session, Emma found the writing table. She picked up one of the clipboards to which was attached a sheet with the heading, “Write the Room” and found a pink felt-tip marker. She turned to me and said, “I am a doctor” and then began to wander around, looking at things, and making markings on her paper. (Field notes, Session 5, January 15, 2014)

Emma initiated the event and structured her own engagement in accordance with the text she found on the table. Joanne had printed sheets with the heading, “Write the Room” and had
attached each individual sheet to a small clipboard. Emma saw the paper on the clipboard and associated this text with being a doctor, a fact she stated orally. She proceeded to investigate items on her own around the room, making notes (language undetermined) on her clipboard as she went. Thus, instead of scribbling in order to practice forming letters, she appeared to be inventing words (Clay, 1979) while enacting the role of doctor (see Figure 5.3).

**Figure 5.3. Emma’s Text**

![Image of Emma's Text](image)

(January 15, 2014)

Since the children were at the early stages of writing, parents and other adults often scaffolded their early attempts at forming letters in English. I observed Zeyar, the Karen-speaking facilitator demonstrate how to form letters by tracing the shape of the letter with her finger on a Ziploc bag filled with paint while both the child and her mother watched (Field notes, February 5, 2014). However, given that many Karen children arrived at school without having held a writing instrument, such as a pencil, teachers in schools in the Karen villages and Thai refugee camps took a more direct approach to teaching them how to form letters in Karen or in Burmese. Teachers taught children how to use a pencil to form letters by placing their hand directly over that of the child (Field notes, July 26, 2013). The following example demonstrates
this traditional form of scaffolding Karen parents brought to the session. The event took place in the fifth session, “Learning to Read”:

Isabelle and Emma then moved over to the 2-piece puzzles. Instead of assembling the puzzles, Isabelle pointed at the word or at individual letters within the word and prompted Emma to print the letter or the full word. Isabelle would say the letter name in English and Emma would try to print the letter. The task was quite difficult for Emma, so Isabelle sat beside her and helped her form the letter by putting her hand over that of Emma. Although Isabelle said the name of the individual letter in English, her informal talk with Emma was in Karen. (Field notes, Session 5, January 15, 2014)

The purpose of this particular centre was for the children to copy individual letters. In this event, Isabelle initially structured Emma’s participation in the event by saying the name of the letter orally, in English (Quadros & Sarroub, 2016). Since Emma was having difficulty with forming the individual letter in English, Isabelle assisted her directly by putting her hand over that of her daughter and guiding her through the act of forming the letter.

In sum, the Karen families had the opportunity to engage in writing events during the “Parent-Child Together” segment of PALS. During this segment, they primarily chose to build names and form individual letters. When using concrete items such as magnetic alphabet letters to build names or making a name plate with craft items, parents primarily modeled (Gregory, Ruby, & Kenner, 2010) the activity for the child by selecting and positioning the individual letters while the child watched, or structured the child’s engagement in the event by outlining the name and directing them where to position craft materials to complete the name, or by prompting them through gesture to identify the letter to be positioned within the name. Children structured their own participation in writing events by forming letters on their own while scribbling on the
chalkboard. Adults demonstrated how to form letters indirectly through modeling or taught children directly by placing their hand over that of the child as they wrote. In the next section, I discuss design events I observed within the program.

**Design Events**

Parents and children had plenty of opportunities to make things in the program. Each month, Joanne structured the families’ opportunity to participate in design events by stocking activity centres with craft materials to decorate artifacts, build theme-related props, and create texts. Over the year, I observed children choose to decorate artifacts on their own or under the supervision of an adult. I also noticed parents structure their child’s opportunity to observe how to build props and create texts or support the child in building their own props by assisting them according to their needs. Although many of the children engaged in similar events in other early learning settings (see Chapter 4), they learned how to create some of the texts in PALS by watching other adults.

Kress (1997) understood young children learning to read and write to be experienced meaning-makers in that they arrive in formal programs having made meaning “in any medium that is to hand” (p. 8) while playing at home. In contrast, the medium of choice in school is lettered representation or literacy, thus what is to hand in formal learning centres are those materials which educators value. Rather than actively transforming these materials to express meaning, Kress argued that children simply applied their meaning making skills “to materials which are already culturally formed” (p. 13).

In PALS at the Lacey City site, the most popular activity involved the children decorating pre-cut cardstock in order to create artifacts. Joanne would stock the centre with cardstock cut in the required shape (e.g., bookmark, pointer, door hangar) and provide a variety of craft materials
including alphabet stickers, stickers, glitter, feathers, googly eyes, glue, and felt-tip markers (see Figure 5.2).

**Figure 5.4. Sam’s Bookmark**

![Sam’s Bookmark](image)

(November 6, 2013)

I often saw parents assisting children directly with tasks that required fine motor skills such as positioning materials on the cardstock. For example, I observed the following event during the second session, “Storybook Reading”:

Sam and his mother began at the bookmark table. Sam selected a bookmark and a felt marker and proceeded to draw a face on the bookmark with the marker. Paw Paw, who was standing beside him, assisted by gluing eyes and feathers onto the paper once he had drawn the face. (Field notes, Session 2, November 6, 2013)

In this example, Sam initiated the event. Paw Paw assisted him by gluing the accessories onto the artifact to complete the design, thus, during this interaction, her form of assistance was based on Sam’s needs. However, in cases where precision gluing was not needed, children often initiated and engaged in the event on their own. For example, during the ninth session “Print in the Community”, I watched as Emma left her mother with the task of making the “I Can” scrapbook in order to decorate a door hangar of her own with alphabet stickers:
Emma wandered away from her mother and ended up at the door hangar centre. Initially, she found the letter ‘e’ on different sheets of stickers. She proceeded to stick the letters onto the knocker and then added the letter ‘y’ (e.g., eeey). She filled the rest of the space with random letters. (Field notes, Session 9, April 30, 2014)

Emma applied her meaning-making skills (Kress, 1997) to the set of alphabet stickers Joanne had provided for use in the activity centre. She attempted to form her name using the alphabet stickers as a way of decorating the door hangar. She correctly identified and positioned the first letter of her name, E, and then proceeded to fill up the space on the door hangar with random letters (see Figure 5.3).

**Figure 5.5. Emma’s Door Hangar**

(April 30, 2014)

A short time later, I observed Claire engage in the same activity with an adult:

Claire pushed her way through the other children and chose her hangar. She then took a sheet of letters and proceeded to peel and place the stickers alphabetically onto the hangar. She didn’t have a letter, ‘w’ in the same colour as the other stickers, so she took one from another sheet. After she had finished, she showed me her “ABCD”s. At one point, another mother came and sat with Claire. She appeared to be guiding her through

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9 The discrepancy between the letters described in the excerpt of the field note and the photo reflect the fact that the name “Emma” is a pseudonym.
the event at that point, although Claire had initiated it. (Field notes, Session 9, April 30, 2014)

In this event, Claire chose to engage in the craft. Her goal was to decorate the door hangar using all the letters of the alphabet in their correct sequence (see Figure 5.4). Although she was able to select and position a large number of the letters on her own, she looked to an adult to tell her the name of the next letter in the sequence and suggest where on the hangar she should position the letter. Taken together, these two examples demonstrate how the Karen children structured their own meaning-making with materials within the program. Emma chose to practice creating her name with individual letters, while Claire chose to re-create the alphabet, much like she had done in the pre-school with the alphabet puzzle (see Chapter 4), seeking assistance from a more experienced partner only when needed.

**Figure 5.6. Claire’s Door Hangar**

![Claire’s Door Hangar](image)

(April 30, 2014)

Joanne also structured the families’ opportunities to participate by providing them with materials to create artifacts that reflected the theme of the session. For example, during the eighth session, “Literacy and Play”, she printed out templates to make a mask of a goat. She stocked the centre with crayons, scissors, glue, and sticks (Field notes, April 9, 2014). Families were encouraged to colour the mask and then cut it out and attach it to the stick. Similarly, during the ninth session, “Print in the Community”, families had the opportunity to create stop
signs. Again, Joanne stocked the centre with printed templates of a stop sign, scissors, glue, sticks, and putty (Field notes, April 30, 2014). The purpose of the activity was for the children to create a road sign and then use it in the centre with the racetrack mat and toy cars. I observed the following two events during the ninth session, “Print in the Community”:

Example 1. Emma and her mother started out at the sign-building table. Isabelle cut out the signs while Emma sat alongside her, watching. (Field notes, April 30, 2014)

Example 2. Claire then moved onto the “Make a Sign” table with another mom. She cut out individual signs and glued them onto the sticks. She was also able to affix them to the putty so that they would stand upright. (Field notes, Session 9, April 30, 2014)

In the first example, it appeared as though Isabelle chose to model (Gregory et al., 2010) for Emma for how to create the artifact. In contrast, in Hser Paw’s absence, Claire structured her own participation in the activity and successfully completed the task on her own while another mother watched.

Finally, families were invited to create their own texts in PALS. For example, during the fifth session, “Learning to Read”, families were given a printed template to make an “I Like” booklet. They had the option to complete the individual pages by copying individual words, drawing and colouring pictures, or affixing stickers (Field notes, January 15, 2014). Similarly, as part of the sixth session, “Learning to Write”, in addition to creating an “I Like” booklet, families could create an “I Can Write” booklet in which they were to copy the word that went with the printed text on each individual page (i.e., I can write mom.) (Field notes, February 5, 2014). Again, the arrangement of, and engagement in the event varied by family. I observed the following two events during the ninth session, “Print in the Community” in which the families
were invited to create a scrapbook of words they could read by selecting, cutting out, and pasting images and logos of familiar items into a scrapbook:

Example 1. They moved to the scrapbook table. Again, Isabelle looked through the materials, cut out the pictures, and glued them into a scrapbook. She chose pictures of different foods, but no print. Emma wandered away from this table, preferring instead to decorate a door hanger. (Field notes, 30 April 2014)

Example 2. Sam, his friend, and his friend’s father moved to the scrapbook table. The father took a scrapbook and found a pamphlet with pictures of cars. He then carefully cut out the pictures (no print) of the cars and glued them onto a page in the scrapbook. Once he had finished, he chose letters from the sheet of letters and made the word stop on the page. Sam watched him do this. Sam then cut out two pictures of cars and glued them on the back of the scrapbook. He took a sheet of letters and randomly placed them on the page. (Field notes, Session 9, 30 April 2014)

In the first example, Isabelle and Emma arrived at the centre once they had finished making the road sign. Although she observed her mother create the scrapbook, Emma left the table before her mother had finished assembling the images, opting instead to structure her own learning by decorating her own door hanger. In the second example, Sam chose to structure his own learning by watching his friend’s father complete a page of the book on behalf of his son. Although his friend did not actively engage in the event, Sam gathered his own materials and engaged in the event on his own, imitating the father’s choices and actions.

In sum, during the year, I observed the families as they decorated artifacts such as bookmarks, pointers, and door hangars, cut out templates of familiar images and pasted them on sticks to be used as signs or masks, and created text forms such as name plates and “I Can Write”
scrapbooks using craft materials and logos and images from newspaper flyers and catalogues. In general, the parents chose to model (Gregory et al., 2010) how to create the artifacts while the child watched (e.g., creating an “I Can Write” scrapbook) or assisted the children directly with tasks that required fine motor skills (e.g., gluing). At times, the children directed their own engagement in the event (e.g., decorating a door hangar), looking to an adult for assistance when needed (e.g., sequencing alphabet stickers on door hangar). In the next section, I discuss play events within the program.

**Play Events**

Although activities within the PALS program were structured to support the child’s learning through play, one session had as its focus, play. The eighth session, “Linking Literacy and Play” took place in the early spring. In contrast to the activity centres in other sessions, Joanne had stocked the centres for this session with a variety of material to support different levels of cognitive play (Christie, 1991). These materials included cars, insects, dinosaurs, finger puppets, a toy train and track, and a set of Lego, complete with pre-assembled boats. The families were encouraged to visit each of the centres and engage in dramatic and constructive play alongside their children using materials provided by the program. This structure of play events differed from that of the play events in which many of the parents participated as children. As children, the Karen parents played outside, with other children, using natural materials (e.g., leaves, rocks, and mud) from the environment (Field notes, April 9, 2014). During the session, I made the following entries in my field notebook:

Example 1. Claire, her mother, and younger sister, were at the puppet centre. Claire had managed to place a puppet on each of her fingers. By the time I arrived, she was directing her younger sister and Hser Paw to sit and face her so that she could perform with the
puppets. She used the tune from the “5 Little Ducks” song and made up her own lyrics. After each verse, she would stop her singing to count the puppets, in English, with her nose and then remove one of the finger puppets. Her mother watched from her spot on the floor. She spoke to her occasionally in Karen. Joanne also watched. (Field notes, Session 8, April 9, 2014)

Example 2. Emma and Isabelle were sitting on the floor, facing each other. The dinosaurs were paired up in a line, moving away from Emma and towards Isabelle. I heard Emma ask where the tree was. Isabelle replied, in English, saying, “Here is the tree. There are only two trees.” She then placed a small blue dinosaur on the back of a larger blue dinosaur. Emma saw me watching and asked, “What is this one?” and showed me a creature. I said that I thought it was a salamander. She repeated the word and then placed it in line with the others. (Field notes, Session 8, April 9, 2014)

Example 3. Sam and his mother sat on the floor facing each other in the Lego centre. He would pick up what was already made and then use it to smash things. He threw in the odd phrase or sentence in English while he manipulated the pieces. Paw Paw picked up a few of the pieces and tried to fit them together. I saw her attempt to engage in conversation with Sam. She speaks very softly, so I could not hear what she was saying. Sam looked at her while she was speaking, but I did not see if he replied to her comments. Eventually, she directed her attention to the Karen woman who was sitting at the car station and proceeded to engage with her in conversation. (Field notes, Session 8, April 9, 2014)

Although each of these events took place within the same session, each differed from the others in terms of the type of play, the materials used during play, the arrangement of participants, and/or their role in the event. All three events involved the child engaged in play
with a toy. In the first event, Claire structured her own participation in dramatic play (Christie, 1991) by choosing to use finger puppets to put on a show for her mother and younger sister. Prior to starting her song, Claire positioned her audience on the floor, facing her. She then sang a song to them in English. In the second example, Emma and her mother chose to engage in dramatic play (Christie, 1991) together using toy dinosaurs. They sat facing each other on the floor with the dinosaurs positioned in the space between them and engaged in a child-focused conversation. Emma asked her mother a question in English. Her mother answered the question, also in English, repositioning the toys as needed. Finally, in the third example, Sam and his mother also sat on the floor, facing each other. They both engaged in constructive play (Christie, 1991) with the Lego, but not with each other. Sam chose to use the Lego figures to smash other figures while uttering the occasional phrase or sentence in English. His mother chose to build things with the individual pieces. Paw Paw eventually stopped playing, opting instead to engage in a conversation in Karen with the Karen mother sitting to her right.

Later in the session, Joanne announced that we would spend the remainder of the “Parent-Child Together” time outside on the playground. We left the room through the door that opened onto the field and made our way to the school playground located on the side of the building, adjacent to the portable activity trailers. I summarized the functional play (Christie, 1991) I observed in my field notes as follows:

As soon as we arrived at the playground, Isabelle put Emma on the swing and pushed her. Sam went to one of the slides with some other boys and tried to walk up the slide. Paw Paw sat on the bench beside the slide with a number of other mothers and watched their children play. Claire led me to the climbing toys and asked me to spin her on one of the climbing poles. We then made our way to the big slide. Hser Paw and Claire’s younger
sister, Victoria, were also there as was Emma. Claire scrambled up the bars to the top.
Emma followed. They slid down in turn. Victoria arrived at the top. She started to cry, so
Claire and Emma went back up to help her. They came down as a group with Hser Paw
and Isabelle watching and cheering them on from the sidelines. Meanwhile, Sam and his
group of boys continued to run around the playground area. At one point, they were
standing on the wiggly bench with a few of the moms (Field notes, Session 8, April 9,
2014)
The children selected the individual piece of equipment that most interested them. In some cases,
their parent or another adult supported them in their play according to their needs by positioning
them in or on the equipment or by pushing or spinning them on the equipment. At other times,
these same parents and adults became participants alongside the children as they engaged with
the equipment. Other parents chose to sit on benches off to the side and visit with each other in
Karen while they watched their children play. At times, they showed their support by cheering
the children on. For the most part, the children structured their own play by running freely
through the space, engaging with various pieces of equipment, either alone or with other
children, in much the same way as I had observed other children engage in playground settings
during my walks through Lacey City (Field notes, July 19, 2013). They carried on conversations
with each other in English. Additionally, the older children looked after the needs of younger
ones. I had observed this type of behaviour during my observations in the Karen church and in
the community (see Chapter 4).

In sum, parents and children had the opportunity to engage in different forms of play
during the “Parent-Child Together” time. When visiting activity centres in the classroom,
children sang songs, animated toy figures, and investigated building materials. Outside, they
explored playground equipment, played with scarves, and blew bubbles. Thus, within the classroom, children structured their own participation in dramatic and constructive play, while outside, their play was functional and exploratory (Christie, 1991). Depending on the activity, parents either supported their child by watching from the sidelines (e.g., watching their children play on the playground equipment), by participating as a peer in the activity with the child (e.g., playing with toy animals) or by engaging with similar materials alongside the child (e.g., building figures with Lego). In general, the language of the events involving the children was English; however, I did observe parents less fluent in English speak to their child in Karen only.

**Results and Discussion**

In this chapter, I described how the facilitators modeled forms of adult-child engagement in literacy events during “All Together Time” and “Parent-child Together Time” and how the parents and children similarly engaged in literacy events at the individual centres. Overall, the program facilitators structured the families’ learning opportunities in the program. For each session, the facilitators chose from the list of suggested centres printed in *PALS Family Literacy Resource* (Anderson & Morrison, 2010). Many of the centres encouraged families to engage in school-related activities. For example, suggested centres in the session “ABCs and Learning” include “Read Alphabet Books”, “Write Invisible ABCs”, and “Find the Letters/Words” (p. 52-23). Similarly, in the session “Learning to Write”, suggested centres include, “Practice Printing”, “Write with Sidewalk Chalk”, and “Trace the Alphabet” (p. 141). For some of the activities, the manual suggests facilitators encourage parents to participate alongside their children (e.g., “Read Alphabet Books”, “Write Invisible ABCs”, “Find the Letters/Words”) while for others, it suggests allowing the children to structure their own participation (e.g., “Practice Printing”, “Trace the Alphabet”).
Table 5.1 summarizes the literacy events I observed in PALS. The lightly shaded area (e.g., subject, object, context) represents the literacy event. The remaining two columns summarize the cultural tools and participant structures mediating the event.

