

**RETHINKING “FAMILY” IN A FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAM:  
A CANADIAN CASE STUDY**

by

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the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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## **Abstract**

Drawing on theories of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996), identity and investment (Norton, 2013) and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1978), this qualitative case study explored the outcomes of a family literacy program in Vancouver, BC, on the identities of 12 immigrant and refugee background mothers for whom English was an additional language. The research questions addressed why these mothers became involved in the program, how their own investment was integrated into the program, and how involvement in the program influenced their identities and imagined communities (Kanno & Norton, 2003). Data were collected through participation in a six-month family literacy program and additional follow up for six-months post-program completion.

Findings demonstrate how learner investment enhanced the range of possibilities available to the participants both socially and academically, which were predicated on dialogue and instruction that validated their life-worlds (Auerbach, 2001; Freire, 1981). In addition to learning literacy skills, the participants shared ideas, hopes, and advice during the program. Motherhood unified this diverse group and drew them to the program in order to become adult learners (Duckworth & Smith, 2018).

The participants expressed the view that immigrant and refugee background parents need to acquire new parenting skills when they arrive in a new country by ascribing meaning to new practices through active, situated, and reflective approaches to learning (Mezirow, 1991; New London Group, 1996). In supporting these parents, the family literacy program paid particular attention to the dilemmas the participants faced in their new society, resulting in expanded and positive mothering identities (Rizk, 2019). In particular, the study revealed that the program

offered the mothers a space to network with facilitators and other mothers, creating a “family” outside of their traditional families.

The study concluded that a three-way model of family literacy has the potential for highly positive outcomes for immigrant and refugee background mothers. This model includes (i) a home-to-program feature, generated by the mothers’ experiences and needs, (ii) a program-to-home feature, which includes elements of the curriculum and material for home use, and (iii) a family-to-family feature, whereby the mothers build relationships and share resources in a safe and caring space.

## **Lay Summary**

Based on a 2019 study of immigrant and refugee background mothers in a family literacy program in Vancouver, this dissertation explored the reasons 12 mothers signed up for and returned to the program each week, as well as the outcomes of the program, including how their view of themselves changed. Through observations and interviews, this study examines the changes the mothers experienced as a result of the program and the lasting effects six months later. Findings revealed that in addition to learning literacy skills, the mothers bonded through the sharing of ideas, hopes, and parenting advice, which contributed to social outcomes and a feeling of “family” between the mothers. The findings also suggest that successful family literacy programming should be based on the needs and lived experiences of the mothers, including both academic and social goals, with conversations and a space for mothers to gather without their children as central to programming goals.

## **Preface**

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Michelle Gilman. This research was approved by the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board with Certificate Number H18-03132-A001 under the title: “Family literacy, mothers, and newcomers to Canada.”

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Lay Summary.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Preface .....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Table of Contents.....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>List of Tables.....</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>List of Figures .....</b>	<b>xii</b>
<b>List of Acronyms.....</b>	<b>xiii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>xiv</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction to the Study .....	1
1.2 Problem Statement.....	5
1.3 Purpose of the Study and Research Questions .....	5
1.4 Significance of Study.....	6
1.5 Overview of the Dissertation.....	8
<b>Chapter 2: Review of Literature .....</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	10
2.2 Background of Family Literacy Programs .....	11
2.3 Critiques of Family Literacy Programs .....	17
2.4 Mothers in Family Literacy Programs.....	23
2.5 Family Literacy Models Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners.....	25
2.6 Bilingual Family Literacy Programs .....	30
2.7 Review of Parental Outcomes in Family Literacy Programs .....	31
2.8 Chapter Summary .....	32
<b>Chapter 3: Conceptual Frameworks .....</b>	<b>35</b>
3.1 Introduction .....	35
3.2 Multiliteracies.....	35
3.3 Identity and Investment .....	42
3.4 Transformative Learning Theory.....	47
3.4.1 Worldview .....	49
3.4.2 Epistemology .....	49
3.4.3 Ontology .....	50
3.4.4 Behaviour .....	51
3.4.5 Capacity .....	51
3.4.6 Self.....	51
3.5 Chapter Summary .....	53
<b>Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology .....</b>	<b>55</b>
4.1 Introduction .....	55

4.2 Research Context.....	57
4.3 Case Study Research .....	58
4.4 Ethnographic Methods.....	59
4.5 Participants .....	60
4.6 Focal Participants .....	64
4.6.1 Jozi.....	64
4.6.2 Eliza.....	65
4.6.3 Luisa .....	66
4.6.4 Susan.....	67
4.7 Data Collection Methods.....	68
4.8 Data Analysis.....	74
4.8.1 The Practices of the Program: Research Questions 1 and 2.....	76
4.8.1.1 Community and Communication .....	77
4.8.1.2 Sisterhood and Family Literacy Programs .....	77
4.8.1.3 Motherhood and Parenting in Canada .....	78
4.8.2 Identity and Transformation: Research Question 3.....	80
4.9 Researcher Positionality .....	83
4.10 Limitations of Study .....	84
4.11 Chapter Summary .....	85
<b>Chapter 5: Findings: Learner Investment and the R2R Program .....</b>	<b>87</b>
5.1 Introduction .....	87
5.2 Reasons for Joining the R2R Program .....	88
5.2.1 Social Network .....	89
5.2.2 Mothers' Learning.....	90
5.2.3 Mothers' Understanding of Children's Literacy Learning.....	91
5.3 Co-Constructed Practices and Mothers' Investment .....	92
5.4 Program Activities that Yielded the Greatest Investment .....	94
5.4.1 Lunch.....	94
5.4.2 Direct Adult .....	95
5.4.3 Parent/Child Reading.....	97
5.5 Pedagogy .....	99
5.5.1 Dialogue .....	100
5.5.2 Direct Instruction.....	101
5.5.2.1 Topic 1: Early Literacy.....	101
5.5.2.2 Topic 2: The Importance of Play in Early Childhood Development.....	106
5.5.2.3 Topic 3: Responsibility and Social Skills.....	108
5.5.2.4 Topic 4: Assertive Communication.....	109
5.5.2.5 Topic 5: Childhood Safety Awareness .....	110
5.5.2.6 Topic 6: Guiding your Child with Positive Discipline .....	111
5.5.2.7 Topic 7: Screen Time and Young Children.....	112
5.5.2.8 Topic 8: Healthy Eating for Children .....	113
5.6 Participants .....	115
5.6.1 Facilitator.....	115
5.6.2 Relationships Between Mothers .....	122
5.7 Analysis and Discussion.....	123
5.8 Chapter Summary .....	126



<b>Chapter 6: Findings: Motherhood and the R2R Program .....</b>	<b>129</b>
6.1 Introduction .....	129
6.2 The “Good Parent” .....	130
6.3 Motherhood Discourse .....	131
6.4 Mothers in the R2R Program.....	132
6.4.1 Motherhood and Parenting .....	134
6.4.2 Motherhood, English, and Canadian Culture .....	135
6.4.3 Motherhood and Social Networks .....	140
6.5 Motherhood and Raising Bilingual Children.....	145
6.6 Analysis and Discussion.....	149
6.7 Chapter Summary .....	152
<b>Chapter 7: Findings: Identity and Transformation .....</b>	<b>155</b>
7.1 Introduction .....	155
7.2 Pedagogy, Critical Reflection, and Changes to the Mothers’ Identities.....	156
7.3 Changes Over the Six Months .....	158
7.3.1 Worldview .....	158
7.3.2 Epistemology.....	161
7.3.3 Ontology .....	164
7.3.4 Behaviour .....	166
7.3.4.1 Reading.....	166
7.3.4.2 Speaking English.....	168
7.3.4.3 Acquiring New Facts and Skills .....	170
7.3.5 Capacity.....	172
7.3.5.1 Furthering Education .....	173
7.3.5.2 Employment .....	174
7.3.5.3 Spirituality .....	175
7.3.6 Self.....	176
7.4 Analysis and Discussion.....	176
7.5 Chapter Summary .....	182
<b>Chapter 8: Discussion: Towards a Three-Way Model of Family Literacy .....</b>	<b>184</b>
8.1 Introduction .....	184
8.2 Models for Family Literacy Programs.....	185
8.2.1 One-Way Model .....	186
8.2.2 Two-Way Model .....	188
8.2.3 Three-Way Model .....	189
8.3 Social Networks and Family Literacy Programs.....	194
8.3.1 Network with Teachers and Students .....	196
8.3.2 Network with Teachers.....	199
8.3.3 Network with Students .....	200
8.4 The “Family” in Family Literacy Programs.....	201
8.5 Chapter Summary .....	203
<b>Chapter 9: Conclusion .....</b>	<b>204</b>
9.1 Implications for Research.....	206

9.2 Implications for Practice.....	207
9.3 Implications for Policy .....	211
<b>Reflection .....</b>	<b>215</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>217</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>241</b>
Appendix A: Initial Questionnaire .....	241
Appendix B: Guide for Initial Focus Group.....	246
Appendix C: Guide for Interviews of Focal Mothers.....	247
Appendix D: Guide for Final Focus Group.....	248
Appendix E: Final Questionnaire .....	249

## List of Tables

Table 4.1: List of participants.....	63
Table 4.2: Home visits.....	71
Table 4.3: Overview of data collection.....	72
Table 4.4: Theme development Research Questions 1 and 2.....	79
Table 4.5: Theme development Research Question 3.....	82
Table 5.1: Weekly messages sent in the WhatsApp chat.....	119
Table 7.1: Changes to four focal mothers.....	180
Table 8.1: Overview of family literacy programs.....	193
Table 9.1: Successful features of the Ready to Read program.....	211

## List of Figures

Figure 6.1: The relationship between returning mothers to the Ready to Read program and becoming “better mothers”.....	135
Figure 6.2: The relationship between newcomers to the Ready to Read program and becoming “better mothers”.....	139
Figure 6.3: The foundation of the Ready to Read program.....	142
Figure 8.1: One-way model of family literacy.....	187
Figure 8.2: Two-way model of family literacy.....	189
Figure 8.3: Three-way model of family literacy.....	192

## List of Acronyms

CASQDA	Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis
ICBC	Insurance Corporation of British Columbia
NLG	New London Group
PALS	Parents as Literacy Supporters
R2R	Ready to Read family literacy program
SNAF	Standard North American Family
TESOL	Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages
VFEC	Vancouver Family Education Centre

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My hope is that this dissertation embodies the motherhood spirit of my Mom, Phyllis, with whom I shared the first 40 years of my life journey. Thank you for being my first and greatest role model. Your memory continues to provide inspiration and guidance to everything I do as both a scholar and mother.

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Motherhood has been and will always be the greatest gift of my life.

# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction to the Study**

The term “family literacy” was coined by Denny Taylor (1983) to describe the repertoire of literacy practices that take place within families to show how “literacy is a part of the very fabric of family life” (p. 87), often with minimal awareness on the part of children and parents. Initially family literacy grew out of ethnographic research into family and community contexts for literacy acquisition (Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983), which found that a diversity of factors contributed to family literacy and that literacy acquisition processes varied culturally. In the late 1980s and 1990s, the concept of family literacy was adopted by governments and research bodies, and its meaning shifted from a description of how diverse families practice literacy to an educational intervention involving parents and their children, with clear aims in improving children's academic success, parenting practices, and employability by enhancing the quality of literacy interactions between parents and their children. In practice, there are a wide array of program offerings that span the varied approaches. Auerbach (1989) argued that in order to be successful, family literacy program practitioners must recognize what the families want to learn and work collaboratively with them to develop the kinds of programs that meet their needs.

Early family literacy programs began to appear in Canada by the start of the 1980s, and they focused on providing opportunities for lower-income parents and children to learn and practice strategies that were shown to be successful for middle-class families (Gosse & Phillips, 2006; Swain & Cara, 2017). Programs were premised on the notion that the family is the foundation for learning, particularly in the area of language and literacy development (Gosse & Phillips, 2006; Heath, 1983; Nickse, 1991; Purcell-Gates, 2000; Taylor, 1983). In most family



literacy programs, native English speakers were the target audience, and the programs had not been specifically designed to address the needs of families from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Critics saw these programs as favoring the dominant language at the expense of families' home languages, thereby positioning immigrant, refugee background, and low-income families in deficit ways (Anderson & Anderson, 2018; Auerbach, 1989). Family literacy, which originated as a descriptive term, became a prescriptive one used to rationalize the transmission of school-based literacy practices into the homes of low-income and language minority families (Auerbach, 2001).