**Table 5.1. Summary of Observed Literacy Events within PALS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject: Participants</th>
<th>Object: Situated Practice</th>
<th>Context: Social Activity Domain</th>
<th>Mediation Means: Cultural Tools</th>
<th>Mediation Means: Participant structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent Child</td>
<td>Reading (rote practice with texts)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>picture book (E) alphabet letters (E) alphabet cards (E) speech (K) speech (E) gesture</td>
<td>Initiator: parent Participant: child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Adult</td>
<td>Reading (aspectual reading)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>picture book (E) language (E) gesture</td>
<td>Initiator: child Participant: adult Observer: parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Adult</td>
<td>Reading (aspectual reading)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>picture book (E) speech (E) gesture</td>
<td>Initiator: child Observer: parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Child</td>
<td>Writing (forming individual letters)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>alphabet letters (E) craft items action gesture</td>
<td>Initiator: parent Observer: child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Child</td>
<td>Writing (forming individual names)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>activity/word puzzle, educational webpage, computer (E) speech (E) gesture</td>
<td>Initiator: parent Participant: child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Child Parent</td>
<td>Writing (forming individual letters)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>Ziploc bag filled with paint action</td>
<td>Initiator: adult Observer: child Observer: parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Writing (scribbling)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>chalk chalkboard felt-tip markers white board paper pencil action</td>
<td>Initiator: child Observer: parent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From my review of the suggested activities within the PALS resource (Anderson & Morrison, 2010), I propose learning in PALS reflects aspects of a form of guided participation Rogoff (2003) described as “Academic Lessons in the Family” in which children learn “through participation in academic ways of interacting” (p. 302). In this form of learning, the role of the parent is to structure their child’s participation by shaping their contributions in school-like conversations (e.g., asking known-answer questions) or by organizing their child’s participation in school-related activities (e.g., picture book-reading). Furthermore, Rogoff suggested parents induce their children to participate in activities by engaging with them as peers in play or as
peers in child-focused conversation. Children structure their own participation in learning through “practice and play with routines and roles” (p. 298).

As participants in PALS, during literacy events within the social activity domain of play, the Karen parents appeared to be taking up the responsibility of structuring their children’s participation in academic ways of interacting. For example, at times they shaped their child’s contributions in school-like conversations by asking them known-answer questions in Karen while engaging with materials (e.g., alphabet puzzle pieces). They also induced their child’s participation in other events (e.g., playing a computer game) by becoming a peer in play or by engaging as a peer in a child-centered conversation in either Karen or in English. Additionally, they arranged their child’s participation in school-related practices (e.g., picture book reading) by prompting them, usually through gesture (i.e., pointing) to provide the label for images in the text. Their use of gesture to prompt a response from the child may reflect the direct form of teaching (i.e., rote practice) they experienced as a student in Burma (see Chapter 4). Quadros and Sarroub (2016) described a similar form of interaction between a Karen mother and her child in a kindergarten class. However, it may also reflect the form of engagement Joanne modeled during the group shared reading events (see above). Hammer (2005) reported one of the parents in her study engaging in this book-reading style with her child. Regardless, the parents’ use of picture books to develop early literacy concepts rather than reading and comprehension skills suggests the parents may be taking up a practice promoted within the program.

Additionally, in this form of guided participation, children structure their own engagement in situated practice. I frequently observed the focal children pretending to read and write in English as participants in literacy events in the various centres. Interestingly, members of the Karen community in Lacey City operated a Karen school for children 6 years of age and
up. Classes were held on Saturdays and took place in one of the trailers located on the grounds of the elementary school across the street from the apartment complex. Reading and writing the Karen alphabet were part of the curriculum. However, the children who were enrolled in the Karen school found the Karen alphabet difficult to learn. Hser Paw’s oldest daughter attended the Karen school and received instruction from her father who volunteered in the school. During her interview, Hser Paw shared with me her daughter’s reluctance to learn the Karen script. She said, “My husband, he tried to teach her Karen alphabet, but she is not interested. It is very difficult for her.” (June 13, 2013)

At times, the parents also drew from aspects of the form of guided participation Rogoff (2003) called, “Intent Participation in Community Activities” in which children “learn through opportunities to listen and watch or by participating in mature activities” (p. 317). In this form of learning, the role of the parent is to structure the child’s opportunities to observe and to participate. During activities in which the parent is present, their role is to leave the pace and direction of learning to the child, helping only when needed. For example, when engaged in writing events, I observed the parents assist their child directly by placing their hand over that of the child as they wrote in English. Similarly, when engaged in a design event that required fine motor skills, the parents outlined the child’s name and then directed the child as to where to position specific craft materials (e.g., o-shaped cereal, alphabet stickers) to complete the name.

In contrast, as described in Chapter 4, Karen children learned the cultural practices of the community through observation of or participation in the activities of the community. I observed the parents draw from this traditional form of learning to support their child’s learning in PALS. For example, when writing or forming names in English, I observed the parents select and position individual letters while the child watched. When making crafts, I noticed the parents
model (Gregory et al., 2010) the activity for the child by creating the text (e.g., “I Can Read” book). At other times, they encouraged their children to learn by observing others engaged in activities within the program. For example, rather than participating in activities with their child, the parents encouraged their children to observe other adults engaged in school-like activities (e.g., book reading, forming individual letters in paint).

However, at times, the parents left the pace and direction of learning to the child. For example, rather than participating in activities with their child, I often saw the focal mothers sit on the periphery while their children engaged directly in a literacy event on their own (e.g., scribbling on the chalkboard) or with another adult (e.g., book reading). The fact that at least once during the year, Hser Paw, Paw Paw, and Isabelle chose to send their children to the program in the company of another member of the Karen community suggests that Karen parents understood learning as resulting from the child’s observation of and participation in activities and that it was their job to provide help only when needed. In contrast, the children structured their own participation in events by drawing from their experiences as participants within other English early learning settings in Lacey City or by watching how adults completed the activity in PALS.

From the above discussion, it follows that the form of activity promoted in the PALS program at Lacey City was shaped by the belief that children learn by participating in child-focused literacy events structured and organized by adults. Rogoff (2003) described these interactions as resembling “the type of interaction for which the children are being prepared to participate in school” (p. 301). At times, the Karen parents drew from this belief and structured their children’s participation in child-focused literacy events. At other times, interactions between parent and child reflected the direct form of learning the parents experienced as children.
attending Karen schools in Burma or the indirect form of learning through observation through which, as children, the parents learned the practices of the community. Furthermore, the parents often drew from the more traditional belief that children should take the lead role in learning and left the pace and direction of learning to the children, providing assistance only when needed. In the next chapter, I discuss how literacy was enacted in the homes of Karen families with preschool-aged children in Lacey City by providing thick description of literacy events within the homes of the three focal families.
CHAPTER 6: LITERACY PRACTICES WITHIN THE SOCIAL ACTIVITY DOMAIN OF PLAY IN THE HOMES

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe literacy events situated within the social activity domain of play taking place in the homes of resettled Karen refugee families participating in the bilingual family literacy program, PALS, in Lacy City. To begin, as a way of furthering the discussion from Chapter 4 regarding the historical literacy practices of the Karen people, I describe the literacy beliefs and historical literacy practices that shape current activity within the homes of the focal families. Next, I identify current literacy practices, those situated within other social activity domains in the home and those situated within the social activity domain of play in both the home and in other early learning settings, that contribute to the focal children’s understanding about literacy. I then provide thick description of literacy events in the homes of the focal families in terms of their mediational means (i.e., cultural tools, participant structure, beliefs). I conclude by summarizing the pattern of learning events within the homes and discussing the roles of the mothers and children within these events.

As I explained in Chapter 2, I define activity as the three-way interaction between participants (subject), situated practice (object), and social activity domain (context). Working within this framework, I understand activity in the form of literacy events to be shaped by values, attitudes, and beliefs and mediated by cultural tools and the division of labour.

In Chapter 3, I detailed how obtaining an understanding of how literacy is practiced within the homes of the focal families required regular visits within their homes between March 2013 and June 2014. In all, I spent 45 hours (an average of around 15 hours in each home) observing the children in their homes. I entered the site as a participant observer and took field
notes as children engaged in literacy events within the home. I participated in events only when asked. Additionally, in order to ascertain the beliefs underlining the events, I carried out semi-structured interviews with the three focal mothers in June 2013 and June 2014. The following discussion draws from descriptions in my field notes of visits in the homes and from the transcripts of my interviews with the mothers. I begin by discussing the literacy beliefs and historical literacy practices shaping activity within homes, beginning with Hser Paw.

**Literacy Beliefs and Historical Literacy Practices**

**Hser Paw**

Hser Paw, Claire’s mother, was born in a Karen village in Burma. She was the youngest of 12 children. Her father passed away when she was only a year and a half old. Although her mother never attended school, Hser Paw thought her father might have completed Grade 2. Hser Paw’s mother did not have the money to send her to school. However, when she was older, Hser Paw had the opportunity to stay with one of her sisters and attend school in a refugee camp. After completing all 10 levels of schooling, she enrolled in the post-10 program in the camp where she received training to become a teacher in the camp school and training to become a medic within the camp clinic. Once she had completed a six-month practicum, she received her certificate and found work as a medic in a clinic.

During our first interview, in June 2013, Hser Paw shared with me her belief about literacy. She said, “Literacy means learning to read and write and to develop children’s thinking skills and all the skills they need to develop their future.” This belief was shaped by her experiences attending Karen school in the Thai refugee camp. As a student, Hser Paw read picture books in Karen and instructional texts and information books in Karen, Burmese, and

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10 Programming in Karen schools in refugee camps is divided into nursery, general education (Grades 1-10), post-secondary schooling, and vocational and adult learning (ages 16+). Schools are staffed and managed by the refugees living in the camps with assistance from external organizations (Oh, 2010).
English. She wrote answers to questions in Karen that assessed her comprehension of the texts she had read. At the end of the year, she wrote final exams in which she was required to demonstrate the knowledge she had learned over the entire school year. A passing grade on the exam meant that she could move up to the next level of schooling.

Since the houses in the camps had no electric lights, Hser Paw read her textbooks at night by the light of an oil lamp. Additionally, as I mentioned in Chapter 4, the emphasis in school was on learning through rote memorization, something Hser Paw found “very difficult”. She said, “Everything we need to put in memory … It was very hard to memorize. But they forced us to memorize”. In school, her failure to memorize resulted in a physical beating the following day. She continued, “Tomorrow, if you can’t memorize, they get a big stick and hit and hit”. Teachers then tested students on what they had memorized. Hser Paw reported, “When we read, we need to bring back everything in memory, to answer the exam question. They give the white paper and the question. And we answer it”. She said she didn’t enjoy reading and writing and did so only to pass the test or exam. She did not identify contexts outside of school in which reading and writing mediated her social activity.

During one of our conversations, Hser Paw told me that, as a result of her participation in PALS and her experiences at the early learning program for immigrant and refugee families (see Chapter 4), her understanding of children’s early literacy development had changed. She went on to say that she learned how to help her children by observing the facilitators in PALS and the teachers in the early learning program and by being an active participant in activities with Claire. As an example, she said that, rather than forcing her children to print by holding their hand, she allowed them to scribble and draw, knowing that is how children learn to write (Field notes, May 13, 2014). Similarly, instead of insisting that her children memorize words, she encouraged her
children to use the pictures. She said, “But here is very easier. They compare and look at the pictures and then the word and the pictures and the word are easier” (Hser Paw, interview, June 13, 2013). When she was out in the neighbourhood with her children, she pointed out and read environmental print, whereas, when she was at home, she read picture books with her children in English, helped her oldest daughter with the spelling of words, and, as part of the bedtime routine, told all three of her children oral stories in Karen.

**Paw Paw**

Sam’s mother, Paw Paw, grew up in a refugee camp on the Thai-Burmese border. Unlike Hser Paw, Paw Paw lived in the camp with her family. Both her parents had attended school in a Karen village; however, neither continued with their education past Grade 4. Although Paw Paw’s siblings attended school in the camp, she did not. She did, however, attend an adult language class in the camp prior to her departure for Canada.

During our interview, Paw Paw shared through Zeyar, who was acting as interpreter, her literacy practices in the camp. She said she would visit the library in the camp to borrow easy-to-read books that she could enjoy on her own. In her role as a seamstress, she read measurements on a ruler before cutting fabric. She also followed along in the texts in the Bible and hymnals when she participated in church services. While she believed her siblings understood reading and writing as necessary in order to assure a passing grade on exams and a promotion to the next level in school, Paw Paw linked literacy with independence. Although she did not specifically define literacy as reading and writing, she said, “It [reading and writing] is helpful because people won’t be with you all the time, if you really need to read it is helpful” (Paw Paw, interview, June 11, 2013).
Isabelle

As a child growing up in the refugee camp, Isabelle listened to her parents tell stories in Karen. She read Karen storybooks and magazines for entertainment. As a child attending Sunday school classes in the Karen church, she copied and recited Bible verses in Karen. In school, she read storybooks and information textbooks, composed sentences and paragraphs, and wrote test answers. While attending school in Lacey City, she answered questions in English as part of her homework and on tests, completed skill practice worksheets (English), wrote paragraphs and stories in English, and labeled maps.

Isabelle equated literacy with education and education with meaningful work. She understood the reading and writing in school as purposeful in that it prepared students for the future. She believed the purpose for reading and writing in the home was to complete work assigned in school, thus she saw no need for reading and writing once a student left formal schooling (Isabelle, interview, June 10, 2013).

To sum up, all three of the focal mothers spent much of their early lives in refugee camps. As members of the Karen refugee community within the camps, they engaged in, or observed, literacy events situated within the contexts of school and the church. From these early experiences with literacy, they came to understand printed (Karen) texts as mediating learning in school and enabling participation in faith-based practices. All three mothers valued literacy for what it could provide - independence and future success. Furthermore, Hser Paw recognized that, due to her participation in various early learning programs in Lacey City, her beliefs about how children acquire literacy and her understanding of her own role in their literacy learning have changed.
In the next section, I discuss current literacy practices within the homes of the focal families that shape the children’s early literacy experiences. To reiterate, data informing this discussion were drawn from the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews with the three focal mothers and from descriptions within my field notes of observed activity in their homes.

The Children’s Early Literacy Experiences within the Home

Current Literacy Practices: Other Domains

**Hser Paw.** Reading and writing were a part of Hser Paw’s daily routine in Canada. During our interview, she shared that she read in order to acquire information and wrote in order to remember. For example, before she went shopping, she read the advertising flyers to find out what was on sale and wrote up a list of items she wanted to buy, in either English or Karen. While shopping, she located the items first by reading the aisle signs and then by reading the packaging labels. As part of the congregation attending the Karen church, she read lessons from the Bible, lyrics to hymns from the hymnal, and lesson notes displayed on the projection screen at the front of the church, and jotted down the passage number of Bible verses she wanted to read on her own later. Although she communicated primarily in Karen with family and friends by phone, she sent and received emails and text messages in English. Finally, as the parent of a school-aged child, she read and responded to paperwork. For example, she signed her daughter’s reading log, read and filled out forms, and read newsletters from the school in English. Additionally, she shared that, because of his work with the immigrant society, Karen language school, and Karen church, her husband, was constantly on the computer, reading and composing emails and documents. Although she did not specify the language in which he primarily engaged, I saw many of these documents stored in binders in and around his work area. The binders were labeled in Karen. Hser Paw indicated that the children noticed his use of reading and writing:
“Sometimes, they say, ‘My daddy’s a garbage man’ and then my older daughter say, ‘No, my daddy’s not a garbage man. My daddy is an office man.’ Because, always, he is on computer” (Hser Paw, interview, June 13, 2013).

During one of my early visits with the family in the apartment, I noticed genres and forms of printed texts that suggest other ways the family used reading and writing in the home. In addition to reading flyers, signs, and labels while shopping, Hser Paw and her husband read government booklets and guides to learn about rules and regulations specific to their city (e.g., recycling guide) and country (e.g., Welcome to Canada booklet), lists of numbers to call in the case of an emergency (e.g., Emergency Contact numbers), and fact sheets to acquire information about topics of interest to them (e.g., how to achieve a healthy pregnancy). All of these texts were printed in English only and were taped to the walls in the main living area of the apartment or attached to the refrigerator in the kitchen. Other English-only texts I saw taped to the wall included a world map and a map of Canada, and a child’s behaviour chart (English) printed from the Internet. The fact that these texts were displayed prominently throughout the living space suggests that they were valued.

However, not all of the information texts I saw in the apartment were in English. Some of the texts were printed in both English and Karen. For example, in order to facilitate her contacting friends and family, in the area around the wall phone, Hser Paw had taped up sheets of paper on which were written the contact’s name in Karen and their phone number, in English numerals. Since she was attending English language classes, Hser Paw had also taped to the wall a list of common English words with their definitions written in Karen. Finally, as a participant in the PALS program, Hser Paw had received an information sheet with suggested early literacy
activities. This sheet was printed in Karen only. Hser Paw had taped this sheet to the wall alongside the other information texts.

Throughout the year, I noticed texts that suggested that the family used print in order to commemorate an important event or to celebrate their culture. For example, during my first visit in the apartment, I noticed three woven wall hangings. Two of the wall hangings had the date of the family’s arrival in Canada, while the third recognized the three-year anniversary of their arrival. All of the text printed on the wall hangings was in English. Later in the year, during one of my visits to the house, Claire showed me her room. I noticed that the pillowcases were embroidered with a Karen phrase. Zeyar explained to me that it was typical of the Karen people to have such a whimsical saying on their pillowcase (Field notes, November 25, 2013).

Paw Paw. Although she herself was unable to engage in reading and writing activities as part of her daily life in either Karen or in English, Paw Paw identified how her husband used literacy. For example, she told me her husband read and responded to paperwork issued by the school in English (e.g., notices, agendas, reading logs). She also said that he read English picture books with his children as part of their bedtime routine and talked about the books with them by asking them simple content questions in Karen.

In her role as parent, Paw Paw was familiar enough with some of the texts that she received from the school and from other school-related programs in Lacey City to know when she needed to ask for assistance. Zeyar was able to broker (Perry, 2009) these events, for example, by helping her with the reading and filling out of registration forms. Paw Paw’s role in

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11 This sheet was part of a set distributed to parents during the previous year of the program.

12 Since Sam’s father was not a participant in the study, I did not have permission to talk to him about his beliefs about literacy or his experiences with literacy as a child.
these events was to supply Zeyar with the required information (see Chapter 4). In general, these events took place in Zeyar’s office.

Throughout the main living space of the apartment, I saw texts displaying images of family and community. For example, they had created a photo collage with pictures of family and friends on the wall in their living room. During one of my visits to the apartment, I noticed they had added an English newspaper clipping celebrating the success of another member of the Karen refugee community to this photo collage (Field notes, October 18, 2013). Additionally, Zeyar showed me a digital photo stream on the computer of pictures of the family that included written declarations in English (e.g., “I love my family”) below certain pictures (Field notes, October 18, 2013).

It was also clear that Paw Paw valued her children’s academic achievements. For example, she stored her older daughter’s schoolwork in individual folders, each labeled with her daughter’s name in English, in a plastic bin which she kept out of the reach of the children. She collected Sam’s drawings from pre-school and stored them in a binder. She displayed on a wall in the living room an ABC poster her daughter had printed, Sam’s drawings from pre-school, and the children’s colouring sheets from Sunday school.

Although she did not have the opportunity to learn about literacy and numeracy as a child or teenager, she structured her children’s opportunities to learn by providing them with school-like resources similar to those she saw being used in PALS and to those her older children brought home from school and allowing them the space to explore literacy on their own. For example, she kept the bilingual picture books she received from PALS in a large bin in the living room. She displayed the magnetic alphabet letters on the refrigerator door in the kitchen. She gathered various writing tools, such as pencils, crayons, and markers, and kept them in the PALS
pencil box in the living room. She provided blank paper for her children to draw and write on. Finally, she purchased phonic workbooks from the dollar store and included them in the bin along with the books from PALS. Li (2009) described similar resources in the home of a young Asian boy. Paw Paw appreciated the PALS program. When I asked her what in particular she found useful, she replied, “Everything” (Field notes, May 13, 2014).

Isabelle. Although Isabelle shared her belief that reading and writing was a school practice, during my interview with her, she also identified ways she used reading and writing in her daily life. For example, as a member of the congregation in the Karen church, she read Bible passages and the lyrics to hymns in Karen. She also taught in the Karen Sunday school. As part of her preparation for the class, she read the syllabus and prepared a work plan in Karen. When she was at work as part of the counter staff at a local fast-food restaurant, she read the menu in English.