The increasing diversity of the Canadian population is changing the face of family literacy programs offered in Canada and, thus, requires program practitioners to rethink what it means to support parents in fostering their children's literacy development. Gosse and Philips (2006) suggested that a diverse population makes the implementation of family literacy programs more challenging because parents of different cultural backgrounds may hold perceptions of literacy learning that are inconsistent with middle-class Western ideologies. Some parents, for example, may support their children's learning by more formal, sequential teaching of skills and literacy behaviors rather than through informal, discovery-based approaches to learning (Li, 2016).

In this study, family literacy refers to "the way parents, children, and extended family members use literacy at home and in the community. It occurs naturally during the routines of daily life and helps children and adults get things done" (Hayden & Sanders, 2017). This definition acknowledges the multiple, often unrecognized, literacy tasks that are embedded in everyday life. It encompasses the diversity of family literacy practices and underlines the non-formal learning that happens in families.

Immigrant and refugee background children are among the most educationally vulnerable groups of children (Gibson & Bejinez, 2002; Gonzalez et al., 2006; Noguera, 2019). Although these parents value education and have very high expectations for their children's academic outcomes, some immigrant and refugee background families face particular challenges in supporting their children's transition to school. Moving to a new country, these parents are more likely to encounter difficulties such as underemployment or unemployment, social isolation, and barriers to accessing support services (Quadros & Sarroub, 2016; Shimoni & Baxter, 2001). These stresses may affect immigrant and refugee background families financially, emotionally, and psychologically, resulting in parents' challenges in preparing children for successful school adaptation. This situation may be exacerbated if parents do not have the English (or French) speaking skills to enable them to adapt to their new environment in Canada. Focused efforts are greatly needed to support these parents in bridging their own knowledge and abilities with those of their new community. A family literacy program is one example of such a bridge.

Vancouver Family English Centre<sup>1</sup> (VFEC) is a non-profit organization located in Vancouver, Canada. The primary goal of the organization is to offer family literacy programming in conjunction with other service providers in the area to create meaningful opportunities for children, youth, and adults to learn together. The organization supports learners by also removing some of the barriers to learning such as childcare and free bus tickets to and from the programs, as well as incentive such as lunch and time to socialize. VFEC offers a number of programs to people in need, including the Ready to Read (R2R) family literacy program, and the Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) program, both of which were involved in this study. Most participants at VFEC have immigrant and refugee backgrounds and are largely

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<sup>1</sup> All the names and places in this study have been changed in order to protect the anonymity of the participants.

mothers. Their countries of origin are varied and include (but are not limited to): Afghanistan, China, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, India, Iran, Iraq, Mexico, Nigeria, Syria, and many more. Many have experienced difficulties for varied reasons such as living in war-torn countries, poverty, or abusive relationships.

I met Jane, the Executive Director of VFEC, in 2008 when I first moved to Vancouver. She warmly embraced me as a volunteer in the TESOL program for four years. My role was that of a support teacher as there were two other teachers and approximately 25 students in the class. I kept in touch with Jane over the years, volunteering at various programs always maintaining a connection to her and the programs. In addition to teaching, I participated in yearly social programs and had the opportunity to meet and spend time with the participants' families outside of the classroom. The R2R program was borne out of the adult-only classes that were taking place while children were at pre-school. The program was created in an attempt to teach parents and children together before the children entered formal schooling. My research was perhaps only possible because of our prior work and relationship.

The main site of my research took place at the Terrace Childcare Centre where the R2R program ran each week. From October to December 2018, I volunteered in the program to establish a rapport with the mothers, as well as the facilitator, Lara, who was my student when I taught in the TESOL program ten years ago. The program ran from January to June 2019, and I collected my data both within the program and community settings. Additional follow-up took place through December.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Over the years, researchers have expressed concerns about family literacy programs (e.g., Auerbach, 1989; Reyes & Torres, 2007; Swain, Brooks & Bosley, 2014). Central to these critiques is the notion that home languages and home literacy practices are suppressed as school literacy is promoted, indeed imposed, on families, especially those from marginalized communities and those speaking the non-dominant language. Literacy is now conceived of more broadly than print, and educators are encouraged to think of multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015). Many family literacy programs already reflect such an orientation, and studies that consider broader conceptions of literacy are needed (Anderson, Anderson, & Sadiq, 2017).

Family literacy programs usually involve two generations (Wasik, 2012), sometimes focusing on both adults' and children's literacy development, but virtually always on the latter (Anderson, Anderson, & Sadiq, 2017). Schools and researchers often dedicate resources toward the goal of increasing the effectiveness of family involvement in children's education. Their efforts, however, are not always informed by systematic investigations of why parents become involved in family literacy practices, how learner investment is integrated into family literacy programs, or how involvement influences parents' identities and imagined communities (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton, 2016; Norton & Pavlenko, 2019).

## **1.3 Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

Family literacy programs and research have contributed to the construction of binaries that frame much of family literacy scholarship (Auerbach, 1989, 1995; Cairney, 2003; Hannon, 2000). The most frequently cited binary is designated by the terms "strengths" and "deficits" (Compton-Lilly, Rogers, & Lewis, 2012). In this construction, families are presented as either

possessing literacy strengths or lacking literacy abilities. Another frequently studied area originates in “match” versus “mismatches” between home and school literacy practices. As Hull and Schultz (2001) argued, such dichotomies can lead educators and researchers to overlook important dimensions of family literacy programs, in particular, the effect of such programs on the lives of the parents. Compton-Lilly, Rogers, and Lewis (2012) argued that traditional approaches to family literacy tend to “deny the intellectual and literate capacities of mothers by privileging the learning potential of children” (p. 35).

This study is concerned with immigrant and refugee background mothers’ experiences and perceptions of being involved in a family literacy program, and the effect it had on their lives. My research was guided by the following questions:

- (i) How were the mothers’ investments integrated into the practices of the R2R program?
- (ii) How was the identity “mother” co-constructed within the practices of the R2R program?
- (iii) To what extent were the mothers’ identities transformed by the practices of the R2R program?

#### **1.4 Significance of Study**

Community-based family literacy programs can be an important jump-start for promoting families’ increased engagement with language and literacy at home (Kim & Byington, 2016). Although many studies have looked at the impact of family literacy programs on a variety of outcomes (Anderson & Anderson, 2018; Reyes & Torres, 2007), several areas remain unexplored, notably how parents benefit from such programs (Swain & Cara, 2017), specifically mothers. Most research focuses on children’s literacy outcomes (see, for example, Wagner,

Spiker & Linn, 2002; Whitehurst, Epstein, & Angell, 1994), while the benefits to parents have received much less attention. Parental investment and outcomes are of equal importance and could play a role in the design of successful family literacy programs. This study attempts to fill a gap in the literature by exploring the impact of a family literacy program on mothers. In addition to viewing the program's success based on indicators such as English language learning, this study explores the ways in which the mothers experienced the program and the resulting impact on their lives.