However, she indicated that the bulk of her reading came with her role as aunt to a school-aged child and parent to a pre-schooler. In this role, Isabelle read notices and read and filled out forms from her niece’s school and signed her reading log, all in English. Before bedtime, she told Emma traditional Karen stories. Isabelle structured Emma’s opportunity to learn by providing her with a variety of English language texts she received from other families as well as the bilingual books she received from PALS. Most of these texts were stored in a bookshelf in the front entranceway. The texts included picture books, predictable books, nursery rhyme books, alphabet books, and skill practice books. Additionally, Isabelle taped posters to the walls in the living room showing the letters of the alphabet and the numbers from one to ten and stored writing tools (e.g., pencils, pencil crayons, pencil sharpener) in a pencil box she received from PALS. During one of our conversations, she told me that she liked PALS because of the
books she received as part of their take-home package and appreciated learning from both the program facilitators and from the other parents how to structure Emma’s literacy learning in the home (Field notes, May 13, 2014).

Throughout the year, I noticed various texts displayed throughout the main living area of the apartment that suggested that members of the family read texts to acquire information (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). For example, I noticed information notes in English from the church and school taped to the wall in the living room, pinned to a small bulletin board in the dining room, and attached to the refrigerator in the kitchen. I once noticed a stack of opened envelopes from the Ministry of Health on the stand beside the television in the living room.

It was clear from the other texts displayed on the living room walls that, like Paw Paw’s family, Isabelle’s family valued their family and their faith. The family had covered the long wall in the living area with photos of family members. Above one of the photos, I noticed that someone had pinned a postcard written in Karen. The post card remained on the wall throughout the year. The family had positioned, in the centre of the display, a framed certificate from the English Baptist church indicating the date of Emma’s welcoming into the church. The text was printed in English. They displayed framed portraits of the parents on the wall above the television and a brass plaque printed with Karen text on the wall beside the framed certificate.

During my visits with Emma in the home, I observed Isabelle engage in other literacy activities. Isabelle owned a smart phone, tablet, and digital camera. I frequently observed her sharing photos from her smartphone with Zeyar, checking her social media page, and searching online for products to buy for herself (e.g., dress for Karen New Year) or for Emma (e.g., Barbie DVD). I also observed Isabelle’s youngest brother play a game on her tablet. She occasionally
read the local English-language newspaper and advertising flyers and doodled on scrap pieces of paper.

To sum up, during the semi-structured interviews, all three mothers shared that, as parents of school aged children, they were regularly required to read and respond to paperwork in English from their children’s school. They also shared that printed texts, primarily in Karen, mediated their social activity in the Christian church. Additionally, Hser Paw shared that, as part of her daily routine, she read texts in English or Karen for information and wrote notes in English and Karen to help her remember. At times, I observed Isabelle engaged in activities on her digital devices (e.g., looking at photos on social media). During my visits within their homes, I saw textual displays created by the families to commemorate events or to celebrate family, faith, and culture, and, on occasion, information texts from various government agencies. However, the bulk of the texts I observed within the homes were English resources to support children’s learning.

To complete my overview of the children’s early literacy experiences, in the next section, I review the children’s situated practice within the social activity domain of play in other early learning settings and identify other early literacy experiences within the home.

**Current Literacy Practices: Social Activity Domain of Play**

**Claire.** Claire experienced literacy within multiple early learning settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), including PALS, the Drop-In program, and the pre-school. In most, if not all, of these settings, she attempted to read picture books and environmental print, listened to stories read from picture books, sang songs, scribbled, wrote her name, drew and coloured pictures, assembled puzzles, made crafts, played with toys inside the classroom and organized games outside. With the exception of group reading events in PALS (see Chapter 5), in all of
these events, the language of both the text and the event was English. In the pre-school, Claire attempted to read picture books to other children (see Chapter 4). In the Drop-In program, she organized other children’s engagement in play with toys (see Chapter 4). The teacher or facilitator structured craft time in all three settings. In all three settings, Claire listened to stories, sang songs, and played organized games outdoors as part of the larger group. Claire also participated in the Karen Sunday school (see Chapter 4). As a member of this class, she sang songs in English and Karen, listened to the teacher recite oral stories in Karen, recited Karen Bible verses, coloured pictures, the text of which was printed in English, and played organized games in the classroom, where the language of the event was English only.

Claire also experienced literacy through her activities with older children in the home. Leah, Claire’s best friend and the one with whom Claire had attended PALS during the previous year, and Kristen, Claire’s older sister, were both in school. During my visits, Claire mentioned to me that she played computer games with Leah and her sister (Field notes, December 19, 2013). In addition, Hser Paw mentioned that Kristen read the bilingual picture books from PALS to Claire, her younger sister, Victoria, and their newly arrived cousins in English each evening. She said, “Kristen, she read the English and they [the cousins] read the Karen” (Hser Paw, interview, June 16, 2014).

Sam. Similar to Claire, Sam also experienced literacy within multiple early learning settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In addition to PALS, Sam attended the English pre-school that was housed within the community school across the street from the apartment complex. Since he attended the program five mornings a week, Sam was unable to regularly participate in the early

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13 Although I did not observe Sam in the pre-school, I was able to look through the parent information booklet from the program. The pre-school espoused a “learning through play” philosophy and provided the children with a choice of curriculum areas in which to engage (e.g., art, music, sand/water, blocks) and the opportunity to play outdoors. There was also time set aside each day for group activities related to science, art, and literature.
learning program for refugee families, something he and Paw Paw had done during the previous school year.

As I described in Chapter 5, Sam attended PALS with his mother. In PALS, he attempted to read picture books and environmental print in English, listened to stories in English read from bilingual picture books, scribbled, made crafts, played inside the classroom with Play-doh and Lego, and played outside on the playground equipment with other children. In general, another adult, often his mother, assisted him while he attempted to read picture books and environmental print and when making crafts involving fine motor skills. He practiced forming letters and playing with Play-doh and Lego on his own. Sam also participated in the Karen Sunday school (see Chapter 4). As a member of this class, he sang songs in English and Karen, listened to the teacher recite oral stories in Karen, recited Karen Bible verses, coloured pictures, the text of which was printed in English, and played organized games in the classroom.

Sam also experienced literacy through his activities with his siblings in the home. Paw Paw shared that the children read books together in English, watched English movie videos and English cartoons on television or through You Tube on the computer (Paw Paw, interview, June 16, 2014). He observed his older siblings read picture books and record the titles on their reading log, and practice writing their letters and numbers, names, and spelling words. When she took her children shopping, Paw Paw said her children would read signs in the community, labels on packages, and the prices of individual items printed on price tags.

Emma. Isabelle shared with me that she and Emma regularly attended the early learning program for refugee families. They also attended a program (English only) for mothers and children at their church one morning a week. This program allowed parents to attend a parenting
class while their children listened to Bible stories read or told in English (Field notes, October 11, 2013). I did not ask for permission to observe Emma participate in programming at this site.

I did, however, observe her participating in activity in PALS (see Chapter 5) and in the Drop-In program (see Chapter 4). In both settings, Emma listened to stories read in English from English-only or bilingual picture books, sang songs in English and performed hand rhymes as part of the larger group, made crafts and played with toys. In PALS, she practiced writing on her own with water on the chalkboard, and wrote alphabet letters in English using a pencil and paper, built words, and played computer games, all with her mother’s assistance. In the Drop-In program, she, along with other children, engaged in dramatic play with toys, such as a toy laptop and a toy cell phone, dressed up in princess clothes, and played house. She also played organized games in English with the teacher. Along with Claire and Sam, Emma participated in the Karen Sunday school class (see Chapter 4). As a participant, she sang songs in English and Karen, listened to Karen Bible stories delivered orally and answered questions orally, in Karen, recited Bible verses in Karen, coloured pictures printed with English texts, and played organized games with other children in English.

Unlike Claire and Sam, I did not observe, nor was I informed of Emma regularly engaging in school-like activities with older children in the home. As I mentioned, five of the 10 members of Emma’s household were under the age of 18. Isabelle’s three younger brothers attended school in Lacey City and were members of the local homework club, thus Emma rarely observed them completing their homework in the apartment. However, at times, I noticed school texts (e.g., spelling worksheet, math workbook, Language Arts worksheets) belonging to her 8-year old cousin scattered around the apartment.
From the above discussion, it follows that many of the early literacy experiences of the three focal children came from their participation in early learning programs situated within both the Karen and Lacey City communities and from their interactions with older children within the home. As active participants in early learning settings within the host community, they participated in Storytime events where they observed the English-speaking teacher read from and talk about English picture books and joined in the singing of English nursery rhymes and songs. During their free play in the program, the children attempted to read English picture books, assembled wooden alphabet puzzles, and practiced forming letters using paint.

To reiterate, working within the framework of the activity system, I understand activity in the form of literacy events to be shaped by values, attitudes, and beliefs and mediated by cultural tools and the division of labour. In this section, I highlighted literacy practices, both historical and current, that shaped the children’s early experiences with literacy within the homes. In the next section, drawing from field notes of my observations within the homes of the focal families, I describe situated practice within the social activity domain of play in the homes in order to identify the cultural tools and participant structures mediating the individual events.

**Observed Literacy Events in the Homes**

**Reading Events**

**Claire.** Over the year, similar to other studies within homes (e.g., Hirst, 1998; Li, 2009), I noticed a number of English only and bilingual books in the home, including easy-to-read, rhyme, number, pattern, predictable, and picture books. I also observed Claire attempt to read other forms of English texts (e.g., directive labels, digital icon texts, movie titles, movie credits) while engaging in events such as playing a game on the computer or watching a movie. When attempting to read books, similar to PALS, Claire sought out the support of a more experienced
reader who could assist her with making sense of the print. For example, the following event took place during an early visit with the family in the fall of 2013:

At one point, she went to the bureau and took out a Thanksgiving booklet belonging to her older sister. Claire had me read the names of the foods that her sister had coloured. She would repeat the words after I had read them. She then went back to the title page and asked me what was meant by the word, *by*. Claire supplied the two other definitions of the word (i.e., *buy*, and *beside*). I tried to describe what it meant. (Field notes, October 17, 2013)

At this point in the visit, the two of us were sitting side-by-side at the dining room table. Zeyar and Hser Paw were engaged in a conversation in Karen on the couch in the living room. The text we were reading was an activity booklet that Claire’s older sister, Kristen, had completed in school. Claire had retrieved the text from Kristen’s belongings. Each page consisted of an image associated with Thanksgiving and the word for that image, printed in English. Claire structured the event in order to learn what the words said. This suggests a growing awareness of print (Sulzby, 1985). For example, during the event, Claire indicated which words I was to read. She repeated each word after me. She even returned to the title page and located the word *by* with which she was not familiar.

However, later in the year, she appeared to be reluctant to attempt reading picture books. I observed the following event in the spring of 2014:

Zeyar opened the book and placed it on the floor beside her. Claire went over and sat down beside her, taking control of the book. She stared intently at the cover. Although she could see the text, by not saying anything, it appeared as though she was trying to recall the title from our reading of the book rather than making meaning of the printed
text. In general, she flipped through the book quickly, both back to front and front to back. She offered a few phrases and words in English, but did not tell the story. (Field notes, April 17, 2014)

Prior to Zeyar’s arrival in the living room, Claire had been engaged in an activity on the computer which allowed her to create and style hair and apply make-up to images of dolls. In this example, Zeyar sat down and opened the English book I had read with Claire earlier during the visit. The book was the English language book, *Rosie’s Walk* (Hutchins, 1971). This iconic book is known for its vibrant images and scant text. She invited Claire to read the book to her.

Claire joined Zeyar on the floor and took over control of the book. During this reading attempt, she appeared to focus more on the text than on the picture. Sulzby (1985) found that the children in her study went through a phase where they were aware that they could not read the print and subsequently refused to reenact the story, using pictures as cues. Perhaps, because she was unable to recall the exact title of the book, Claire refused to attempt to read the book, preferring instead to flip through the book and supply the occasional comment in English.

In contrast, Hser Paw structured Claire’s participation in reading events by engaging her in a form of labeling and commenting when looking at picture books. For example, during one visit, Claire was pretending to call people with her toy phone. While she was playing with the phone, Hser Paw came into the room. She was in the process of leaving to attend her language class. She noticed the book on the floor, so she sat down with us and engaged in a child-centered style of book reading (Hammer, 2005) with Claire.

Hser Paw came into the room and sat down with us and asked Claire in Karen to name the shapes in the book. Claire identified the shapes and colours that her mother pointed to in English. Hser Paw directed her in Karen to count the number of books that were out on
the floor as she cleaned them up. Claire did so, but rather than count in Karen, she
counted the books in English. (Field notes, December 3, 2013)

Hser Paw structured Claire’s contribution to the book reading event by asking her known-answer
questions (Rogoff, 2003) in Karen. For example, Hser Paw asked Claire first to label the shapes
and then to identify their colour. She directed Claire’s attention to the images rather than to the
words by pointing to the image and then asking her a question. Hser Paw then suggested that
Claire practice her counting as she picked the books up off the floor.

**Sam.** Sam’s mother kept a variety of genres of picture books in a large plastic container.
Although the bin was primarily stored in the living room, for some visits, Paw Paw or Sam often
brought it into the room after I was seated on the floor. Because of the language barrier, it was
difficult to engage in casual conversation with Paw Paw during my visits. I asked Zeyar about
Paw Paw’s purpose for bringing the bin into the room during my visits. Zeyar speculated that it
might be because she wanted me to show her how to use the books (Field notes, October 4,
2013).

Sam’s favourite book appeared to be a soft-sided picture dictionary he had received from
PALS. I noticed that the pages of this book were well worn. When Sam engaged with this text,
he did so on his own. Similar to reading events in which I had observed him participate in PALS,
he would open the book to the first double-page and label the picture he saw. He did not attend to
the letter positioned beside the image (Field notes, October 18, 2013).

Although many of the texts Sam engaged with were the bilingual books from PALS, Sam
talked about the book (Rogoff, 2003) in English only. His reading attempts in the home were
similar to his reading attempts in PALS in that, initially, his focus was on the picture instead of
the text. For narrative texts (e.g., *The Three Little Pigs* (Amery, 2004)), Sam vocalized using
labels and short phrases while pointing at the pictures. For example, he pointed to the pictures and said “sticks”, or “straw”, or “wall” and followed the action (Sulzby, 1985) by making motions such as blowing a big puff of air. He started at the beginning of the text and went through to the end of the story (Field notes, October 18, 2013). For picture books that contained repetitive texts (e.g., *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* (Martin & Carle, 1996)), he would say the repeated text, (e.g., “Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?”), sneak a peek at the next page, and identify the colour and the name of the animal. He then turned to the next page and repeated the same sequence (Field notes, February 6, 2014). For those texts with which he was less familiar, he would look to me to provide the label for those objects of which he was unsure. For example, when he was reading the English text *Goodnight Moon* (Brown & Hurd, 2007), he sat across from me on the floor and looked to me to supply the label for the cow. However, he disagreed with my labeling of the animal as a cow since the animal in the book did not have horns (Field notes, October 18, 2013).

Over time, his focus during reading attempts switched from the images in the book to the print. The following excerpt described how Sam structured my involvement in the reading of the bilingual book, *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* (Barkow & Johnson, 2004)

The final page had pictures with initial letters listed on the right hand side. He pointed to each individual picture and I said the word. He then searched for and found the first letter of the word from those letters listed on the right. He then asked me to read the individual vocabulary words included on the back page. He pointed, I read. He repeated each word. For one of the words, I included the phrase from the story. He repeated the whole phrase while pointing at the one word. (Field notes, April 14, 2014)
In this example, we were sitting on the floor facing each other, with the book between us. He had just finished flipping through the book, with me narrating the text in English and him repeating some of my words. The final double page of text, printed in English only, contained an activity that required the reader to focus on individual letters and words. Joanne had demonstrated this activity during the “All Together Time” in PALS the week before (Field notes, April 9, 2014). Sam directed the event by prompting me for the label and then searching on his own for the initial letter of the word. He asked me to read the whole word in English, which he then repeated, again, in English.

During the majority of my visits with Sam in his home, Paw Paw remained seated on the couch or on the floor off to the side of the room. As I mentioned, she often flipped through texts on her own while chatting with Zeyar or while holding Sam’s baby sister on her lap.

The exception to this took place during a visit in the spring of 2014. On that day, there was another Karen woman visiting. She had three daughters with her. The oldest looked to be a bit older than Sam while the youngest was around 6-months old. The family also attended the PALS program in Lacey City. Sam’s baby sister was having her nap. When I arrived, I went to sit next to Sam on the floor, but Paw Paw motioned to me to sit on the couch and then she sat on the floor beside Sam. Sam was busy playing with a toy spinning top. Paw Paw tried to direct his attention away from the top and towards his books. I made the following entry in my field notebook:

Paw Paw took out Pete The Cat (Litwin, 2010) and put it on the floor for Sam to look at. Sam glanced down briefly, but preferred to play with his top. However, the three girls came right over to the book. This caught Sam’s attention. Paw Paw pointed at Pete’s shoes and said something to Sam in Karen. Sam then answered, “black” even though they
were white shoes. Paw Paw said something else and pointed to another part of the picture, but Sam had lost interest. (Field notes, March 14, 2014)

Rather than observing me reading with Sam while she visited with her guests, Paw Paw positioned me on the couch while she sat on the floor alongside Sam and structured Sam’s participation in the event. Her attempt at reading the book with Sam focused on the images rather than on the words and included Paw Paw asking Sam known-answer (Rogoff, 2003) questions. It reminded me of the event I observed from PALS (see Chapter 5) in that Paw Paw prompted Sam, in Karen, to say the colour of the image. Again, because of the language barrier, it was difficult to engage in an informal conversation with Paw Paw for her to explain this change in role. Unfortunately, Sam did not want to participate in the event. However, when he turned his attention back to the spinning top, one of the girls tried to take the book. Perhaps because it was his book, he stopped playing with the spinning top long enough to grab the book from out of her hands and return it to the plastic storage container.

Emma. Although Isabelle indicated that the focus of the reading attempts in which she and Emma engaged during the day was on reading the words, most of the reading attempts I observed in the home focused on the pictures. This type of event involved Isabelle and Emma labeling and/or counting the images in English or Emma engaged in monologic storytelling (Sulzby, 1985) in English based on the picture, with Isabelle supplying the English word or phrase as needed. For example, during one of my first visits to the home, Emma selected the bilingual book, *No David* (Shannon, 2002). She and Isabelle sat side-by-side on the floor and went through the book, with Emma saying “David” and then delivering a narrative in a storytelling intonation based on the pictures in English. At times, Isabelle supplied the English
text or would say the word in English, but did not read the text or draw Emma’s attention to the text (Field notes, May 29, 2013).

The most frequent arrangement during reading events resembled that modeled during “All Together Time” in PALS, with Emma playing the role of facilitator. The following description is taken from my field notes:

Emma then picked up a Franklin book. It was, *Franklin’s Class Trip* (Bourgeois, 1998). Emma took the book over to the stack of rice bags in the corner. She said that she was the teacher and we were her students. She was going to read the story to us. She tried to climb up on top of the bags of rice, but kept slipping off. She said that she needed a chair. She then ran out of the room and came back carrying a princess lawn chair. She put it up in front of the rice and sat down and positioned the book on her lap, facing out. Emma did not tell us the story. Instead, she just asked us questions. She first asked us, “Where is Franklin going?” Isabelle answered, “To school.” Emma said, no, he was going to the museum. She was right. She turned the page. This double page showed Franklin and his friends arriving at the museum. Emma asked us to find specific characters in the picture. (Field notes, October 24, 2013)

Prior to this event, Isabelle had asked Emma to bring some of the books from the bookshelf in the entranceway to the living room. At Isabelle’s suggestion, they looked through one together, each providing labels in English for the animals on each page. Once they had finished, Emma announced that she would read us a story. From her actions, it appeared as though Emma understood that, to share a story with others, she needed to be seated, facing her audience. Once seated, she positioned the book in a similar fashion to what she had observed during group reading events in PALS and in the early learning program. However, instead of reading the text,
as was the practice in the early learning settings, she asked us questions in English about the content of the story (e.g., “Where’s Franklin going?”) or about the picture (e.g., “Where’s Franklin?”). This is an example of Emma engaging in what Wohlwend (2011) described as “playing to read” (p. 20) in order to strengthen her own reading abilities. That is, in her role as teacher, she taught reading strategies to her students. Unlike Hser Paw and Paw Paw, Isabelle participated in the event as a peer and engaged in Emma’s narrative in English.

Two of Emma’s favourite stories were *Three Little Pigs* (Amery, 2004) and *Little Red Riding Hood* (Seal, 2012). She had received a translated copy of the former while attending PALS the previous year. Her copy of the latter was in the form of a pop-up book with English text. Emma was able to retell these stories from the pictures. However, she preferred to retell the story with props by assigning Isabelle, Zeyar, and me a role and directing us through the narrative. The following is a description from my field notes of one of Emma’s retellings of her favourite story:

She said something about Red Riding Hood. Perhaps it was the [jewelry] basket that triggered this thought. She then assigned us all roles. I was the grandma. I was directed to go to sleep. She appeared to be narrating the story in a hybrid of English and Karen words. Neither was clear. Shortly afterwards, I sat up and she brought me some “flowers” she had picked. (Field notes, October 29, 2013)

Just prior to this reenactment, Emma, Isabelle, Zeyar, and I had been engaged in a game of catch. Emma had abruptly stopped the game once she noticed her jewelry basket sitting off to the side of the playing area. Emma took on the role of director by assigning us all a role and issuing us explicit directives in English. Emma then narrated the story. Since her speech was still developing, during this period of extended narration, it was difficult to decide if she was
speaking in English only or in a Karen-English hybrid. Neither Isabelle nor Zeyar could fully understand her. The props used in the reenactment were materials at hand (Kress, 1997) and were usually pieces of plastic jewelry or hair accessories. Wohlwend (2011) described a child’s re-telling of stories with props as an invented sense-making strategy, one in which the child is able to express a deeper understanding of the book. Again, in contrast to the other two focal mothers, Isabelle’s role in the event was that of peer, interacting in a playful way with Emma as an equal (Rogoff, 2003).

To sum up, in general, the role of the mothers was to present their children with opportunities to participate in reading events within the home by providing them with tools in the form of printed texts (English, English/Karen) and the space in which to use these resources. The mothers often chose to remain in the background, leaving the pace and direction of learning to the child. However, Isabelle frequently took on the role of a peer by participating in events initiated by Emma. When left on their own, the children chose to engage in various forms of book-reading activity in English, looking to another adult for assistance only when needed. Book-reading attempts varied. When participating in a reading event alongside their child, the mothers chose to shape the child’s contribution by asking them known-answer questions or by engaging them in rote practice in Karen.

**Writing Events**

**Claire.** Although I saw examples of writing attempts, including letters and scribbling, in both languages on a white board hung in the hallway of the apartment and watched as Claire wrote her name with a pencil on one of the pages of Kristen’s Thanksgiving booklet, I rarely saw Claire engage in writing events in the home. The family had received writing materials (e.g., pencil box with pencil, pencil sharpener, eraser) and a set of magnetic alphabet letters as take-
home items from PALS. On one of my visits, I saw that someone had used these letters to form the word “God” on the door to the freezer compartment of the refrigerator (Field notes, February 6, 2014). I also observed the following event:

Claire said that she wanted to spell her dad’s name. She located the first two letters of his name from the set of magnetic alphabet letters and then selected random letters to complete the name. When she had finished, she pointed to each individual letter and, rather than saying the name of the letter, she counted. In one go, she had a total of 11 letters. When she was finished counting, she passed her finger over the chain and said the name in English. (Field notes, November 25, 2013)

In the event just described, Claire showed her understanding that print conveys a message by stating that she wanted to write her father’s name (Clay, 1979) and then began to select the letters to form his name. She correctly selected the first two letters in his name before inventing the rest of it. Rather than associating each letter with its sound, she assigned each letter a number. When she had finished building the name, she attempted to read the name in that she ran her finger across the text as she said her father’s name.

Sam. Although Paw Paw provided Sam with writing tools and paper, I rarely saw Sam write, colour, or draw during my home visits. However, in December 2013, I handed Sam a large manila envelope on which I had printed his name and asked him to collect samples of his printed work and place them in the envelope. Sam took the envelope from me and proceeded to copy the letters of his name. During the event, he asked Zeyar what some of the letters were. Once she had identified the letter, Sam printed it on the envelope. Zeyar told me that Sam’s difficulty stemmed from the fact that I had printed his name using both upper- and lower-case letters (Field
notes, December 2013). I then re-wrote his name using all upper-case letters. Sam was able to copy these letters on his own.

During my visit two weeks later, Sam, Paw Paw, and I looked at the work Sam had collected for me. Sam had collected many pictures he had drawn. None of the pictures included printed text. Then, during a visit in February, Sam wanted to complete one of the sheets he had received in the number booklet from PALS. The first space on the worksheet was for his name. He positioned his pencil, but did not appear to know how to print his name. I took the pencil and outlined each letter of his name in dots. He took the pencil and traced the dots to complete each letter (Field notes, February 6, 2014).

This form of scaffolding contrasted with the form of scaffolding I observed Paw Paw provide for her young daughter. I made the following field note describing the event:

Paw Paw was sitting with the baby. She had opened the pencil box and had removed the alphabet letters. She and the girl were picking up individual letters and looking at them. She then took out a crayon and put her hand over the girl’s hand as they drew circles on the inside cover of a book. (Field notes, October 18, 2013)

In this example, Paw Paw used materials she had received from PALS, but directed her child’s participation in the event using a more traditional form of hand-over-hand scaffolding.

Emma. At no time during my visits to the home did I observe Emma writing. However, as I had done with the two other focal children, I did provide her with an envelope and asked her to collect samples of her writing and put them in the envelope. We then reviewed the contents together. Most of the samples showed Emma’s attempt at printing individual letters. Similar to PALS, on two of the sheets, she had written her name. She had also drawn a triangle and a square. When I asked her what she had written, she started to sing the “Alphabet Song”. She then
named some of the individual letters of her name from memory without looking at the text. When Isabelle pointed at the letters and asked her to name them, Emma appeared to be unsure of the individual letter names (Field notes, December 19, 2013).

To sum up, although the mothers provided the children with tools for writing (e.g., pencils, paper, alphabet letters), I rarely observed the children engage in writing events within the home. On the rare occasion when I did observe an attempt at writing, I observed the children using the tools to form or write individual names in English on their own. However, during one visit, I observed Paw Paw engage directly in an event alongside her youngest daughter. She guided the child’s participation in the event directly by placing her hand over top of her child’s as they formed shapes in crayon on the inside of a book cover.

**Design Events**

**Claire.** Similar to writing events within the home, I rarely observed Claire make things. Additionally, over the year, I did not see any of the artifacts Claire had created in PALS (e.g., door hangar, stop sign) displayed in the home.

During one of my visits to the house, Claire invited me into the room she shared with Kristen (Field notes, November 25, 2013). The space was very small with room enough for a bunk bed and a dresser. In terms of visible texts, there were two Disney princess backpacks, both with the name “Kristen” printed on them. I asked Claire who had written the name and she said that Kristen had, even though one of the packs belonged to Claire. I also noticed an ABC Bingo game under the bed. The girls had positioned their pillows side-by-side on the bottom bunk. Each pillow was covered with a pillowcase on which was embroidered a traditional Karen saying. Each girl had placed a Bible under her own pillow. The Bibles, children’s versions, were both in English. I noticed that Claire had placed a bookmark in her Bible to mark her place. She
said that Kristen read to her from the Bible at night. Zeyar later told me that it was very common to keep the Bible in the bedroom and even more common to keep it hidden under the pillow since reading from the Bible was a private event that takes place at bedtime (Field notes, November 25, 2013). I made the following entry in my field notes:

We spent all of our time decorating wipe off pictures that were printed on a “Project Runway” lapdesk. Claire said that she had received this lapdesk from the early learning program. It had the outline of a female model, a shoe, and a handbag. It also had two blank spaces. Claire had a set of wipe off markers which she kept in a particular order in the case. She then proceeded to select a colour, name it, and then use it to decorate one of the images on the lapdesk or to draw a fashion accessory in one of the available spaces.

(Field notes, November 25, 2013)

In this event, Claire coloured a culturally formed image (Kress, 1997) using a set of felt markers that had come with the lapdesk. It was interesting to note that she made meaning from the colour of the marker, by saying the name of each colour before using it to complete the image stamped on the surface of the lapdesk.

We returned to the room the following week. During this visit, Claire further structured her own participation in the event by drawing fashion accessories on the lapdesk and colouring the stamped images. Throughout the event, she engaged me as a conversational partner (Rogoff, 2003). She mentioned that she often coloured with her friend Leah and with Kristen and explained that Leah was now in kindergarten, but only because, “her legs had grown” (Field notes, December 3, 2014). She also said, “I go to kindergarten, not baby pre-school” and said

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14 Claire had been attending the pre-school that was run out of a classroom in the elementary school. In November, she refused to go back to the class. Hayley then enrolled her in a pre-school run through the municipality. The program took place in the recreation centre adjacent to the school (Hser Paw, interview, November 25, 2013).
that she does her homework alongside Kristen. This exchange suggests that Claire understood colouring as a school-like activity and not as a craft as was practiced in pre-school. Interestingly, I did observe her colouring on her own in PALS during the session, “Learning to Read” (Field notes, January 15, 2014).

**Emma.** Similarly, I rarely saw Emma making things or colouring in the home. My first visit with her in the fall was in the afternoon. Emma and Isabelle had attended the Drop-In program earlier that morning and Emma had received a folder containing a number of worksheets. I watched as Emma coloured the images on the page, using crayons she had received from PALS. As she coloured, she said the English name of the animal (e.g., monkey) or the object (e.g., banana) she was colouring. As was often the case in PALS (see Chapter 5), Isabelle left Emma to colour on her own while she visited with Zeyar. Their conversation, in Karen, took place off to the side of the room (Field notes, October 11, 2013). However, Emma appeared to be monitoring her mother’s activity as she coloured. I often noticed her lift her head and listen in (Rogoff, 2003) to the conversation, rather than participate in the adult conversation.

In sum, the mothers provided their children with opportunities to engage in design events by making available to them resources which they could use to colour pictures or draw images. Some of these resources (e.g., crayons, skill practice worksheets) came from other learning settings, while others (e.g., stamped lap desk) did not. Although I did not observe Sam participate in design events, during these events, Claire and Emma chose to engage in forms of discourse in English including conversation and labeling.

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15 During my visit in the early learning program, the teacher had told me that she had provided the 4-year olds with a packet of early reading and writing worksheets and had worked one-on-one with them on these worksheets in order to prepare them for kindergarten.
Play Events

Claire. The bulk of my observations within the home described Claire engaging in forms of play with materials supplied by her parents. Over the year, I observed her structuring her own participation in play events to sing along with songs on the computer, play with commercial toys (e.g., Barbies, dolls, toy telephone, bowling pins, toy mouse, toy snake), create structures with building blocks, explore objects (e.g., electronic piano), assemble jigsaw puzzles, and play computer games. She often practiced literacy and numeracy on her own while engaging in exploratory play with the materials. To illustrate, I present the following examples:

Example 1. I could hear at one point Claire’s voice saying, “I-like-the-mu-sic mu-sic”. She was pressing on one of the electronic buttons of the toy in time to what she was saying. I am not sure if she was trying to spell or if she was putting a sound to a complete word. (Field notes, April 17, 2013)

Example 2. Claire appeared with the pieces of the floor puzzle I had seen on the stairway. She placed them down on the carpet and started to piece them together in numerical order, identifying the numbers as she went. (Field notes, December 19, 2013)

In the first example, Claire had separated herself from a group of children who had come to visit her in her apartment. While the children played with toys behind the curtain, Claire explored an electronic toy meant for an infant. The toy had lots of buttons to press, each making a distinct sound. Just prior to her retrieving the toy, Claire and her sister had been singing along with English songs from a children’s website. In this first example, Claire played with the lyrics to one of the songs while pressing the buttons on the toy. In so doing, she was able to segment the lyrics of the song phonologically (Goswami, 2002) in English similar to the way in which a young South African child decomposed her name into syllables (see Prinsloo, 2008). In the
second example, Claire applied her understanding of numeracy as she identified each number and assembled the pieces of a floor puzzle in numerical order.

Although not a direct participant in play, on occasion, Hser Paw engaged Claire in conversation while Claire played with toys in the home. For example, during one of my early visits with the family, Hser Paw, Zeyar, and Claire were sitting on the floor. Claire was playing with a set of building toys. As Claire assembled the pieces, Hser Paw directed her in Karen to name the colours of each piece as she fit them together. Claire participated in this discourse by saying the name of the colour in English before fitting the pieces together (Field notes, April 17, 2013).

Claire also experienced literacy through the Internet. Prior to engaging with the electronic toy in Example 1 (see above), Claire, with the help of Zeyar, had accessed an English website on the family’s desktop computer that featured music videos of popular children’s songs. Using the mouse, Claire selected a song from the available icons and then proceeded to sing and dance along with the video:

Claire and her sister, Victoria, proceeded to dance in the middle of the living room floor while singing along to the song. With the exception of the refrain and a few of the more recognizable words (e.g., Lou, skip to my lou) neither sang the correct words. When the song was finished, Claire went back to the computer and selected another song. It was a pop song (“I Like the Music, Music”). She and her sister again mimicked the movements of the children on the screen and sang the repeated parts of the song over and over. They continued in this fashion for a few other songs. (Field notes, April 17, 2013)

Claire and her sister re-created the PALS practice of singing songs to include singing along with music videos. In this example, they imitated the singing and dancing from the video. Although
they may not have known all the words to the song, they still sang along, copying the intonation and phrasing in a manner similar to how children pretend to read books. In so doing, they practiced analyzing syllables in words (Rogoff, 2003) while making meaning through movement and gesture.

The bulk of Claire’s play on the desktop computer involved her playing games. As the year progressed, Claire became quite adept at accessing videos and games on the computer. For example, I observed her typing search terms and reading search result lists to find the appropriate website, and reading digital icon texts to select activities (Field notes, April 17, 2014).

At the conclusion of my second visit in the early learning program, Hser Paw mentioned to me that she was having difficulties with her home computer. She asked if I could come to the house to help her figure out why she could not access the websites recommended to her during the previous PALS session (Field notes, March 3, 2014). I accepted her invitation. The issue appeared to be caused by pop up ads. I was able to solve the issue by accessing the games through another operating system. I showed Hser Paw how to access the games through this system.

Once the issue had been fixed, Claire was quick to take over control of the computer. Hser Paw returned to the kitchen to make a snack for Claire. When she returned, rather than sitting beside Claire (see Chapter 5 for the description of Hser Paw and Claire using the computer in PALS) she took a seat on the couch behind us. She told me to remain seated on a chair at the computer, beside Claire.

For most of the visit, Hser Paw took on the role of observer. From her position on the couch, she could see the screen and hear the computer prompts. At times, she would ask me for clarification as to the meaning of a word. For example, as we were listening to the reading of a
story, Hser Paw asked me what the word “mukluk” meant. In general, she watched as Claire and I played the different games.

Claire engaged in some of the activities on her own. During these activities, she controlled the mouse and responded to the computer-generated prompts. For example, in a game that required Claire’s knowledge of the letters of the alphabet, the computer prompted Claire to locate specific letters. Claire looked for the letter from a group of upper and lower case letters, clicked on it, and then watched as the letter appeared on the wall behind the on-screen character. In the end, Claire had assembled the entire alphabet. (Field notes, March 7, 2014)

For those games with which Claire was less familiar, I assisted her participation in the event when needed by pointing out a specific object (e.g., “Try that piece.”) or by voicing the letter name (e.g., “The letter b.”), or indirectly by describing the colour and location of the button she had to choose (e.g., “It is the green button near the top of the page.”). I chose to engage in the same form of labeling and commenting that I had observed in interactions between Karen parents and their children in PALS (see Chapter 5).

Near the end of the visit, Claire selected an activity that required a different set of problem-solving skills. Hser Paw joined in the event from her position on the couch:

Claire chose a game which required her to assemble a jigsaw puzzle. It appeared as though she was unclear as to how to assemble the digital pieces. Both Hser Paw and I directed her in English to drag individual pieces to the site, to rearrange pieces, or to just leave them and think about where they might go once we had more details. At times, Hser Paw would translate what I had said into Karen. For example, I directed Claire to the ‘hint’ button that revealed the completed picture in relation to those pieces positioned
improperly. Claire would often return to this button as she assembled the puzzle. (Field notes, March 7, 2014)

In this event, Hser Paw and I left the pace and direction of the activity to Claire. Claire continued to control the mouse. However, when Claire began to experience difficulty, Hser Paw recommended pieces to choose, suggested their placement within the puzzle, and advised her to think about the piece a bit longer, in both English and Karen. Although Hser Paw was primarily a peripheral participant in the activity, she was in fact poised to help Claire by providing responsive assistance (Rogoff, 2003) when needed.

**Sam.** Similar to Claire, Sam structured his own opportunities to explore literacy and numeracy during play. For example, when I arrived for my second visit, I noticed that the television set was on. It was showing an English cartoon. Although he rarely paid attention to what was playing on the television, Sam would periodically take the remote control and press individual numbers to change the channel. Each time he pressed a number, he said the name of the individual digit in English (Field notes, April 9, 2013).

I noticed a similar form of engagement with other household objects following my interview with Paw Paw. Sam had periodically come up to me while I was talking with his mother. At one point, he even sat down beside me with a book on his lap. Once I had completed the interview, he engaged with me in the following event:

Sam brought the ceramic dish to me and showed me his name engraved on the bottom of the dish. When I asked him what it said, he said “me”. He then turned the dish so it faced him and, with his finger, he traced each individual letter. Instead of saying the letter, he simply grunted. Once he had finished tracing his name, he took down a small white alarm clock from the cabinet directly behind me and placed it on the floor so that the numbers
were facing up at him. As the secondhand passed a digit he said the digit’s name in English. He did this from 1 through 11. However, when the secondhand reached 12, he said 32. His mother laughed and I think she corrected him, in Karen, on this point. (Field notes, June 11, 2013)

This example describes Sam exploring text on two household objects. First, he explored the individual letters in his name in English by tracing over each letter engraved in the base of the dish with his fingers. Next, he labeled the individual digits on the clock as indicated by the second hand of the clock.