Ultimately, Heath (2010) said that family literacy will never lend itself to being fast, easy, or efficient. She claimed that researchers still have much work to do, as society is ever changing with political and social unrest, and technology is affecting and impacting families. Auerbach (1995) claimed that “marginalized families generally not only value literacy but see it as the single most powerful hope for their children” (p. 646). Additionally, the landscape and how we understand family configurations continue to change, as does the notion of what literacy is. For the purpose of this study, I define “parents” to include any significant adult caregiver in a child's life jointly participating in a family literacy program. As researchers, it is our responsibility to continue to build relationships with families and communities in order to best support children by adopting realistic expectations. Home literacy practices of all children need to be recognized and built upon as children make the transition from home to school (e.g., Heath, 1983; Swain et al., 2009). This can be accomplished by creating family literacy programs in which parents aspire to invest. As insiders and consumers of family literacy programs, parents have the potential to make vital contributions to policy and practice, including the design of future successful programs. Although some studies have reported parents' views (see, for example, Anderson & Morrison, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2004; Swain et al., 2014; Swain & Cara,

2017), these generally seem to have been of less interest to policy makers, and in much of the research about family literacy, parents have been neglected. There is scant research examining the effects of family literacy programs on mothers' lives in particular.

### **1.5 Overview of the Dissertation**

This dissertation consists of nine chapters whereby I attempt to respond to the stated research questions relying, as much as and wherever possible, on the voices of the mothers in this study.

Chapter 1 introduces the area of study and the problems that this research addresses. It also provides a rationale for why this research matters, outlining its significance for theory, practice, and policy. The research questions are presented as well as a rationale for their importance to the existing literature.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on key areas of this research. I review the evolution of family literacy programs, different models, and critiques, including the type of family literacy program on which the R2R program is premised. This chapter reports on how family literacy programs are meeting the needs of diverse learners through different models including bilingual programs, with an emphasis on mothers. It concludes with a review of parental outcomes.

Chapter 3 presents the conceptual frameworks in which this dissertation is situated: multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996), identity and investment (Norton, 2013), and transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1978). I show how these three frameworks work in a complementary way with critical reflection at the heart of all three.

In Chapter 4, I introduce the research design and methodology, as well as present the ways in which I collected data and the means by which it was analyzed. My role as a researcher as well as limitations of this dissertation are also explained.

Chapter 5 addresses the findings from Research Question 1 and explores how the mothers' investment was integrated into the practices of the R2R program. This chapter provides a description of the program as well as a detailed description of the weekly topics and how they were generated. It seeks to highlight the shared input by both the facilitators and the mothers.

Chapter 6 addresses Research Question 2, exploring how the identity "mother" was co-constructed in the R2R program by recognizing the ways in which the program was constituted by all the parties and their interactions. The mothers' investment was crucial to shaping the program, which had an impact on their identities as mothers.

Chapter 7 presents the findings from Research Question 3 in examining the extent to which the program was transformative for the mothers. This chapter looks to Mezirow's theory on Transformative Learning (Mezirow, 1978) as a way to operationalize observable changes to the mothers' identities.

Chapter 8 provides a discussion of the research, focusing on new findings presented in this study. It provides a three-way model of family literacy as a response to findings from the study.

Chapter 9 provides a conclusion, as well as implications for theory, research, and practice.



## Chapter 2: Review of Literature

### 2.1 Introduction

In the sphere of education, family literacy has diverse meanings. For some, it encapsulates “the myriad ways that literacy is practiced and promoted within the context of the family” (Anderson, Anderson, & Friedrich, 2010, p. 33). For others, it indicates the relationship between literacy use in families and children’s academic achievement (Grant & Ray, 2009; Jaynes, 2007). And for yet others, it describes educational programs that recognize the importance of the family dimension in the literacy learning of children or parents or both (Hannon, 2003). All of these (often overlapping) meanings are addressed in the research literature that deals with family literacy. Family literacy programs can look quite different from one another, depending on the needs and available resources in a given community. I draw on Taylor’s (1997) definition of families and literacies to guide this research:

Descriptive studies of families and literacy in many different countries with many different cultural traditions... show that each family is an original, that there is a seemingly infinite variety of patterns of cooperation and domestic organization, and that flexible household arrangements are often an adaptive response to an uncertain world. (p. 1)

One way of classifying family literacy programs is by how the participants (parent and child) receive the programming, and this type of classification includes four types of programming (Nickse, 1991): i) direct adults/direct children, it is designed for both parents and children to receive direct instruction together; ii) indirect adults/indirect children, whereby children are accompanied to events that focus on enjoyable literacy activities with little or no

direct instruction; iii) direct adults/indirect children, where adults participate alone with a focus on adult learning and parenting (child minding may be provided); and iv) indirect adults/direct children, where children are the focus of the programming and adults learn through informal observation and limited participation. Wasik and Van Horn (2012) defined family literacy programs as any “two-generation program focused on direct or indirect services to children and adults” that provide “parents with experiences to enhance their children’s literacy skills” (p. 6). Many programs are aimed at preschool children, providing parents and children with an opportunity to engage in age-appropriate literacy activities and are often located outside of schools in libraries and community centers.

## **2.2 Background of Family Literacy Programs**

Over the last three decades, researchers have documented that families can play important roles in children’s early literacy development (Anderson, Anderson, & Sadiq, 2017; Mui & Anderson, 2008; Purcell-Gates, 1996; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Goodman (1980) called the informal literacy activities and events that occur in homes and communities “the roots of literacy.” Attempting to capitalize on this knowledge, educators have developed family literacy programs that aim to support families by increasing opportunities for young children to engage in literacy activities at home, with the goal to enhance their early language and literacy development. Converging evidence indicates that these programs; can have a positive effect on children’s language and literacy development (Anderson, Friedrich, & Kim, 2011; Brooks, Pahl, Pollard, & Rees, 2008), which is sustained into the elementary school years (St. Clair, Jackson, & Zweiback, 2012); are valued by parents and caregivers (Anderson, Anderson, & Teichert, 2013); and can also help teachers and schools understand the lived experiences of culturally and

linguistically diverse families and families living in challenging social situations (Anderson, Smythe, & Shapiro, 2005).