Paw Paw provided her children with a variety of resources many of which she stored in plastic bins in the living room. For example, she stored books and writing tools in one bin and toys in another. Most of Sam’s toys were in the form of action figures or transformers. I also noticed a number of toy weapons including a light saber. Although these types of toys support a child’s dramatic play (Christie, 1991), I often observed Sam explore the objects on his own in order to figure out how they worked. For example, during one visit, I watched him construct a small spinner top. He periodically vocalized what he was doing in English (e.g., “Diamond … here”). Once the top was completed, he attempted to spin it on the tabletop. I observed this same manipulation of parts of a toy later that visit when he was playing with a red transformer ball. During this event, he uttered simple statements about what parts of the ball he was touching (e.g., horns) or commented on the size of the ball (e.g., big). Once he had the toy assembled correctly, he walked over to the table and placed the toy so that it attached magnetically to the table leg (Field notes, March 14, 2014).
However, during one of my visits, I made the following observation in my field notes:
Sam began by playing with an angry bird stretchy/squishy figure on his own. He stretched its arms and legs and tried to turn it inside out. At one point, he retrieved a toy pistol from somewhere and pretended to shoot the bird. He even had the bird move through the toy garage. During this play, he made sound effects and often provided a description in English of what the bird was doing (e.g., “sliding down the slide”). Sam then decided he would throw the angry bird figure at the wall. Much to his surprise, the figure stuck to one of the photos on the wall. He had difficulties prying it off of the photo. We all laughed at this. He then tried to see on what other surfaces it would stick. He tried the bare wall and the poster his sister had made of the alphabet. Neither worked the same. Paw Paw and Zeyar, who were watching from the couch, then suggested (in Karen) he throw it up to the ceiling. I noticed that other items had been stuck to the ceiling since parts still remained. The bird stuck. Sam then tried to decide how best to get it down. He couldn’t reach it, so he pulled over the chair from the computer desk. Standing on the chair, he still couldn’t reach the bird. Zeyar asked him, in English, what he should do. Sam suggested moving the table over, but Zeyar said that she would stand on the chair instead. (Field notes, December 3, 2013)
In this example, Sam explored the properties of the squishy toy while playing on his own. He vocalized his actions in English. During the event, I was sitting on the floor watching him. Zeyar and Paw Paw were sitting on the couch, also watching. Paw Paw supported Sam’s learning by helping him to extend his exploration of the toy’s properties. Zeyar then prompted him to reason through the problem in order to find a solution on his own as to how to get the toy down from the
ceiling. Zeyar only took over from Sam in order to prevent him from engaging in unsafe behaviour (e.g., standing on a table and reaching for the toy on the ceiling).

**Emma.** Emma liked to play because playing was fun (Field notes, October 22, 2015). Over the year, I observed her engaged in various forms of dramatic play such as enacting adult roles while playing house, store, and restaurant, taking on the role of characters from movies (e.g., *Peter Pan*) or television (e.g., *Power Rangers*), and performing traditional rhymes in Karen. Additionally, Isabelle told me that Emma often performed to music videos from You Tube in Karen, Thai, or Burmese, in much the same way as she had seen the Karen teens perform during the Karen New Year celebration (see Chapter 4).

Early on in my visits, I noticed that Isabelle had provided Emma with toys to support her dramatic play. For example, she had a large number of household props including dolls, a doll carriage and stroller, highchair, and cradle, as well as a toy kitchen complete with plastic dishes, pots and pans, and plastic food. She also had a toy cash register which she used when she played store. However, over the year, the number of toys began to decline. Zeyar told me that Isabelle had thrown out or given away many of the toys in order to free up space in the home. This left Emma with a handful of other materials (Kress, 1997) to use as props when she engaged in dramatic play. These props included a set of beach toys (e.g., bucket, shovels), hair accessories, a hairbrush, lip balms, plastic jewelry, and a variety of decorative containers (e.g., a basket, a cloth pouch). For example, when playing store, Emma used the plastic jewelry as money to purchase various hair accessories (Field notes, February 17, 2014). She used the pieces of jewelry as ingredients for cakes when playing house, and playing cards as money to buy food items when playing restaurant. When enacting the role of a Power Ranger, she used the bracelet as a communication device. By enacting pretend adult roles (e.g., shopper, mother, waitress) in
imaginary workplace settings (e.g., store, house, restaurant), Emma explored the cultural practices in which she had observed others engage (Wohlwend, 2011).

When engaged in dramatic play, Emma moved seamlessly from one play scenario to the next, all the while maintaining a continuous narrative in English. She appeared to switch scenarios according to what materials were available. For example, during one visit, Emma outlined a path using her plastic jewelry. This path-building activity quickly shifted into a scenario involving a pony and a puppet show. I described the scene as follows:

The scenario changed again. I was suddenly included in her reenactment of a scene from *Peter Pan*, while Isabelle and Zeyar watched from the kitchen. Emma assigned me the role of Captain Hook, while she played the pirate princess. She motioned to her bike propped up in the corner and told me that it was the pirate ship, the Jolly Roger. She then sprinkled me with imaginary pixie dust and showed me the treasure (the beanbags she had received in her take-home package from the last session of PALS). Emma’s revised version of the story had her character stealing the treasure from my ship. She provided both the narration and the direction in English (Field notes, April 14, 2014).

Emma initiated the event and assigned the roles. She used the materials available to her as props to support her narrative. By enacting a pretend identity (Vygotsky, 1978; Wohlwend, 2011), Emma was able to explore the material meanings of the objects, thus discovering new uses. Although Isabelle and Zeyar had participated in enactments in the past, in this event, their role was to observe us as we performed the story.

Finally, Emma liked to play games. Her game of choice was playing catch with a ball. Over the year, we played catch with a rubber ball, a basketball, and an inflatable ball on which was printed a map of the world. Emma would issue explicit directives in English in order to co-
ordinate my actions with hers. For example, she directed me as to how to sit, how to catch, and how to throw. Sometimes, she would include Isabelle and Zeyar in the activity. I described one of these games as follows:

I sat down and immediately began to play catch with Emma. As usual, she directed me as to how to sit, how to catch, and how to throw. At one point, she left the room and returned with the footstool which she proceeded to incorporate it into our game of catch. She also expanded the game to include Zeyar and Isabelle. Emma directed me to throw the ball over her head to Isabelle. She then joined hands with Zeyar so that Isabelle and I could play catch over their hands. She then directed me to switch places with her so that I joined hands with Zeyar and she played catch with her mother. At one point, she had Zeyar and I open up our arms so that she could “dunk” the ball in the “basket”. (Field notes, November 13, 2013)

In this example, Emma structured the event and directed our actions. Isabelle, Zeyar, and I participated in the event as peers while engaging in child-focused conversations with Emma in English.

Emma also had a number of commercial card games at her disposal. For example, she kept a mixture of three sets of cards, Barbie, Skip Bo, and Spot It, in a small container. During one visit, Isabelle took out the pack of Go Fish cards they had received from PALS. Instead of using the cards to play Go Fish, she shuffled the cards and the four of us, Isabelle, Zeyar, Emma, and I, played a memory game. Although the purpose of the game was to turn over a pair of cards with matching pictures, Isabelle used the game as an opportunity to test Emma’s knowledge of numbers. For example, Emma would turn over a card and say the name of the animal pictured on the card. She would then turn over another card. If the pictures matched, she would collect the
pair. Before allowing her to take the pair, Isabelle would ask her, in Karen, to identify the number on the card. Emma would say the number in English (Field notes, December 19, 2013). In this event, Isabelle was the initiator. She structured Emma’s involvement in the activity by engaging her in rote practice with the text by asking her known-answer questions (Rogoff, 2003). Unlike the game of catch in which Emma provided us with direction, in this game, Isabelle prompted Emma, in Karen, for the name of the number being displayed on the card. Emma responded in English.

This overview of play events taking place in the children’s homes shows that, in general, the role of the mothers was again to present their children with opportunities to participate in various forms of play within the home by providing them with tools in the form of commercially-produced materials (e.g., housekeeping props, dolls, plastic figures, blocks, balls, games), resources (e.g., desktop computer), and the space in which to use these materials and resources. For the most part, the mothers chose to remain in the background, leaving the child to organize and direct themselves and others in English in various types of play including dramatic (e.g., enacting roles, animating objects), exploratory (e.g., examining objects), constructive (e.g., manipulating objects), and functional (e.g., physical play), providing assistance, oral (in Karen) or physical, only when needed. However, on one occasion, Isabelle took up the task of organizing Emma’s participation in a structured card game by engaging her in a form of rote practice in Karen with the game cards.

In this section, drawing from field notes of my observations within the homes of the focal families, I described situated practice within the social activity domain of play in the homes and identified the cultural tools and participant structures mediating the individual events. In the next section, I analyze the results through the lens of the activity system in order to understand how
literacy is enacted within the social activity domain of play in the homes of the Karen families while participating in the bilingual family literacy program in Lacey City.

**Results and Discussion**

Unlike their own experiences as children growing up in the refugee camp (see Chapter 4), as parents, Hser Paw, Paw Paw, and Isabelle shaped their children’s opportunities to learn in the home by providing them with tools similar to those used in other early learning centres (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), space in the home in which to use the tools, and by enrolling them in early learning programs (e.g., PALS, the Drop-In program, the pre-school program) in the community. In other words, the parents provided them with opportunities (Hannon, 1995) to engage in literacy events and the resources with which to engage (Hirst, 1998; Li, 2009; Mui & Anderson, 2008). For example, Claire had access to a variety of genres of picture books, both English only and English with translation into Karen, an older computer through which she could access English movie videos and English word games, writing tools, and toys. These resources were similar to those to which Claire had access as a participant in the Drop-In program, the pre-school program, and in PALS.

Similarly, Sam had access to a variety of genres of English and English-Karen picture books. Many of the books were from PALS. His family had borrowed some of the others from the school library. He and his older siblings had access to a computer and a television set through which they could watch English cartoons. Paw Paw also purchased a variety of English skill instruction workbooks, writing tools and toys which she stored in plastic bins in the living room for her children to use. In addition to attending PALS, Paw Paw chose to enroll Sam in a half-day, English pre-school program, and took him to the early learning program for refugee families when he was available.
Finally, Emma had access to a variety of genres of picture books (English, English-Karen), a computer through which she could access Karen music videos, writing tools, and toys. Additionally, Isabelle took Emma to PALS and the early learning program for refugee families.

Zeyar once described Paw Paw as a typical Karen parent (Field notes, February 23, 2015) in that typically Karen parents support their children by allowing them to learn on their own in a safe, caring, environment. For example, as I described in Chapter 4, young Karen children were encouraged to observe their parents as they engaged in situated practice within the village. The children then re-created these practices during play. This cultural approach to childrearing is similar to the childrearing strategies of working-class and poor parents as described by Lareau (2002). Drawing from an ethnographic data set that included white children and black children from two socioeconomic groups, middle-class and working-class and poor, Lareau found that working-class and poor parents believed they could best foster their child’s development by providing them with the basics including love, food, and safety. Specifically, her analysis of the data suggested the middle-class parents in the study cultivated their children’s development by enrolling them in numerous organized activities, whereas the working-class and poor parents encouraged natural growth by valuing their children’s free time and encouraging “deeper, richer ties within their extended families” (p. 749).

Throughout the year, I observed all three mothers leave the pace and direction of learning (Rogoff, 2003) to their children. For example, Claire and Sam had the opportunity (Hannon, 1995) to observe or engage directly in school-like activities in the home alongside older siblings or friends. During one of my visits, Claire told me about her play experiences on the computer involving other children, in particular, her older sister Kristen and her best friend Leah. During another visit, Paw Paw told me how Sam would engage in book-reading activities alongside his
older brother and sister. This suggests that both Claire and Sam learned about literacy and the genres of school discourse while playing with older children (Gregory, 2001). In contrast, Emma learned how to make meaning of texts by observing others engaged in situated practice in the home and in other settings. For example, she learned how to share books by watching Joanne read during “All Together Time” in PALS and the early childhood educator reading books to the group during the Drop-In program, and how to sing Karen songs by watching Karen music videos on You Tube and the Karen teens perform during the Karen New Year celebration.

Book reading was a common practice within the early learning settings in which the focal children participated. Within these settings, the children observed or participated in reading events in English. Thus, within these settings, the young Karen children came to understand print, specifically English print, as mediating their literacy learning. Although reading events mediated by English texts were common child-initiated events in all three homes, each of the focal children enacted the event differently. Initially, when Claire read English picture books in the home, she read aspectually (Sulzby, 1985) in English, focusing on the print rather than utilizing the pictures as well, to help her comprehend the story. At times, she looked to another adult to assist her in making meaning of print, eventually refusing to attempt reading, preferring instead to flip through the book and offering the occasional comment in English. In contrast, when attempting to read English or dual language picture books, Sam made meaning from the pictures by vocalizing labels and phrases in English, making motions, and repeating text in English. As he transitioned from a focus on pictures to a focus on print, in order to help him make meaning of the individual words, he sought assistance from a more experienced reader to tell him what the individual word said (Mui & Anderson, 2008; Hirst, 1998; Volk & de Acosta, 2001). Finally, when Emma structured book reading events, she made meaning of the story by
engaging in monologic storytelling (Sulzby, 1985) in English, with Isabelle providing English-language support when needed, or by playing the role of teacher, with Isabelle, Zeyar, and myself participating as peers in play.

Each of the focal children initiated and structured other meaning-making events in the home. Claire structured her own engagement with digital texts on the computer as a way to practice school-like behaviours in ways similar to those I had observed in PALS and in other early learning settings. For example, in PALS, parents and children were encouraged to form words using the magnetic letters. They were also introduced to a computer game in which they could form words by selecting individual letters and positioning them on an image of a refrigerator (Field notes, February 26, 2014). During my visits within the home, I observed Claire choose to play English language games on the computer that allowed her to practice assembling letters of the alphabet in sequence. Furthermore, families sang nursery rhymes and songs in PALS and received nursery rhyme books and CDs as take home materials. In the home, I observed Claire choose to sing along with texts in the form of music videos on the computer. Similarly, Sam made meaning by engaging in school-like activities similar to those which he had observed or had engaged in within the formal early learning programs in which he was enrolled. For example, when attempting to write, he made meaning of individual letters by tracing and copying letters. However, the bulk of his time was spent figuring out how things worked (Kendrick, 2005; Rowe, 1998). When playing on his own, he used language (English) to assist him in solving the problem of how toys and other objects worked (Vygotsky, 1978). Finally, Emma made meaning of cultural practices in the home by structuring her own participation in dramatic play events in which she enacted adult or pretend roles in English using props or materials at the hand (Kress, 1997) and while playing games of catch. Furthermore, by singing
along with Karen music videos on the computer, she was developing her ability to speak Karen and strengthening her Karen identity (Gilhooly & Lee, 2014; Omerbašić, 2015).

Additionally, although all three mothers encouraged their children to direct their own learning while they visited with other adults or prepared snacks and meals, Hser Paw, Paw Paw, and Isabelle provided assistance when needed (Quadros & Sarroub, 2016). During some events, they provided assistance in order to scaffold their child’s learning. For example, I observed Hser Paw make suggestions in Karen to assist Claire with assembling the digital puzzle. In this event, her verbal explanations were given in context rather than in the form of school-like discourse as I described in other play scenarios. In other words, rather than asking Claire known-answer question (e.g., “What colour is this?”), she made suggestions as to what shape of piece Claire should look for and provided her with specific details as to where to look in order to find the correct piece and where in the puzzle the piece should be placed. Similarly, during the event in which Sam explored the pop-culture figure, Paw Paw helped Sam extend his exploration of the toy’s properties by making suggestions in Karen. Finally, although Isabelle participated in many events as a peer in play, while Emma engaged in a child-initiated reading event, Isabelle sat beside her and supplied the English text or would say the word in English only when needed.

At other times, the mothers provided direct assistance so that the children could engage in an activity on their own. For example, during one of my visits in Claire’s home, Hser Paw came into the living room to correctly load a DVD into the DVD recorder so that Claire and her younger sister, Victoria, could watch a movie. Similarly, during a visit with Sam in his home, during the event in which Sam explored the plastic spinner top, Paw Paw found two other transformer toys, which she then tossed over to Sam.
By attending PALS and the early learning program for refugee families, the mothers learned (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) about the types of tools they could provide to their children and ways to support them as they explored literacy in their home. For example, throughout the year, the PALS facilitators stressed the link between a child’s language and literacy development and encouraged parents to engage in conversations with their children in both English and Karen (Field notes, November 6, 2013). During literacy events within the home, I observed Hser Paw and Isabelle take on the role of initiator by structuring their children’s participation in school-like conversations (Heath, 1982) similar to what was modeled by the facilitators in PALS and by the early childhood educator in the Drop-In program. For example, I observed both mothers ask their children known-answer questions (Rogoff, 2003) in Karen or in English about pictures in books, about attributes of toys, or about the numbers on a set of playing cards. Similarly, when engaged in a reading event with Emma, Isabelle chose a book-reading style that was child-focused (Hammer, 2005), during which she prompted Emma to make meaning of the text by labeling objects on each page. However, in these events, it is difficult, to know if Hser Paw and Isabelle drew from their experiences in PALS or from their own experiences as children in school where they engaged in a similar form of rote practice. In contrast, Paw Paw attempted to structure Sam’s participation in a similar form of conversation by asking him known-answer questions (Rogoff, 2003) in Karen about pictures in a book. Since she had not attended school as a child, she may have drawn from her experience as a participant observer during “All Together Time” in PALS to structure Sam’s participation in a reading event. These observed behaviours support Heath’s (1982) assertion as to the authority of books and book-related activities in the lives of pre-schoolers and their families.
Table 6.1 summarizes the activity I observed in the homes of the three focal families. The shaded area (e.g., subject, object, context) represents activity. The remaining two columns summarize the cultural tools and participant structures mediating the activity.

**Table 6.1. Summary of Observed Activity within the Homes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject: Participants</th>
<th>Object: Situated Practice</th>
<th>Context: Social Activity Domain</th>
<th>Mediation Means: Cultural Tools</th>
<th>Mediation Means: Role of Parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Reading (focus on print)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>picture book (E)</td>
<td>Initiator: Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Adult</td>
<td>Reading (focus on print)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>picture book (E) gesture speech (E)</td>
<td>Initiator: Child Participant: Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Reading (focus on image)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>picture book (E; E/K) speech (E) gesture</td>
<td>Initiator: Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Adult</td>
<td>Reading (focus on image)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>picture book (E; E/K) speech (E) gesture</td>
<td>Initiator: Child Participant: Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Parent</td>
<td>Reading (focus on print)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>picture book (E; E/K) speech (E) gesture</td>
<td>Initiator: Child Participant: Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Parent</td>
<td>Reading (monologic storytelling)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>picture book (E/K) speech (E)</td>
<td>Initiator: Child Participant: Parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Child</td>
<td>Reading (focus on image)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>picture book (E) speech (K) gesture speech (E)</td>
<td>Initiator: Parent Participant: Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Parent Adult</td>
<td>Reading (playing to read)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>picture book (E) speech (E) gesture</td>
<td>Initiator: Child Participant: Parent Participant: Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Writing (forming name)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>magnetic alphabet letters (E) speech (E) action</td>
<td>Initiator: Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Adult</td>
<td>Writing (copying letters)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>skill practice sheet (E) pencil action speech (E)</td>
<td>Initiator: Child Participant: Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject: Participants</td>
<td>Object: Situated Practice</td>
<td>Context: Social Activity Domain</td>
<td>Mediational Means: Cultural Tools</td>
<td>Mediational Means: Role of Parent</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Designing (colouring images)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>images on skill practice worksheet (E), crayons, speech (E)</td>
<td>Initiator: Child, Participant: Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Adult</td>
<td>Designing (colouring images)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>stamped image on wipe off board, markers, speech (E)</td>
<td>Initiator: Child, Participant: Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Adult</td>
<td>Designing (drawing images)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>stamped image on wipe off board (E), markers, speech (E)</td>
<td>Initiator: Child, Participant: Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Child</td>
<td>Playing (constructive play)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>building toys, speech (K), speech (E), action</td>
<td>Initiator: Parent, Participant: Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Playing (dramatic play)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>music video, video sharing webpage, computer (E), action</td>
<td>Initiator: Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Adult Parent</td>
<td>Playing (dramatic play)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>miscellaneous toys, speech (E), action</td>
<td>Initiator: Child, Participant: Parent, Participant: Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Adult Parent</td>
<td>Playing (dramatic play)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>miscellaneous toys, speech (E), action</td>
<td>Initiator: Child, Participant: Parent, Participant: Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Playing (exploratory play)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>floor puzzle, electronic toy, speech (E), action</td>
<td>Initiator: Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Playing (exploratory play)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>toys, speech (E), action</td>
<td>Initiator: Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Parent Adult</td>
<td>Playing (exploratory play)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>toys, speech (E), speech (K), action</td>
<td>Initiator: Child, Participant: Parent, Participant: Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject: Participants</td>
<td>Object: Situated Practice</td>
<td>Context: Social Activity Domain</td>
<td>Mediational Means: Cultural Tools</td>
<td>Mediational Means: Role of Parent</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Playing (functional play)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>activity/word puzzle, educational webpage, computer (E) gesture</td>
<td>Initiator: Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Adult</td>
<td>Playing (functional play)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>activity/word puzzle, educational webpage, computer (E) speech (E) speech (K) gesture</td>
<td>Initiator: Child Participant: Parent Participant: Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Child Adult</td>
<td>Playing (functional play)</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>card game speech (K) speech (E) action</td>
<td>Initiator: Parent Participant: Child Participant: Adult</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* (E) – English; (K) – Karen; (E/K) – English and Karen

**Summary**

In sum, all three of the focal mothers appeared to draw from the knowledge they gained through their participation in PALS and other early learning settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to organize their children’s participation in school-like activities within the home by providing them with a variety of English and bilingual resources and making space and time within the home for them to engage with the resources. This observation is consistent with findings in the literature (e.g., Hannon, 1995; Hirst, 1998; Li, 2009). Although I observed the three focal mothers begin to construct and reinterpret their understandings of English activities from PALS into Karen in the home, they primarily chose to leave the pace and direction of learning to their children, by encouraging them to observe others engage in school-related activities and to structure their own participation in both school and non-school related literacy events.

In contrast, the children chose to structure their own participation in activities with the resources in ways similar to those they observed others engage within PALS, the English
language Drop-In program, the English language pre-school, and the home\(^\text{16}\). In general, the children chose to engage with English-language texts and make meaning of these texts by talking about them in English. For example, they read picture books, wrote their names, drew and coloured pictures, sang along with songs, played with toys, created structures, explored objects, and played computer games. They also enacted adult and imaginary roles, performed traditional rhymes, reenacted stories, and played card games.

In this chapter, I described how literacy events were enacted in the homes of the three focal families. For each family, I identified and described historical literacy practices and discussed how these practices shaped their current literacy beliefs. I then identified current literacy practices both in and out of the home that contributed to the child’s understanding of literacy. Finally, I described individual literacy events within each of the three homes in terms of their meditational means (i.e., cultural tools, participant structure) and determined the distinctive pattern of support for the child’s learning in each of the homes.

Taken together, in Chapters 5 and 6, I demonstrated the ways in which the families engaged in certain literacy practices within the PALS program and how they brought aspects of these practices into their home. I also demonstrated how the mothers developed the children’s activity within the two contexts to create practices that were specific to neither the program nor the home. What has emerged, I suggest, is the need for a reconceptualization of early learning settings to embrace diversity, not only of language and culture, but also of meditational tools and roles. I address this idea in the next and final chapter of the dissertation.

\(^{16}\) I acknowledge that it is difficult to tell from which of these contexts the children are appropriating discursive and literacy practices.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Introduction

My purpose for conducting this study was to understand literacy as it was enacted within a community of resettled Karen refugee families as they participated in a bilingual family literacy program. I chose to observe and document literacy events through the lens of Activity Theory (Engeström, 1987, 2001; Guetiérrez et al., 1999). This lens allowed me to understand how literacy was enacted in the larger community and how families responded to changes introduced into the system. In Chapter 4, I described how the values, beliefs, and attitudes of the community of resettled Karen families living in Lacey City were rooted in culture, shaped by spirituality, and developed in school and demonstrated how, despite the inclusion of printed texts, the current activity of the Karen people within the community and the church was consistent with how activity was enacted within these contexts prior to the families’ arrival in the host community. I also described how, in response to the introduction into the system of a new type of text, bureaucratic text, members of the Karen community created an innovative form of activity (Engeström, 2001) during which other individuals brokered their engagement with these texts.

The primary focus of this study looked at how literacy was enacted within two contexts, a bilingual family literacy program, PALS, and the homes of Karen families with pre-school aged children. I was particularly interested in the question of if and how families took up practices from one setting and brought them into the other. In Chapter 4, I illustrated how the young children engaged in literacy activities within formal early learning settings within the Lacey City community and concluded that parents learned about this new form of early childhood activity either directly, through their observation of activity taking place in the setting, or indirectly,
through written or oral communication from the program. In Chapters 5 and 6, I demonstrated the ways in which the families engaged in certain literacy events within the PALS program and within their homes and highlighted how they brought aspects of practices from one context into the other. I also demonstrated how the mothers developed the children’s activity within the two contexts to create practices that were specific to neither the program nor the home. Thus, rather than discussing activity in terms of take-up, I described how the activity was transformed within each context.

In this concluding chapter, I continue to explore the concept of transformed activity within the community of resettled Karen refugees. As I stated in the conclusion to Chapter 6, there is the need for a reconceptualization of early learning settings to reflect diversity, not only of language and culture, but also of meditational tools and roles. First, I revisit the conceptual framework guiding this study. Next, I draw from this framework, specifically from Guetièrrez et al.’s (1999) notion of third space, to reconceptualize the families’ activity within the contexts of PALS and the homes as expanded activity and critique the concept of bilingualism as it applies to the program. Then, I describe insights gained from this study as they relate to family literacy programmers, facilitators, and administrators, and families. I conclude with a discussion of the study’s limitations and suggestions for future research.

**Revisiting the Conceptual Framework**

As I stated in Chapter 2, I wove together constructs from Activity Theory (Engeström, 1987, 2001; Guetièrrez et al., 1999), the New Literacy Studies (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 2007; Street, 1984), and Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and assertions from the literature on literacy learning in out-of-school contexts to shape my research questions, guide my data collection, and inform my understanding. My primary focus was on the
literacy learning activity of parents and their young children within the community. My conceptual framework allowed me to understand literacy events within two contexts, the bilingual family literacy program and the home, as situated activities with multiple forms of texts during which participants constructed literacy knowledge using multiple modes. It assisted me in identifying the myriad of meditational means the participants used during activities to construct literacy knowledge and shaped my understanding of the outcome of activity, the literacy practice, as being either new or syncretic (Duranti & Ochs, 1995). To reiterate, I constructed the conceptual framework by drawing on my understanding of theories used in literacy research and from my interpretation of findings within the literature. I am not suggesting it as a new theory to inform literacy research. To do so would require a greater exploration of each individual theory and a wider review of the literature. However, working within this conceptual framework allowed me to document how change was facilitated within the community and understand new activity in terms of culture and diversity. In the next section, in order to answer the questions of the take up and transformation of literacy practices within the homes and bilingual family literacy program, I describe how activity was reconceptualized within the two contexts, beginning with the family literacy program.

Reconceptualizing Activity

Literacy Learning in PALS

As I described in Chapter 5, Parents as Literacy Supporters (PALS) in Immigrant and Refugee Communities is a bilingual family literacy program for parents/caregivers and their 3- and 4-year old children. The program is delivered in English with translation into the first language of the participants and reflects an additive bilingual environment (Cummins et al., 2006). The program was designed with the understanding that parents provide their children with
many opportunities to learn literacy within the home. However, the program also recognizes that families want to learn ways to support their children that are consistent with the learning practices to which the children will be exposed once they begin formal schooling (Anderson & Morrison, 2010). Thus, at each site in which the program is offered, program facilitators make space for the families to explore resources in the form of English and bilingual texts and other materials and provide them with opportunities to observe and participate in school-like activity.

In Lacey City, the PALS facilitators created a space they called, “All Together Time” in which they read the English text of a bilingual (English-Karen) picture book to the children while the parents watched from the periphery. The facilitator structured these reading events so that the children could observe her as she read the book in English and participate in a school-like conversation with her about the book in English. Then, during the segment, “Parent-Child Together”, the facilitators made available to the families individual activity centers in which they could engage in a variety of activities. During individual literacy events, parents syncretized the knowledge shared during the group discussion in the “Parent-Only” segment, the knowledge gained through their observation of the facilitator during book-reading events, and from cultural beliefs, values, and attitudes within the Karen community to structure their child’s participation in the event.

At times, the parents structured their role in events in ways consistent with suggestions shared by the facilitators during the group discussion. For example, during child-initiated events (e.g., making rubbings of numbers, playing with toy dinosaurs) the parents participated alongside their children as peers in play and engaged them in child-focused conversations in English or in a combination of English and Karen. Although this form of parent-child interaction within a formal family literacy program reflects that reported in the literature (e.g., Hannon et al., 2006;
Hirst et al., 2010; Jay & Rohl, 2005; Singh et al., 2015), it was new to the Karen families and suggests that the parents drew from knowledge they gained by observing other adults engaged in activity within PALS and other early learning programs to transform their own role in their child’s learning.

During other parent-initiated events, although they structured the child’s involvement in activity in much the same way as was modeled for them during “All Together Time”, the Karen parents chose tools from their own culture to mediate their child’s participation in the activity. For example, during parent-initiated book-reading attempts, they organized the child’s participation in the event by pointing to images and asking questions. However, rather than reading the text and asking the children to chime in or to answer simple recall questions (Dickinson & Smith, 1994) in English, as had been modeled to them in PALS and in other early learning programs in the community, the mothers asked their children known-answer questions in Karen. This form of engagement reflects the form of rote practice in which the parents engaged as children attending Karen schools and is consistent with that observed by Quadros and Sarroub (2016) in a kindergarten classroom. However, the mothers’ choice of the Karen language as a cultural tool may reflect more their limited facility with the English language rather than their choice to draw from their own traditional learning practices. Zeyar told me that most of the Karen parents she knew spoke in Karen because it was their first language and the easiest language in which to communicate (Field notes, October 22, 2015).

Parents also drew from values, beliefs, and attitudes that shape learning within the Karen community to structure their children’s opportunities to learn in PALS through their observation of mature activities. At times, they structured their children’s opportunity to observe how they and other adults engaged in activities. For example, the parents demonstrated for the children
how to form names using magnetic alphabet letters and create texts using words and images cut from newspapers and magazines. During these events, as was customary in the Karen culture (Field notes, November 19, 2013), the adults did not engage the children in a conversation about what they were doing, nor did the children ask any questions. The role of the parent was simply to model (Gregory et al., 2010) the activity for their child. Similarly, the Karen parents understood the English-speaking facilitator, Joanne, as being an expert in reading (Field notes, April 7, 2014). Thus, during each session, they encouraged their children to sit on the floor and observe her as she read the bilingual book during “All Together Time”. They also encouraged the children to walk alongside her and observe her as she read signs during the environmental print walk and identified shapes during the shape walk.

Similar to learning within the Karen culture (Field notes, November 19, 2013), the parents often left the pace and direction of learning to the child. For example, they chose to watch from behind as their child formed patterns using small plastic counters or completed word games on the computer. Again, there was no direct talk between the parent and child during the event. At other times, the parents remained at a distance as their child engaged in the activity on their own and engaged in conversations with the other mothers. As I mentioned previously, visiting between adults while children played was a common practice in the Karen community (Field notes, October 4, 2013), a practice that may not be fully understood within the context of the family literacy program in Lacey City, even though Anderson and Morrison (2011) documented the myriad ways that parents in PALS support their children, in addition to verbal scaffolding. At one point during the year, Joanne expressed to me her concern about what she perceived as the parents’ lack of engagement in activities alongside their children.
Finally, when engaged in an activity alongside their child, rather than choosing the activity and structuring their participation in the event, as was modeled for them by the English-speaking adults taking part in the program, the Karen parents understood their role in an event as providing responsive assistance (Rogoff, 2003) to their child. For example, during the making of a craft, they formed the letters of the child’s name using glue and pulled apart strands of clay. While playing a word game on the computer, they repeated the computer’s prompts to their child in English so that the child could make the correct selection. While arranging dominoes in an early math centre, they stood beside their children, assisting when needed by drawing their attention to the number of dots on the tile. I also observed both Isabelle and Paw Paw place their hands directly on that of their child as the child formed letters. For example, Isabelle guided Emma’s writing of letters on a piece of paper with a pencil while Paw Paw placed her hand over that of Sam’s younger sister while she made shapes on a white board using a felt tip marker. I described this same structure of support during direct interactions between adults and children within the context of the home (see Chapter 6).

Guetiérrez et al. (1999) define the concept of third space in Activity Theory as, “an expanded activity in which the object is extended and the activity itself reorganized, resulting in new opportunities for learning” (p. 293). Hence, rather than thinking in terms of if and how the Karen families take-up practices in the program, I suggest considering how the families created situated practice while constructing literacy knowledge (Guetiérrez & Stone, 2000) within the program. The outcomes of events were syncretic literacy practices (Gregory, 2001). Through the use of multiple and diverse meditational tools, in particular the Karen language and cultural forms of support, the focal mothers expanded activity within the program to provide new learning opportunities for their children. Specifically, they transformed parent-child attempts at
book-reading and reading individual letters into bilingual events in which the children engaged in rote practice. They reconfigured the structure of events to allow them to take on a more traditional role in order to encourage their children’s observation and allow for them to direct and pace their own learning. Hence, book reading, singing songs, and scribbling became monolingual practices in which only the children were involved or monolingual practices in which the children engaged with another adult or child. Finally, activities in which the parents were directly involved became structured events in which they assisted their children’s learning by helping them according to their needs. As a result, the practice of forming individual letters, for example, became a syncretic practice in which the parents directly guided the child’s hand movements.

**Literacy Learning in the Homes**

Despite the fact that learning early literacy concepts within the home were not consistent with their own learning experiences growing up in the village or camp (see Chapter 4), the three mothers structured their children’s opportunities to observe and participate in literacy activities within their homes. Similar to the Asian immigrant parents’ in Li’s (2009) study, Hser Paw, Paw Paw, and Isabelle provided their children with resources in the form of English and bilingual picture books, computers, writing tools (e.g., pencils, felt tip markers, paper, wipe off boards), and various toys, as well as the space in which to use these resources. The mothers came to understand these resources as tools to support their children’s early literacy development through their direct participation in PALS and in the Drop-In program (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Drawing on the values, beliefs, and attitudes of the Karen community, the mothers chose to engage their children in rote practice in Karen. For example, Hser Paw asked Claire to identify the colour of the piece she was using to build a tower. Isabelle asked Emma to identify individual
letters while reading an alphabet book. Paw Paw attempted to structure Sam’s participation in a book-reading attempt by asking him to name the colour of an image in a picture book. However, again, their choice of Karen as a mediating tool may simply reflect their lack of facility with the English language.

Interestingly, throughout the year, I observed Isabelle prompt Emma to participate in school-like activities by becoming a peer in play during which she engaged Emma in child-focused conversations in both languages. For example, she prompted Emma to read a picture book in English by taking on the role of student to Emma’s teacher, encouraged Emma’s English-language development by participating in her enactments of the fairy-tale, *Little Red Riding Hood* in English, and supported her development of numeracy concepts by playing a card game with her in which she spoke Karen. Although researchers have reported adults from other cultural groups engaged in this form of activity within the home (e.g., Mui & Anderson, 2008), this represents a change in role for the three Karen mothers. Of the three focal mothers in this study, Isabelle was the youngest. Her choice to engage in child-initiated events as a peer suggests that her beliefs and attitudes regarding the parents’ role in young children’s learning may be changing. Similarly, in Chapter 6, I described how Hser Paw understood her change in beliefs with regards to how young children learn as being related to her experiences in PALS and in the Drop-In program. This finding that parents’ beliefs change over time is consistent with those of Reese and Gallimore (2000), although they reported on cross-generational change.

Perhaps, because of their experiences with similar resources in multiple early learning settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the children chose to use tools provided to them by their parents to engage in multiple literacy learning events in English within the home. For example, they read picture books, wrote their names, drew and coloured pictures, sang along with songs, played with
toys, created structures, explored objects, and played computer games. They also enacted adult and imaginary roles, performed traditional rhymes, reenacted stories, and played card games.

There may be several explanations for their preference for English. The children’s preference for choosing to use English over their first language may reflect the fact that they have yet to achieve a stable enough command of their native language (Wong Fillmore, 1991). For example, during one of our informal conversations, Paw Paw said that Sam understood enough Karen to communicate with his family, but not enough to fully understand the stories told to him by the Sunday school teacher (Field notes, November 22, 2013). Similarly, Isabelle said that, although she would direct Emma in Karen, due to Emma’s lack of fluency in Karen, she would explain things to her in English (Field notes, October 25, 2015).

Furthermore, through their participation in the host community, the children have come to understand English as the valued language, both within the school and community, and may reject any use of their first language, even if it may be the only language spoken by their parents (Wong Fillmore, 1991). Moreover, because they only saw English-speaking adults make meaning from printed English texts in early learning settings, I posit that the children engaged in book handling practices such as holding the book and turning the pages on their own and looked to a more experienced English-speaking adult for assistance in making meaning.

I believe that the children’s rejection of the first language may already be happening. For example, during our first interview, Hser Paw shared with me her oldest daughter’s reluctance to maintain the Karen language. Hser Paw said, “She [Kristen] said, ‘No. I go to school. My teacher never teach me the Karen language. She teach me English. Why I need to learn Karen?’” (Hser Paw, interview, June 13, 2013). Similarly, during one of my visits, Paw Paw shared, through Zeyar, that, in order to lure Sam’s attention away from an English cartoon on the computer, she
stood beside him and quietly told him an oral story in Karen. Sam did not appear to appreciate her effort, muttering, “Better”, under his breath when she had finished and he was free to return to his English cartoon (Field notes, November 22, 2013).

Thus, similar to findings reported in the literature, literacy-learning practices within the Karen home involved the children engaging in school-like events in English on their own or with older siblings, friends, and relatives (e.g., Gregory, 2001), and in bilingual rote learning events with a parent (Anderson, & Gunderson, 1997). Rather than concluding that literacy practices from PALS were taken up in the home, I suggest the mothers expanded the children’s literacy-learning activity within the home. Guetiérrez et al. (1999) state, “an activity becomes a hybrid activity when it draws together aspects from multiple contexts” (p. 292). Activity within the home drew from participant structures and language from within the Karen community and on resources and language from other early learning settings. Hence, the three mothers expanded learning in the home first by organizing their children’s opportunities to learn, then by providing them with the resources with which to learn. However, I posit that, because PALS and other early learning programs consistently promote English and school-like practices, the potential for diversity of activity within the home is limited. In the next section, I critique the concept of bilingualism as it is promoted within PALS.