There are many conceptions of family literacy that have evolved since Taylor (1983) first used the phrase in the 1980s. Hannon (2003) differentiated between identifying literacy practices in the home and the provision of formal programs by schools or other educational institutions, where parents are involved in their children's learning. According to Camilleri, Spiteri, and Wolfendale (2005), these programs can be further broadly divided into those aimed at improving children's literacy skills with focused parental support, and those that follow, in Hannon's term, the "cycle of literacy" model, which set out to enhance the literacy levels of both parents and children. The premise is that children with low literacy skills have parents with low literacy skills, and by providing opportunities to increase parents' literacy repertoires to support their children's educational development, parents will, in turn, strengthen their own literacy skills.

Auerbach (1989), Reyes and Torres (2007), and others have critiqued these programs, arguing that they fail to recognize and build on the home language and literacy practices of families and communities, and instead promote English and school literacy. As a result, Auerbach (1989) proposed an alternative framework to the deficit family model, which does not value families' cultural capital and argued that families need to be "fixed" or changed to conform to Western literacy practices. She presented a social-contextual approach whereby community concerns and cultural practices (cultural capital) served to inform curriculum development. This meant a shift in ideology away a deficit model to a strength-based model, whereby a family's diversity and resources were viewed as assets. This approach provided a new formulation as to what counts as literacy. Auerbach's (1989) broadened definition includes (but is not limited to) direct parent-child interactions around literacy tasks, reading with and/or listening to children,

talking about and giving and receiving support for homework and school concerns, and engaging in other activities with children that involve literacy (such as cooking, writing notes, etc.). She included a writing sample from an immigrant woman named Rosa and offered a glimpse into her life:

Why I didn't do the homework

Because the phone is ringing

the door is noking

the kid is yumping

the food is burning

time runs fast. Rosa.

(Auerbach, 1989, p. 165)

Rosa's note reflects the tensions she faced as a young mother pursuing educational dreams in a new country. Although she saw the importance of learning and made the effort to enroll in an English class, she asked her teacher to look at schoolwork in the context of her life and to understand the complex demands of her life that sometimes take priority over assignments (p. 166).

If educators define family literacy more broadly to include a range of activities (more than print-based literacies) and practices that are integrated into families' daily lives, the social context becomes a rich resource that can inform rather than impede learning. In this more inclusive view, doing formal schoolwork and developing literacy are not necessarily synonymous. The acquisition of literacy skills is seen in relation to its context and uses (Heath, 1983; Street, 1984): literacy is meaningful to students to the extent that it relates to daily realities and helps them to act on them (Freire, 1970); separated from such contexts and purposes,

however, it can become a burden. In this view, the teacher's role is to connect what happens inside the classroom to what happens outside so that literacy can become a meaningful tool for addressing the daily literacy events in parents' and students' lives. According to this view, family literacy programs need to recognize and value what families bring to family literacy programs, while at the same time, build upon and expand the range of literacy repertoires.

According to Freire (1970), education is not neutral, and it can only become empowering when individuals become active questioners of the social, economic, and political reality that surrounds them. Families should be prepared to “read the word on the basis of their own reading of their world” (p. 80). Freire advocated for creating family literacy “culture circles” whereby through discussion groups, participants are empowered to shape family literacy curriculum and practices that are relevant to them and to their communities (Reyes & Torres, 2007). According to Freire (1983), the purpose of culture circles revolves around the fact that:

... the literacy education of adults is really a process of cultural action. The very designation ‘culture circles’ rather than ‘adult literacy classes’ was intended to emphasize this point. The ‘reading’ or ‘rereading’ of reality as it is being transformed is the primary consideration, taking precedence over the mere learning of the written language. (p. 160)

In doing so, programming shifts away from teacher-directed, top-down, commonly imposed and standardized curricula and assessments that prescribe the same for all learners, regardless of their ability, values, ethnicity, history, and their community requirements or their specific contexts. Instead, it takes an egalitarian approach, whereby there is a sharing of power between the teacher and the student in learning, the curriculum, its contents, and methods (Duckworth & Tett, 2019). The goals of the facilitators of these inquiry-based family literacy programs include listening to parents' own accounts of their needs, establishing a collaborative approach to instruction,

working with families to shape a program that meets their needs and expands their range of possibilities, and empowering and inspiring them to achieve new goals (Neuman, Celano, & Fischer, 1996). This aligns with Taylor's (1983) key finding, that a range of literacy practices integrated in a meaningful way into the fabric of everyday life promotes literacy acquisition.

The focus of family literacy programs differs greatly based on the mindset behind the development of the program. Thomas and Skage (1998) posed the question: "Whose literacy are we trying to promote?" (p. 20). Family literacy programs generally follow one of two models depending on their focus: either (1) the "transmission of school practices model" or (2) the "family strengths model" (Auerbach, 1995; Neuman et al., 1996). Under the "transmission of school practices model," parents are taught to transmit the culture of school literacy through the vehicle of the family, while the "family strengths model" emphasizes the importance of respecting cultural differences in family literacy practices. Reyes and Torres (2007) claimed that most family literacy programs are motivated by wanting to "fix" the child, family, and community rather than collaboratively identifying and removing barriers to literacy development. These types of programs fall under the "transmission of school practices model" and focus on "improving" parents' literacy practices with the ultimate goal of supporting school readiness in young children and promoting mainstream literacy practices. Because these programs are based on the belief that families from diverse backgrounds lack the characteristics and skills necessary to support children's literacy development, they are often developed with minimal input from families or community members.

In the transmission model, women are positioned primarily as carriers of literacy for their families. This "caretaking approach to literacy" (Luttrell, 1990, p. 7) supports women's traditional role in the family and secondary status in society. Slogans such as "teach the mother

and reach the child” (Fossen & Sticht, 1991) equate educating women with educating their families. In this view, women pursue literacy education to meet the needs of others and are the first access point in the literacy circuit rather than the subjects of their own learning (Auerbach, 1991; Freire, 1970). They are passive recipients of literacy education rather than active participants. Although called the “first teachers” of their children (Bush, 1989), women are given no authority or power in the teaching role but, instead, are expected to transmit knowledge and skills in prescribed ways. Women’s presence in literacy programs becomes esteemed insofar as women convey dominant cultural knowledge and values to their children, knowledge that supports rather than challenges the status quo.