**Bilingualism within PALS in Lacey City**

The literature on family literacy programs includes descriptions of programs that have addressed the issue of language diversity through the provision of instruction in both English and the first language of the participants (e.g., Friedrich et al., 2014; Iddings, 2009; Singh et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2010). Most often, providing instruction in both languages is understood as providing simultaneous oral translation during each session (e.g., Friedrich et al., 2014; Singh et
Past participants in the PALS program indicated that they valued this aspect of the program. For example, in a study reporting on immigrant and refugee families’ perceptions of the benefits of the program, drawing on data from focus groups with parents during the pilot project (see Chapter 1), Anderson et al. (in press) found that, in general, parents appreciated the bilingual format of the program in that it assisted in their understanding of the key ideas being shared in each session and affirmed the value of maintaining their first language.

Bilingual family literacy programs have also addressed the issue of linguistic diversity by providing participating families with bilingual books (e.g., Anderson et al., 2011; Hirst et al., 2010; Hope, 2011). The parents who participated in the focus groups during the PALS pilot study reported that, during shared reading events with their children, they engaged in code switching in that they would read the English text of the book, but switch to their first language if the text became too difficult (Anderson et al., in press).

I argue that, although the PALS program in Lacey City provided families with simultaneous translation during each of the sessions and bilingual books as part of their take-home package, the program did not promote the use of the families’ first language as a tool for meaning-making in an early learning setting. In contrast, a key construct of the framework that emerged from Cummins et al.’s (2006) action research initiative, “Situating learning in home, school, and community” was negotiating identities (p. 304). This initiative aimed, in part, to support parents in developing their children’s first language skills. Through the “Dual-Language Books and Stories Project” in which teachers created book bags of commercial and student-produced dual-language books for use in the home and hosted a day of multilingual storytelling in the classroom, the authors concluded that students came to understand “proficiency in languages other than English as a significant accomplishment” (p. 304).
Throughout the year, I consistently observed the co-facilitators in Lacey City modeling the scaffolding of the children’s engagement in one form of activity, one with printed texts shared in English only. Although they did model the sharing of an oral story in Karen, this only happened once and, similar to the other group shared reading events, this event lacked linguistic diversity. In terms of the bilingual books, due to the lack of availability of dual-language (Karen-English) books, Zeyar provided the written translation of each page of text in the take-home book into Karen. To facilitate this task, she printed the Karen text on clear sheets, cut out the text for each page, and then affixed the strip of text directly above or below the English text. Thus, in effect, the families at this site received an English picture book with simultaneous translation into Karen. Although Joanne modeled the reading of these texts during “All Together Time”, at no time did Zeyar model the reading of the Karen text.

Naqvi, McKeough, Thorne, and Pfitscher (2013) studied the use of dual language books (DLB) in shared reading events in a mainstream kindergarten classroom. As part of the data analysis for the study, the authors viewed and analyzed video taped excerpts and transcriptions of two DLB events in order to identify linguistically and culturally responsive teaching practices. The dual language books included text in English and in Punjabi. The classroom teacher read and discussed the English text of both books as part of a group shared reading event. A Punjabi-speaking volunteer, trained in dual language book reading, then read each text in Punjabi. The children responded to the text in either English or Punjabi. The authors defined those teaching practices that drew on the students’ strengths relative to their home language and culture as being linguistically and culturally responsive and concluded that, through their participation in these practices, the children came to understand reading, both in English and in their first language, as a valued practice in both linguistic communities.
I suggest that, if the purpose of the shared book reading events during the “All Together Time” at this site was to model for parents how to engage with bilingual books then texts should be read and discussed in both languages. By observing reading events in both languages, parents and children may come to understand the value of reading picture books in their home language and in English. This understanding might lead to expanded activity within the program and home, one in which the Karen language mediates the child’s understanding of Karen text rather than simply facilitating the Karen-speaking parent’s participation in the event. In the next section, I further discuss insights from this study.

**Insights**

Le Compte and Schensul (1999) believe the job of the ethnographer is “to attribute meanings and importance to patterns and regularities that people otherwise take for granted in everyday life” (p. 214). They go on to state that, while stakeholders may think they know what is going on, they are unable “to step back from everyday knowledge to pinpoint the significance or implications of such knowledge for future practice or program innovation” (p. 214). In this section, I pinpoint insights from the findings of this study for developers of family literacy programs, family literacy program facilitators and administrators, and for resettled refugee families.

**Insights for Family Literacy Program Developers**

Based largely on studies that were carried out within the homes of white, middle class families (e.g., Burgess, Hect, & Lonigan, 2002; Christian et al., 1998; Snow, 1983; Storch & Whitehurst, 2001), educators and administrators began to create literacy programs for families. Although these programs were targeted at culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse families, these programs aimed to impart to them the literacy practices of the middle class
families whose children typically made the transition to school literacy without much difficulty (Auerbach, 1989). The majority of these programs were based on a model of family literacy that promoted the transmission of school practices into family contexts (Auerbach, 1989). Thus, the focus was on young children’s early literacy learning and on educating parents on how to bring early literacy learning into the context of the family.

Phillips et al. (2006) acknowledge that parents from different cultures want their children to experience the sense of being literate even if this means challenging their own first hand experiences with literacy learning. As such, these families look to family literacy programs to show them how to use their local literacies to engage with their children in the more formal literacies of schooling. However, the beliefs, values, and attitudes that shape activities within these programs reflect a culture other than the one to which the participants belong. Thus, Auerbach (1989) argued that family literacy programs for immigrant and refugee families should include instruction that is informed by the experience and knowledge of parents rather than on a pre-determined set of practices and activities.

The family literacy program, Parents as Literacy Supporters (PALS) was initially developed in response to a request from the mayor of a small urban centre to assist with a literacy initiative to meet the needs of a low-income, English-speaking population and then modified for use in immigrant and refugee communities (Anderson & Morrison, 2010). Although the individual program modules were developed with input from multiple sources, they still reflect the underlying values, attitudes, and beliefs of the western community in which they were created. Specifically, the modules espouse a learning through play philosophy and encourage the families’ participation in research-based activities to support the children’s early literacy development.
This study described historical learning practices rooted in the Buddhist tradition that shaped the Karen parents’ current beliefs and attitudes towards learning and literacy. This study also described current activity, activity mediated by print, oral, and symbolic texts, in both Karen and English, shaping the early literacy experiences of the participating children. Rather than abandoning their traditional ways of knowing and doing, the Karen families extended activity within the program and their own homes by drawing from diverse meditational means as they engaged in or structured literacy events within the social activity domain of play in the home and PALS. Thus, when developing programming for use in culturally and linguistically diverse communities, family literacy providers should continue to develop modules with input from multiple sources. However, in addition to asking members of the cultural community for input as to what they would like to have included in the program, program developers should also ask for input as to how similar types of activities are culturally enacted within the community. The inclusion of written descriptions within the official resource or curriculum manual of how families enact specific activities might signal to program facilitators the diverse mediational means families bring to the program.

**Insights for Family Literacy Facilitators and Administrators**

Beliefs guide actions (Bruner, 1990); thus family literacy program facilitators’ practice is shaped by their own beliefs about learning. These beliefs in turn are shaped in part by past experiences as children in school and by current experiences as parents and/or as teachers within the education system in which they operate. The training they received as part of the pilot project also shaped the beliefs of facilitators working in the PALS program. Through their reading of scholarly articles, their viewing of information videos, their participation in workshops, and their
attendance at formal talks delivered by family literacy scholars, PALS facilitators developed insights on working with culturally diverse families.

The findings of this study indicate that, despite her participation in the second year of training during the pilot project\textsuperscript{17}, the English-speaking co-facilitator at this site, Joanne, appeared to draw from her own beliefs about and experiences with literacy and learning. Specifically, she favoured activities mediated by printed texts, used English as the primary meaning-making tool, and understood the role of the parent as structuring the child’s engagement in school-like events in English. To reiterate, on one occasion, Joanne expressed to me her concern about what she perceived as the parents’ lack of engagement in events alongside their children (Field notes, February 5, 2014). I agree with Anderson and Gunderson (1997) and suggest program facilitators “understand their developmental perspectives as a cultural view that is not universally shared” (p. 514). To that end, I encourage cultural workers from the community to continue to act as co-facilitators and inform their English-speaking co-facilitator of the culturally specific forms of knowing and doing within the community.

However, I acknowledge the challenge in acting on this suggestion. Even though the responsibility for facilitating the program is often shared between a native English-speaker and a member from the same cultural community in which the program is situated, there may be issues of power at play. Drawing from their own beliefs and experiences within the community, the cultural workers may regard native English-speakers as the knowledge holders, making them hesitant to offer up suggestions as to how programming should be delivered at their site. Moreover, even though the program recognizes the co-facilitators as equals, the fact that the native English-speaker is often a current or retired teacher may lead to the cultural worker

\textsuperscript{17} Joanne joined the pilot program in the second year and shared in the facilitating of the program in Lacey City with one of the co-creators of the program and with Zeyar. She took over as co-facilitator in the fall of 2011.
understanding the teaching structure within the program as being hierarchical. The findings of this study may encourage both the native English-speaker and the cultural worker to reflect on their working relationship. This relationship needs to be collaborative, one in which the co-facilitators engage in the joint planning and joint delivery of individual sessions. To prevent one of the co-facilitators from adopting the role of assistant, both co-facilitators need to remain mindful of how non-teaching tasks are delegated within the sessions.

Furthermore, this study demonstrated that, although the Karen parents expanded their child’s learning within the home and program by transforming situated practice, the transformation was limited by the program’s narrow use of the first language of the participants at this site. Given that the study also demonstrated how the Karen parents learned through their observation of the English-speaking facilitator’s modeling of certain practices, co-facilitators at all sites in which PALS is offered can draw from the findings of this study and consistently model the use of the participants’ first language in meaning-making practices.

The findings of this study should also encourage family literacy program administrators to shift their perspective away from pre-conceived ideas of what form of activity is taking place within the program and towards the understanding that activity may look different at the various sites in which the program is offered. Program administrators should endeavor to visit each site on a regular basis in order to identify and understand the culturally diverse ways parents and caregivers mediate literacy-learning activities. Program administrators could document these activities and share them with all facilitators working in the PALS program.

Additionally, when possible, program administrators should look for culturally appropriate resources for each site. However, finding bilingual books in languages such as Karen and books participating families consider culturally appropriate may be difficult. For example,
the original English-speaking facilitator of the program in Lacey City tried to find texts written in English and Karen but was unsuccessful. The Karen families who participated in the program during the pilot project indicated that they appreciated the translated picture books (Anderson et al., in press). Furthermore, the facilitator at another PALS site downloaded texts from a website with texts from the families’ home country. The participating families at her site indicated that they did not like these texts and preferred western picture books. Thus, although research has documented the benefits of using culturally appropriate, dual-language books in early learning classrooms, participating families should have agency with regards to the materials made available to them in the individual activity centres and to the materials they receive as part of their take-home package.

**Insights for Families**

This study validates activity within the community of resettled Karen refugees by highlighting how traditional practices, and the values, beliefs, and attitudes that shaped these practices, continue to shape current activity within the community. It understands families within this community as agentive; rather than simply abandoning traditional practices as new elements were introduced into their community, they responded to contradictions (Engeström, 2001) within the system by creating syncretic literacy practices (Duranti & Ochs, 1995). This finding is of particular value for children within the community who participate in activities within the host community and who are exposed to western traditions and practices through television and computers. Families should be encouraged to draw from the findings of this study and share with their children that their culture and language are valued in both communities in which they actively participate.
In this section, I discussed insights from this study for family literacy program developers, facilitators, and administrators and for participating families. However, I acknowledge the generalizability of these findings is limited. In the next section, I identify and address the limitations of this study.

**Limitations of the Study**

In Chapter 3, I discussed how I addressed issues of trustworthiness and confirmability. To reiterate, in order to ensure that my interpretations were informed by the data, during the study, I triangulated my data collection methods and sources and maintained a reflexive journal. To help me insure credibility with my findings, I gathered data during a period of prolonged engagement and through persistent observation. I also carried out a form of member check with the three focal mothers at the end of the data collection period. In this section, I address the limitations of this study as they relate to three strands of research.

**Research on Literacy Practices within the Home**

I acknowledge that the findings of this study as they pertain to scholarship on literacy practices in family homes are limited. Although the selection of these families was theoretically informed, I focused on only three families. Moreover, due to circumstances beyond my control, I had less access to the three focal families than I had originally intended. This resulted in my making fewer visits within the homes than I had originally planned. Furthermore, because I do not speak Karen, opportunities to engage in casual conversation with the mothers during the visits were limited, and, although I questioned the mothers and Zeyar as to what they were saying when they spoke to the children in Karen during an event, my understanding of the event was limited to what was translated for me. Additionally, my primary method of data collection was observation. Other researchers working within the framework of Activity Theory (e.g.,
Gregory, 2001; Ruby, 2012) supplemented their observations using video and audio recordings of the participants as they engaged in activity. This allowed them to perform an analysis of the transcripts to create a more in-depth description. My description of literacy events within the homes was limited to what I observed. Although I carried out semi-structured, expert, and informal interviews, I presented descriptions of literacy events that were drawn primarily from observational field notes within the homes, generated discussions about these events primarily from the transcripts of semi-structured, expert, and informal interviews, and used the photographs and artifacts for clarification purposes only. Furthermore, because the three focal children participated in early learning programs other than PALS, it is difficult to discern which early literacy experiences informed their activity in the home.

Finally, as an outsider, I acknowledge that my presence in the home and my participation in activities may have affected the regular enactment of the activity. First, because of my inability to speak Karen, Zeyar accompanied me on each of my visits in the homes of the focal families. As I described in Chapter 1, during my first visit in the home, I described the purpose of my study to the parents. Thus, although the families understood the purpose of my visit was to observe the children, they may have perceived Zeyar as a visitor in their homes. Traditionally, adults visit while children play. Therefore, the mother’s role during our visits may have been to entertain her guest. Second, I first met the focal families in my role as a volunteer in the PALS program. As I described in Chapter 1, as a volunteer, I assisted with the set up of the room and helped prepare the snack. However, I also participated in large group activities and responded to the children’s request for assistance at the individual activity centres when needed. Thus, the children and mothers may have understood my role as being a teacher. In fact, Emma regularly called me “teacher” during my visits in her home. Therefore, at times, the children may have
chosen to engage in activities in the home that were similar to the ones in which we engaged in PALS. Similarly, at times, the mothers may have chosen to take on the role of observer, leaving me to engage in activities with the children during my visit.

**Research on Family Literacy Programs**

Similarly, I acknowledge that the findings of this study as they pertain to scholarship on family literacy programs are limited. First, Parents as Literacy Supporters (PALS) in Immigrant and Refugee Communities is offered at sites in multiple school districts, servicing multiple families from diverse cultural and linguistic communities. This study reports on findings drawn from observations and interviews with participants at only one site and from only one cultural and linguistic community. Literacy events may be enacted differently in programs that cater to other cultural and linguistic groups, thus the findings should not be generalized across all sites and communities. Second, much of the data for this paper were drawn from observations of three focal children and their mothers. As such, during my observations within the program, my focus was on literacy events involving these three families. I acknowledge that I may have missed other forms of engagement during literacy events while I was observing the focal children.

**Research within the Resettled Karen Community**

I also acknowledge that the findings of this study as they pertain to research with resettled Karen refugee families are limited. I observed activity within one community of resettled Karen refugee families. I chose to gather data from only three families. My interactions with other members of the Karen community were limited and again, because of my inability to speak Karen, I was restricted as to which community gatherings I could observe.
In this section, I identified limitations of this study as they applied to three strands of research. In the final and concluding section of this dissertation, I draw from these limitations to suggest future research.

**Future Research**

In the conclusion of her seminal review of family literacy research, Purcell-Gates (2000) called for research to address the cultural factors of learning, specifically children’s meaning-making practices and the role of parents in these practices. With this study, I have responded to her call by providing a description of literacy as it was enacted in a bilingual family literacy program for resettled Karen refugee families and in the homes of Karen families with pre-school aged children. Specifically, I described how, through the use of multiple and diverse mediational tools, in particular the Karen language and cultural forms of support, the focal mothers expanded activity within the program to provide new learning opportunities for their children and how, by organizing opportunities to learn and providing resources with which to learn, the three mothers expanded the young Karen children’s learning in the home. At the time of writing, the Canadian government committed to accept upwards of 25,000 Syrian refugees for resettlement in various communities across Canada (Government of Canada, 2016). The findings of this study support the need for expanded programs of research to better understand complexities that shape the meaning-making practices of young refugee children and their families within communities of resettled refugees in Canada. Thus, Purcell-Gates’ (2000) call for ethnographic and descriptive research “to capture the relevant nuances of individuals and context” (p. 867) is as relevant today as it was in the year 2000.

From a local perspective, in order to better understand literacy as it is enacted within the homes of Karen refugee families in Lacey City and to contribute to the growing literature on
resettled Karen refugee families in North America, an expanded program of this type of research is needed, one which draws data from more than three families and uses multiple data collection methods including video recordings. Furthermore, this study described the meaning-making practices of young Karen children within multiple contexts. During my time in the community, I became aware of the educational challenges of young Karen teens. It would be interesting to conduct a similar study within the homes of teens who participate in a local homework club run by a group of English-speaking volunteers from the host community. Finally, in Chapter 4, I described how community cultural workers brokered the Karen adults’ activity with bureaucratic texts. This form of literacy event is identified in the literature (e.g., Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988) as taking place within the home. However, in this community, these events took place outside of the home. Given that young children’s early experiences with texts inside the home help to shape their understanding of literacy (Purcell-Gates, 2013), it would be interesting to discover how young children learn these practices and to understand how the absence of this form of activity in the home affects their understanding of the value of literacy.

The findings of this study also suggest possibilities for future research within the bilingual family literacy program, PALS. As I mentioned above, the PALS program is offered at sites in multiple school districts servicing multiple families from diverse cultural and linguistic communities. An extended program of research into how literacy events are enacted across all sites of the program is needed in order to accurately inform program coordinators and funders of how literacy is enacted within the program.

I began this dissertation with a description of an event I had observed within the family literacy program. It involved the provincial family literacy program coordinator positioning a young Karen mother and her two children at a table with a bilingual picture book. Her purpose
was to capture the image of the family engaging in a reading event in the program. When she
told me what she was doing, I objected, telling her that I had yet to see a family engage in book-
reading in such a way. At the time, she simply shrugged, saying that it was what the funders
wanted to see.

I recently accessed the organization’s website and was surprised to see that the pictures
she had taken during her visit to the program that day have been converted into a slide show to
promote the PALS program. The slide show displayed the families enthusiastically engaging in
activities during all segments of the program. The images were set to music. There was no
accompanying narrative to interpret the images. I offer this dissertation as one interpretation of
literacy as it is enacted, not only in the bilingual family literacy program, but also within the
homes of families with pre-school aged children within the community of resettled Karen
refugee families living in Lacey City.
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Appendix A
Parent Consent/Child Assent Form

-making Connections: The Literacy Practices of Karen Refugee Families
Parent Consent/Child Assent Form

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jim Anderson
Department of Language and Literacy Education
Faculty of Education
University of British Columbia
(XXX) XXX-XXXX

Dear Parents,

My name is Nicola Friedrich. I am writing to invite you and your child to participate in a study looking at the ways in which young children in your community learn at home, in the community, and in the family literacy program before they begin formal schooling. The research will focus on the children’s participation in learning activities. I am looking for three families to participate in this study. The study is part of the requirements for a PhD degree I am doing at the University of British Columbia.

The study will be carried out between January 2013 and December 2013. The study will include your participation in one interview, weekly in-home visits, monthly visits in the family literacy program, Parents as Literacy Supporters in Immigrant Communities (IPALS), and your review of my observations and findings. The total amount of time required for participation will be approximately 43 hours, spread out over a period of 12-months.