Programs based on the “family strengths model” often adopt a Freirean approach to family literacy as a way of working toward social justice (Auerbach, 2001; Reyes & Torres, 2007; Rolander, 2018). Within these programs, educators recognize that “our own ways of knowing are no longer the ultimate authority” (Weinstein-Shr, 1995, p. 112). The task, then, is to listen to parents to find out about their lives and cultural contexts, and to make room for their literacy practices in teaching.

Wasik, Dobbins, and Herrmann (2001) referred to family literacy programs that incorporate early-childhood programming and adult education along with an element of parents and children working together as comprehensive programs. Based on the presumption that the skills learned and practiced by the adult and the child produce an intergenerational and/or reciprocal transfer of skills (Neuman, 1998), these programs vary in the relative emphasis on the child and adult components (Hendrix, 1999). Within the child-focused component, developmentally appropriate experiences are offered to promote language and literacy learning. The adult literacy instruction is typically geared to the goals of the parents, either relating to

parent-child learning or to employment (Brizius & Foster, 1993). Facilitators promote parents' awareness of their own knowledge and capabilities for helping their children (Rodriguez-Brown & Meehan, 1998). The joint parent-child activities are focused on families learning how to become a greater part of the world of print and are designed to promote interactions that lead to greater understanding, communication, and skill gains. Many programs also specifically seek to provide opportunities for parents to support other parents, provide time for sharing of experiences, and discuss ways to overcome challenges to family literacy. The extent to which family literacy programs can claim success has been and continues to be extensively debated (e.g., Gadsden, 2000; Purcell-Gates, 2000).

### **2.3 Critiques of Family Literacy Programs**

Given the underlying premise that families, particularly those with low social and economic status, are deficient in the literacy practices and parenting skills needed to effectively support their child's learning, critics have criticized these programs for using a deficit model (e.g., Auerbach, 1995, 2001; Whitehouse & Colvin, 2001). Nearly 30 years ago, Auerbach (1995) critically analyzed family literacy programs designed to support immigrant and refugee families' participation in their children's education, which focused on having parents take up Western style pedagogies and assist their children with homework. Family literacy programs arose out of an intervention/prevention model whereby educators believed family literacy problems were rooted in undereducated parental inability to promote positive literacy attitudes and interactions in the home. Since parents are seen as children's first teachers, they were said to bear primary responsibility for children's literacy development. According to this view, when parents themselves do not adequately use or value literacy, they perpetuate a cycle of



undereducation. Given that literacy problems were seen to originate in families, they felt the remedy must also be located there; as Darling (1992) said, “the seeds of school failure are planted in the home, and we cannot hope to uproot the problem by working only within the schools. We must approach it through the family” (p. 5). Mansbach (1993) painted a bleak picture of families:

No one at home would read books, newspapers, or magazines. There were no library visits or books given as presents. No one even checked on whether the children had done their homework for school. I discovered an intergenerational disease—parents who passed illiteracy and poverty along to their children. (p. 37)

As such, proponents of this view supported intervention programs aimed at changing parents’ beliefs about literacy and literacy interactions with their children (Nickse, Speicher, & Buchek, 1988). Such programs were seen as the best means to ensure that patterns of undereducation and illiteracy would be prevented from passing from generation to generation. The objectives of the interventions were framed in terms of “[breaking] the intergenerational cycle of under-education and poverty, one family at a time, by changing the messages communicated in the home” (National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy, 1994, p. 3).

When “the problem” is framed in terms of inadequate family literacy practices, beliefs and values, the remedy is framed in terms of changing family behaviors and attitudes within families. In some cases, program objectives focus on changing behaviors and attitudes related to specific literacy practices (most commonly parent/child story-reading), and in others, they focus on altering the broad patterns of family interaction in which literacy is embedded (Auerbach, 1995).

To address the issues educators believed stemmed from “deficit” families, a common intervention strategy Auerbach (1995) called the “bullet” program model was implemented.

These programs offered single practice solutions such as training parents to read stories or sending books home in backpacks; in their most extreme form, these single practice models suggest that schooling problems would be solved if only parents read to their children every day. Many were premised on the notion that it was necessary to find ways of extending school reading experiences into the home and teaching parents to support classroom instruction. The most common program objective of these bullet programs was teaching parents the value of story-reading and the behaviors associated with it. Such programs (still) are often based on the premise that parents themselves grew up in homes where positive experiences with print were limited, and thus need to be taught the value of reading to their own children (Auerbach, 2001). This is problematic in that giving instruction in the value of story-reading assumes that marginalized parents do not already know that it is important to focus on story-reading. It may promote one kind of literacy event at the expense of others, thus undermining the integration of a range of literacy activities ongoing in families' lives and ignoring the value of other positive culture-specific practices. Taylor (1983) found that a range of literacy practices integrated into the daily lives of families promote literacy acquisition. Also missing from this model is any notion of how the children's home experiences might inform classroom instruction.

Other programs focused more broadly on patterns of interaction within families, aiming to change the parenting practices within which literacy was embedded. Often these programs were framed in terms of family strengths, emphasizing the identification of existing "healthy" family traits, acknowledging the culture-specificity of norms for family strengths, and involving participants in setting their own goals (Potts, 1992). Characteristics of the trait "time together" included playing games as well as watching television together. Suggestions for enhancing the "time together" trait included basing lessons on McDonald's menus, Little League brochures,

scouting manuals, and TV guides (Potts, 1992, p. 11). Auerbach (1995) critiqued this model, claiming it did not recognize parents' existing values and the need to teach parenting skills:

Who gets to decide what values are adequate and what good parenting entails? Are there universals of good parenting? Do middle class academic "experts" know better than low-income African American parents, or Cambodian refugee parents how they should raise their children to deal with the challenges of economic survival, racism, or cultural transition? I would argue that any program which aims to change values, beliefs, messages or behaviors raises significant ethical questions. (p. 649)

Borg and Mayo (2001) argued that such views that position children as the "object of rehabilitation" (p. 245) who need to change their orientation, and that family literacy should be informed by Freire's (1970) theory of critical pedagogy, which places learners' own context, cultures, and experiences at the heart of instruction. More recently, Timmons and Pelletier (2014) have also warned against forms of family literacy that devalue existing language and literacy use by attempting to exchange it with a seemingly privileged form of school literacy found in the education system (Anderson et al., 2010; Heath, 1982). Timmons and Pelletier (2014) argued that many programs use a one-way or "top-down" conception of literacy that does not take sufficient account of parents' existing knowledge and practices. Other academics who research family literacy (see for example, Anderson et al., 2010; Auerbach, 1989; Marsh, 2003; Nichols, Nixon, & Rowsell, 2009; Reyes & Torres, 2007; Whitehouse & Colvin, 2001) also contended that family literacy programs that use a top-down model seeking to transfer cultural values, from the school to families, are based on a "deficit hypothesis" and "deficit thinking" (Anderson et al., 2010, p. 47).

In spite of the critiques, what we do know is that research (e.g., Anderson et al., 2010; Brooks, Gorman, Harman, Hutchison, & Wilkinson, 1996; Hannon, Morgan, & Nutbrown, 2006; St. Clair, 2008; Swain & Cara, 2017; Swain et al., 2009) shows that the vast majority of parents are very positive about their experiences in family literacy programs. In the context of what Cummins (2004) has termed “the default option” in North American classrooms, these complex family literacies have been separated from the curriculum, with families and students penalized by the cultural and linguistic deficit models underlying pedagogies focused overwhelmingly on monolingual English academic print literacy.

Several pedagogical frameworks aim to redress this exclusion with the growing body of family literacy programs exploring how family literacies might be better linked to academic/school literacies (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005; Schechter & Ippolito, 2006) by acknowledging that “people are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge (González et al., 2005, p. bix–x). Moll and Greenberg (1990) conceptualized this as “funds of knowledge” which are “the essential cultural practices and bodies of knowledge and information that households use to survive, to get ahead, or to thrive” (p. 321).

A study conducted by The National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (2015) found a significant increase in parents’ confidence, which enabled them to better support their child(ren) with their homework. Parents also improved their understanding of how reading (including the use of phonics) was taught at school and noted a closer parent-school alignment. The study also found that the most common reason for parents to enroll in a family literacy program was to learn about school literacies and pedagogies, so they felt able to support their children at home. Although almost all parents were aware of the importance of their

children having sound literacy skills; parents also reported gaps in their understanding of how reading was taught at school, including the role of phonics in the literacy curriculum.

An example of a family literacy program that focused on the simultaneous teaching of both parents and children is the Kenan model, which was promoted by the National Center for Family Literacy (Hannon, 2000). This program included four integrated components which were believed to form a comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of families: “i) basic skill instruction for parents or caregivers, ii) preschool or literacy education for young children, iii) regular parent and child interaction, and iv) parent education/support activities” (Darling, 1993, p. 3). A full review of the literature conducted by Morrow, Paratore, Gaber, Harrison, and Tracey (1993) concluded that this model emphasized how and what parents could learn from schools but gave little (or no) attention to how schools might learn from parents, leading to criticism that early models of this program were based on the deficit family model, and perpetuated the “we know, you don’t dichotomy” (Shockley, 1994, p. 500). Auerbach (1995) critiqued this intervention prevention approach, which placed the blame for lower literacy rates on family beliefs and behaviors attributing fault to marginalized groups, rather than questioning the institutions’ roles in marginalization.

Indeed, the perception that low-income, immigrant, and minority families are deficient in their home literacy practices is perhaps the most damaging assumption underlying the school-based family literacy model. The consequence of this assumption is that schools and intervention programs, such as family literacy, determine for families what is important and necessary for them to learn. And while parents are encouraged to become more involved in their children’s education, little is done to promote their participation as mutual constructors of the curriculum.

This view is in contrast to community-based literacy perspectives whereby parents and children are given a space to voice their needs, interests, and concerns in classroom learning. Sometimes called “participatory” education (Frye, 1999; Mitchell, 2004), this method of teaching attempts to diminish the power structure between teachers and students by inviting students to participate in designing the curriculum. This view holds that every learner brings a wealth of experience to the classroom and that the role of the teacher is to discover and build on those experiences. Ada and Beutel (1991) provided an eloquent definition of participatory research, saying that, “participatory research is a philosophical and ideological commitment which holds that every human being has the capacity of knowing, of analyzing and reflecting about reality so that she becomes a true agent of action in her own life” (p. 8).

## **2.4 Mothers in Family Literacy Programs**

In addition to examining the deep ideological issues that underlie family literacy programs, one must take into account the significant role that women, specifically mothers, have as participants in family literacy programs. While the research in family literacy programs largely refers to “parents,” mothers constitute the majority of adult participants in family literacy programs (Smythe & Illeris, 2004). In her book *Schoolsmart and Motherwise*, Wendy Luttrell (2016) argued that the high prevalence of women's involvement in children's education and, moreover, the expectation that women's involvement is the norm, was due to “the gendered organization of school” (p. 91). Luttrell (2016) said:

The institutional order of the school requires particular activities to be accomplished within the home, a work organization usually managed and coordinated by mothers. At the primary educational level, an overtired or hungry child is unable to keep up with the

morning's teaching program. In the later grades, a child living in a crowded space, who has limited time and resources has difficulty completing homework assignments. Where mothering work does not conform to the generalized requirements of schooling, or to the particularities of the classroom, it appears as inadequate mothering due to incompetence, or social deprivation. (p. 92)

Luttrell (2016) refers to this notion of the ideal mother as being central to a “mothering discourse” whereby women were seen as responsible for providing educational and economic security for their children. Women who felt that they were “failing” to do this may experience guilt, shame, anxiety, and a host of other negative emotions. What many of these mothers do not recognize, however, is that this type of school organization was designed for mothers with “middleclass resources, time, and knowledge” (Luttrell, 2016, p. 92). This result confirms earlier findings (Smythe & Illeris, 2002) that “contend that family literacy policy and programs are founded upon culturally bound beliefs and values surrounding who and what constitutes a good mother, a normal family and by extension, appropriate literacy and pedagogical practices in the home” (para 2) based on Smith’s (1993) construct of the “Standard North American Family” (SNAF). Smith likens SNAF to a “genetic code” that infiltrates and shapes the ways in which individuals and communities act and understand their world to the extent that these actions and beliefs seem normal, natural, and, thus, invisible. SNAF privileges the two parent, heterosexual, nuclear family where women occupy the domestic sphere of child raising and men occupy the public sphere of work outside the home. The effect of this works against Auerbach’s (1995) social-contextual model of family literacy because in constructing imagined, or ideal models of family life and literacy practices, they render non-SNAF families as deficient and thus in need of intervention and preventative measures to help them better approximate the ideal. Marginalized

women, therefore, are particularly prone to buying into the mothering discourse, believing that they are incapable of providing an adequate home environment for their children (Gordon, 2000). Mothering discourse is powerful in the way that it shapes (and is shaped by) the attitudes, beliefs, ideas, and emotions of individuals - most especially those of mothers.