The interview will take place once at a location of your choosing during the month of March 2013 and will last approximately one hour. A Karen interpreter will be present during the interview. In the interview, you will be asked to talk about the kinds of things you read and write in your daily life as well as the kinds of things people in your family and community read and wrote in their daily lives while you were growing up in your homeland. The interview will be audio-recorded and then transcribed. I will return summaries of the Karen transcript to you to check for clarity and accuracy. All information will be kept in a locked office, with paper information separate from audio-tapes.

The observations will take place in your home on different days of the week and at different times, within your comfort level, between January 2013 and December 2013 (once per week, for
32 weeks for approximately 1 hour) and will focus on the daily life activity within your home. These observations will take place only when your child is present and awake. If I have any questions about the type of activities and behaviours I observe, I will ask you about them following the observation. Observations will also take place within the family literacy program (10 sessions for approximately 1 hour) and will focus on your child’s participation in the program activities.

During the observation sessions, I will take notes and photographs of what I am observing. I will also collect or take photos of any print your child produces during the activity. The photos will be developed and the notes will be transcribed. I will return summaries of the transcripts in Karen to you to check for clarity and accuracy.

The final phase of the study will take place between January 2014 and March 2014. During this phase, I will give you a translated copy of the write up for your child and ask that you read through it and tell me about any information that is incorrect or missing.

The information shared in interviews and observed during in-home visits will be confidential. I will not use your name or other identifiable information for the report I will be preparing or for future publications. This will assure your anonymity. All documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the co-investigator’s office. Computer files will be password protected. Confidential information will not be collected or exchanged via email. I will provide you with a copy of my final report to use for your own purposes.

At the end of the study, you will be given a $100.00 gift certificate from a local business for your participation. You will also gain some valuable knowledge of your child’s individual strengths as they apply to their early literacy development in the home.

Included in this invitation and description of my project are the consent forms that you will need to complete if you agree to take part in this study. If you and your child decide to participate in this study, please complete the enclosed forms and return them to me in the stamped envelope provided within a week of receiving them.

There are no known risks associated with your participation. You have the right to not answer any questions and to withdraw from the home visits (interview and observations) and observations in the family literacy program at any time with no consequences. If you have any questions concerning any aspect of this project, the procedures to be used or the nature of your involvement, please contact me, Nicola Friedrich at (XXX) XXX-XXXX. The principal investigator, Dr. Jim Anderson, can be contacted at (XXX) XXX-XXXX. If you have any concerns about you or family’s treatment or rights as research participants, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the Office of Research Services at the University of British Columbia, (XXX) XXX-XXXX.
Respectfully,

Nicola Friedrich  
PhD Candidate  
Department of Language and Literacy Education

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature also indicates that you consent to participate in this study.


Signature: __________________________  Date: __________________________

I consent/I do not consent to my participation [adult’s name] in the study titled “Making Connections: The Literacy Practices of Karen Refugee Families in the Home, Community, and Family Literacy Program” as described above.

Signature: __________________________  Date: __________________________

[I consent/I do not consent to my home as the setting for the study.

Signature: __________________________  Date: __________________________]

[I consent/I do not consent to photographs being taken during this study.

Signature: __________________________  Date: __________________________]

[I consent/I do not consent to having interviews audio-taped during this study.

Signature: __________________________  Date: __________________________]
Appendix A

Parent Consent/Child Assent Form

Making Connections: The Literacy Practices of Karen Refugee Families
Child Assent Form

(Child’s name), I will be working to learn about the ways you and your (mom, dad, sister, brother, and others) help you learn when you are at home, when you are outside your home, and when you are at IPALS (Parents as Literacy Supporters in Immigrant Communities).

I will visit with you once each week during the next 12 months to watch as you go about your normal activities. Each time I visit, it will take about an hour. I will be working with you for about 40 hours. I will use what I learn from watching you to write a report and it is possible that I will also write an article (or story) that I will share with teachers and other people who work with boys and girls like you. I will make sure that no one other than myself and Dr. Jim Anderson, who is helping me, see your work and I will not use your real name in my report or elsewhere and no one other than me will know who you are.

Do you agree (assent) to participate or work with me? Yes _____ No _____

NB: The assent form will be read aloud in Karen and summarized and reworded appropriately according to the age of the child.
Appendix B
Community Cultural Worker Consent Form

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jim Anderson
Department of Language and Literacy Education
Faculty of Education
University of British Columbia
(XXX) XXX-XXXX

Greetings!

My name is Nicola Friedrich. I am a doctoral student working on my PhD in the Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia under the supervision of Dr. Jim Anderson. My doctoral thesis is examining the ways in which young children learn in the home, community, and family literacy program before they begin formal schooling. I am writing to invite you to participate in this study by consenting to participate in a semi-structured interview to talk about your role as multicultural worker within the community and providing me permission to observe you as you help families meet the literacy demands of the community for the time period specified.

The interview will take place once in a location of your choosing between April 1, 2014 and May 15, 2014 and will last approximately one hour. The focus of the interview will be on the types of texts individuals engage with in the community and the type of support you provide to these individuals as they engage with these texts. The interview will be audio-recorded and then transcribed. Observations of you engaging in literacy events with individuals from the community, not to exceed 4 hours, will take place during the months of April and May 2014. The focus of the observations will be on the ways in which you support the individual’s understanding of the text and will serve to clarify the types of support identified during the interview. I will not use your name or other identifiable information in my dissertation or in any future publications. This will assure your anonymity in any documents that are written about this project. I will return summaries of the transcripts for you to check for clarity and accuracy. The total amount of time required for you to participate in the study will not exceed 5 hours spread out over 2 months. As a gesture of appreciation for your contributions, you will be given a $15 gift card.

The study is being carried out between April 2013 and May 2014. The total amount of time required for families to participate will be approximately 40 hours, spread out over a period of 15-months. The study will include the parents’ participation in two in-home interviews and the
families’ participation in weekly in-home visits, and monthly visits in the family literacy program, IPALS.

The identity of the participating child, his or her parents, family members and family literacy program will be strictly confidential. The only people who have access to the data will be the Principal Investigator and the Co-Investigator. The program facilitators, the family, and the child participants will have access to all their respective data from the program and the home. Everyone involved in the study will be informed of their responsibilities regarding confidentiality at the beginning of the study and reminded as appropriate.

All documents associated with this study will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the co-investigator’s office, with paper information separate from audio-tapes. Computer files will be password protected. Confidential information will not be collected or exchanged via email. Subjects will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study.

The results of the study will be communicated to academic audiences through presentation at scholarly conferences, such as The Canadian Society for the Study of Education, and publication in scholarly journals such as The Journal of Early Childhood Literacy.

Included in this invitation and description of my project is the consent form that you will need to complete if you agree to take part in this study. If you decide to participate in this study, please complete the enclosed form and return it to me in the stamped envelope provided within a week of receiving them.

There are no known risks associated with your participation. You have the right to not answer any questions and to withdraw from your participation in the interview at any time with no consequences. If you have any questions or require further information with respect to this project, please contact me, Nicola Friedrich at (XXX) XXX-XXXX. The principal researcher, Dr. Jim Anderson, can be reached at (XXX) XXX-XXXX. If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research participant, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the Office of Research Services at the University of British Columbia at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Thank you for your assistance in helping us with this project.

Respectfully,

Nicola Friedrich
PhD Candidate
Department of Language and Literacy Education
Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature also indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

I consent/I do not consent to my participation [adult’s name] in the study titled “Making Connections: The Literacy Practices of Karen Refugee Families in the Home, Community, and Family Literacy Program” as described above.

Signature: __________________________ Date: __________________________

[I consent/I do not consent to having an interview audiotaped for this study.

Signature: ______________ Date: ______________]
Appendix C

Semi-structured Interview Protocol

Semi-structured Interview Protocol (Based on CPALS, Purcell-Gates, 2007)

Current Literacy Practices:

1. What does literacy mean to you?
2. What kinds of things do you read in your life?
   - For each text or practice mentioned, ask:
     o In what language do you read this text?
     o Why do you read this text/why do you do this?
     o What type of activity is this text a part of?
       ▪ Work? Church? Shopping for family?
     o Who else takes part in reading this text?
       ▪ Is it read to a child?
     o How important is reading this text to your daily life activities?

Suggested Prompts (With each of the following, give example texts but don’t ask about any one specifically.)

   • For daily tasks? (reading a phone message, writing a “to do” list)
   • With your children? (reading picture books) With your spouse? (reading the mail) With your friends?
   • For official purposes like applying for a job? (reading/writing job application)
   • For paying taxes? (reading receipts, filling out form)
   • At your job?
   • For entertainment? (completing a crossword)
   • For relaxation? (reading a novel)
   • For information? (reading information pamphlets)
   • For shopping? (reading flyers, writing a list)
   • For worship (or religious purposes)? (reading the Bible)
   • Internet? (email, playing educational games)
   • For group/community activities (book goups)?

3. What kinds of things do you write in your life?
   - For each text or practice mentioned, ask:
     o In what language do you write this text?
     o Why do you write this text/why do you do this?
     o What type of activity is this text a part of?
       ▪ Work? Church? Shopping for family?
     o Who else takes part in writing this text?
       ▪ Is it written for a relative?
     o How important is writing this text to your daily life activities?
Suggested Prompts (With each of the following, give example texts but don’t ask about any one specifically.)

- For daily tasks? (reading a phone message, writing a “to do” list)
- With your children? (writing names) With your spouse? (writing notes) With your friends?
- For official purposes like applying for a job? (reading/writing job application)
- For paying taxes? (reading receipts, filling out form)
- At your job?
- For entertainment? (completing a crossword)
- For relaxation? (writing a poem)
- For information? (making notes)
- For shopping? (writing a list)
- For worship (or religious purposes)? (copying Bible passages)
- Internet? (email, playing educational games)
- For group/community activities?

Historical Literacy Practices:

1. What did literacy mean to you in your homeland?
2. When you were a child, what kinds of things did people in your family read regularly?
   - For each text or practice mentioned, ask:
     o In what language do you read this text?
     o Why do you read this/why do you do this?
     o What type of activity is this text a part of?
       ▪ Work? Church? Shopping for family?
     o Who else takes part in reading this text?
       ▪ Is it read to a child?
     o How important is reading this text to your daily life activities?

Suggested Prompts (With each of the following, give example texts but don’t ask about any one specifically.)

- For daily tasks? (reading a phone message, writing a “to do” list)
- With your children? (reading picture books) With your spouse? (reading the mail) With your friends?
- For official purposes like applying for a job? (reading/writing job application)
- For paying taxes? (reading receipts, filling out form)
- At your job?
- For entertainment? (completing a crossword)
- For relaxation? (reading a novel)
- For information? (reading information pamphlets)
- For shopping? (reading flyers, writing a list)
- For worship (or religious purposes)? (reading the Bible)
- Internet? (email, playing educational games)
• For group/community activities (book groups)?

3. When you were a child, what kinds of things did your family write regularly?
   • For each text or practice mentioned, ask:
     o In what language do they write this text?
     o Why did they write this/why did they do this?
     o What type of activity was this text a part of?
       ▪ Work? Church? Shopping for family?
     o Who else takes part in reading this text?
       ▪ Is it written for a relative?
     o How important was writing this text to their daily life activities?

Suggested Prompts (With each of the following, give example texts but don’t ask about any one specifically.)

   • For daily tasks? (reading a phone message, writing a “to do” list)
   • With your children? (reading picture books) With your spouse? (reading the mail) With your friends?
   • For official purposes like applying for a job? (reading/writing job application)
   • For paying taxes? (reading receipts, filling out form)
   • At your job?
   • For entertainment? (completing a crossword)
   • For relaxation? (reading a novel)
   • For information? (reading information pamphlets)
   • For shopping? (reading flyers, writing a list)
   • For worship (or religious purposes)? (reading the Bible)
   • Internet? (email, playing educational games)
   • For group/community activities (book groups)?

4. What kinds of texts did other people in your community read or write when you were a child? (These should be texts that the participant remembers seeing people use, not those that he “supposes” people used.)
   • For each text or practice mentioned, ask:
     o In what language do they read/write this text?
     o Why do they read/write this text/why did they do this?
     o What type of activity was this text a part of?
       ▪ Work? Church? Shopping for family?
     o Who else took part in reading/writing this text?
       ▪ Was it read to a child?
       ▪ Was it written for a family member?
     o How important was reading/writing this text to their daily life activities?

Suggested Prompts (With each of the following, give example texts but don’t ask about any one specifically.)
• For daily tasks? (reading a phone message, writing a “to do” list)
• With your children? (reading picture books) With your spouse? (reading the mail) With your friends?
• For official purposes like applying for a job? (reading/writing job application)
• For paying taxes? (reading receipts, filling out form)
• At your job?
• For entertainment? (completing a crossword)
• For relaxation? (reading a novel)
• For information? (reading information pamphlets)
• For shopping? (reading flyers, writing a list)
• For worship (or religious purposes)? (reading the Bible)
• Internet? (email, playing educational games)
• For group/community activities (book groups)?

5. Do you think that the way your feel about reading and writing – like how useful they are or how enjoyable they are – is about the same or different in the same way from how people in your community and in your family felt?

School Literacy Practices

1. What kinds of texts do you see children reading in schools in the community as part of their school instruction/assignments (eg., textbooks, novels, basal readers, encyclopedias, Internet, short stories, poetry, worksheets, picture books, information books, science books, math books, etc.)?
   • For each text or practice mentioned, ask:
     o In what language do they read this text?
     o Why do they read this text/why did they do this?
     o What type of school activity is this text a part of?
     o Who else takes part in reading this text?
       ▪ Was it read with or read to a family member?
     o How important is reading this text to their daily life activities?

Suggested prompts (For each of these, it will help to conduct a brief conversation about the grade level, like where the participant lived then, do they remember the school, teacher, etc.):
   • During kindergarten?
   • During Grades 1-3?
   • During Grades 4-6?
   • During Grades 7-8?
   • During Grades 9-12?
   • During post-high school education (for this, be sure to elicit what type of education/school they connect to specific literacy practices).

3. What kinds of texts do you see children writing in schools in the community as part of their school instruction/assignments (eg. stories, poetry, spelling practice, reports, worksheets, essays/compositions, journals, class books, etc.)?
   • For each text or practice mentioned, ask:
     o In what language do they write this text?
     o Why do they write this text/why did they do this?
     o What type of school activity is this text a part of?
     o Who else takes part in writing this text?
       ▪ Was it written with or written to a family member?
     o How important is writing this text to their daily life activities?

Suggested prompts (For each of these, it will help to conduct a brief conversation about the grade level, like where the participant lived then, do they remember the school, teacher, etc.):
   • During kindergarten?
   • During Grades 1-3?
   • During Grades 4-6?
   • During Grades 7-8?
   • During Grades 9-12?
   • During post-high school education (for this, be sure to elicit what type of education/school they connect to specific literacy practices).


5. Do you think the reading and writing children do at school prepares them for the kinds of things that they will read and write outside of school? Why or why not, or in what ways?

6. How do you think the reading/writing children do at school similar to or different than the reading/writing they do outside of school?

Historical School Literacy Practices

1. What kinds of texts did you read in your school as part of your school instruction/assignments (eg., textbooks, novels, basal readers, encyclopedias, Internet, short stories, poetry, worksheets, picture books, information books, science books, math books, etc.)?
   • For each text or practice mentioned, ask:
     o In what language do they read this text?
     o Why do they read this text/why did they do this?
     o What type of school activity is this text a part of?
     o Who else takes part in reading this text?
       ▪ Was it read with or read to a family member?
     o How important is reading this text to their daily life activities?

3. What kinds of texts did you write in schools as part of your school instruction/assignments (eg., stories, poetry, spelling practice, reports, worksheets, essays/compositions, journals, class books, etc.)?
   • For each text or practice mentioned, ask:
     o In what language do they write this text?
     o Why do they write this text/why did they do this?
     o What type of school activity is this text a part of?
     o Who else takes part in writing this text?
       ▪ Was it written with or written to a family member?
     o How important is writing this text to their daily life activities?


5. When you were in school, do you remember how you felt about what you thought about learning to read? About learning to write?

6. Do you think the reading and writing you did at school prepared you for the kinds of things that you read and write now? Why or why not, or in what ways?

6. How do you think the reading/writing you did at school similar to or different than the reading/writing you do now as an adult?
Appendix D

Demographic Survey

Demographic Information
(Based on CPALS, Purcell-Gates, 2007)

Note: The researcher will pose the following questions to the parent of the focal child who initially consented to participate in the study and who participated in the initial interview. The questions will be asked in English with language support provided by a Karen translator.

Date: __________________

(1) Name: ____________________________________

(2) Age Range:  8-12____; 13-18 ____; 19-30 ____; 31-55 ____; 55-70____; 70+ _____

(3) Gender:   Male      Female

(4) Ethnicity: _____________________________


(7) Language spoken in the home: _______________

(8) Are you currently a student?    Yes    No

   (10a) If yes, where do you attend school? _____________________________

   (10b) What type of school is it? (e.g. high school, university, community college, etc)

(9) Highest level of schooling you have completed:

☐ Some elementary/primary school    ☐ Vocational training

☐ Elementary school (6th grade)    ☐ Some college

☐ Some secondary school    ☐ College degree (B.A./B.S.)

☐ Secondary school (3rd grade)    ☐ Master’s degree

☐ Some high school    ☐ Graduate degree (Ph.D., M.D., J.D., etc)
(10) Highest level of schooling your mother completed: (somewhere in here a question about WHERE this schooling occurred (i.e. what country? What location in the country (like rural village; capitol city; major city?))

- Don’t know
- Some elementary/primary school
- Elementary school (6th grade)
- Some secondary school
- Secondary school (3rd grade)
- Some high school
- High school (3rd grade)
- Other: ______________

(11) Highest level of schooling your father completed: (see above for location of schooling)

- Don’t know
- Some elementary/primary school
- Elementary school (6th grade)
- Some secondary school
- Secondary school (3rd grade)
- Some high school
- High school (3rd grade)
- Other: ______________

(12) Your occupation: _____________________

(13) Your mother’s occupation: _____________________

(14) Your father’s occupation: _____________________

(15) Where you live now (choose one):
____ Rural  _____ Small town

(16) Number of people who live in your household: ________________

(17) Number of people **under age 18** who live in your household: ________________

(18) Do you have a computer in your home? Yes  No

If yes, is it connected to the Internet? Yes  No

If no, do you have access to one? If yes, where? (e.g. office; library; friend, etc.) and do you use it for email and/or for the Internet?

(19) Do you have a smartphone?  Yes  No

If no, do you have access to one? If yes, where? And do you use it for email and text messaging and/or for the Internet?
Appendix E

Community Multicultural Worker Interview Protocol

1. What kinds of things are families within this community required to *read* as part of their daily lives?

   - For each text or practice mentioned, ask:
     - In what **language** is this text presented?
     - **Why** are parents/individuals required to read this?
     - In which **social context** does this text play a role?
       - Is reading this text related to their participation in school? Church? Work?
     - Who else might take part in the reading of this text?

2. In your role as community multicultural worker, how do you support the individual as he/she engages with the above-mentioned texts?

3. What kinds of things are families within this community required to *write* as part of their daily lives?

   - For each text or practice mentioned, ask:
     - In what **language** is the text presented?
     - **Why** are parents/individuals required to write this?
     - In which **social context** does this text play a role?
       - Is the writing of this text related to their participation in school? Church? Work?
     - Who else might take part in writing this text?

4. In your role as community multicultural worker, how do you support the individual as he/she engages with the above-mentioned texts?