Many women enter family literacy programs seeking care and personal support (Hill-Collins, 1990; Luttrell, 2016). The “emotional labor” (Hochschild, 1983) that mothers are expected to provide on a daily basis may leave them needing emotional support themselves, support that they feel they can find in the presence of other women in similar situations. For this reason, care, affection, and concern may be important aspects to focus on in adult family literacy classes. Examining the emotional side to learning in family programs is an underdeveloped area of study but is one that may reveal more about the ways that educational programs can support women and help them cope with the social realities in which they live.

## **2.5 Family Literacy Models Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners**

Matthiesen (2019) reported that much research is devoted to uncovering the reasons for the lack of parental involvement of immigrant and refugee background parents in their children’s education. The research shows that these parents tend to have a lack of knowledge of what is expected of them and how to live up to their parental responsibilities in their new country of residence (Bitew & Ferguson, 2010; Dennesen, Bakker, & Gierveld, 2007; Ibrahim, Small & Grimley, 2009; Vera et al., 2012). This literature often recommends certain interventions to counteract these perceived deficits, resulting in an increased number of programs intended to ensure that immigrant and refugee background parents have the adequate know-how and skills to support their children. The focus on the lack of know-how and skills that form the basis of these



interventions and programs can be critiqued for adhering to a deficit logic where parents with immigrant and refugee backgrounds are considered inadequate as parents, often regarding both disciplinary strategies and academic support abilities (Matthiesen, 2016). Crozier and Davies (2007) drew on Dale's (1996) typology, namely the expert model and the transplant model to describe these deficit-oriented approaches.

In the expert model, the professional is the expert who has valuable knowledge. Ravn (2011) drew on a similar analytical concept, which she termed the "compensation rationale." She argued that based on the notion that the teachers are the experts and the parents lack sufficient skills and competencies, the schools compensate for any insufficient or lacking skills and competencies shown by the parents. Thus, the experts assume that homework support is typically thought of as a parental responsibility. This isolates parents and undermines their perspectives.

In the transplant model, professionals teach their skills and expertise to parents and thereby help them become more successful as parents supporting their children's education. This is the model that is employed in the intervention programs intended to teach immigrant and refugee background parents necessary knowledge and skills. Crozier and Davies (2007) argued that although the transplant model is a strategy intended for empowerment of parents, it still locates the balance of power in the hands of the professional adhering to an assimilation logic and placing the demand of change on the parents. These interventions that seek to empower parents through changing their cultural capital are thus problematic, as they implicitly draw on a deficit understanding of these parents and their parenting practices. Lightfoot (2004) likewise argued that middle-class parents are treated as resources, whereas immigrant and refugee background parents are considered deficient and in need of input and help before they can be thought of as resources:

middle-class parents are seen as overflowing containers, whose involvement in schools is to be valued...contrasted with low-income, urban parents who speak English as a second language and who are portrayed as empty containers, which need to be filled before they can give anything of value to the schools or their own offspring. (Lightfoot, 2004, p. 93)

The parental strategies of those with immigrant and refugee backgrounds are thus not considered merely different but rather inappropriate. As Guo (2012) wrote, “A deficit model of difference leads to beliefs that difference is equal to deficiency, and that the knowledge of others – particularly those from developing countries – is incompatible, inferior, and hence invalid” (p. 123). Others point out that in order to be considered responsible parents, they must respond to the call of the schools in a school-centric manner, i.e., “good parents” are defined by their ability to respond to the demands of the school (Matthiesen, 2016; Theodorou, 2008).

Appreciative inquiry (Hammond, 1998) is an approach to family literacy that encourages adults to identify personal experiences that demonstrate past successes in their lives, specifically in education. A key assumption within this approach is that “if we bring the past forward, we should bring the best” (p. 21). Giles and Alderson (2008) wrote that the purpose of appreciative inquiry is to focus on personal instances when something worked well for the participants and to articulate the positive aspects of the social dimensions of those environments that were most impactful. Giles and Alderson (2008) characterized this model as “dream forming” and “destiny creating,” with the inquiry approach allowing the class to capture adults’ stories of transformative learning experiences (p. 470). The program achieved the sharing of stories through purposeful discussion stipulating the “dialogue of the teaching-learning process to be the medium for deeper and reflective learning, supporting students who critically reflect on their assumptions and beliefs as part of the learning process” (p. 467).

Rolander (2018) found that, through this model, the role taken by facilitators was critical; they needed to act more as supporters than as content experts. She also found that the learning environment needed to be socially enabling to allow for the sharing of transformative experiences that could benefit the whole class. Another important finding was that the educational outcomes, not just the methodology, must recognize the wider family and not focus solely on institutional measures (Giles & Alderson, 2008, p. 472). The appreciative inquiry model, rather than bringing in outside content and relating it to the participants' lives, was truly built entirely on the adults' lived experiences, with the teacher acting as a supportive facilitator. McKinney and Norton (2010) cite a "Freirean problem-posing approach where social issues are elicited from the lived experiences of adult learners" (p. 197). Within a Freirean approach, the learners themselves establish the goals and content for learning, rejecting a top-down educational structure that is often divorced from their everyday lives and actual needs.

How literacy is defined and how family literacy programs are designed can greatly impact the extent to which learners are empowered to shape their own future possibilities. Dialogue emerges as a theme in research about transformative approaches to family literacy (Freire, 1970; Rolander, 2018). Iddings (2010) commented that "in a dialogic problem-posing method of education, the student must find his or her own generative themes, and the task of the dialogic teacher is to represent these themes as problems" (p. 306). Reyes and Torres (2007) discussed culture circles as a dialogic learning environment where participants dialogue with a facilitator to articulate together how they can work to reshape their worlds (p. 80). In the latter pedagogic model, participants discuss their own lived experiences and concerns and thus reshape family literacy curricula and practices to better meet their needs and align with their interests and cultural realities, rather than work to alter their personal realities to better fit into an institutional

paradigm. This eliminates the top-down curriculum that imposes dominant literacies on marginalized groups. Their notion of culture circles, with a focus on problem posing, is a pedagogical model of family literacy that goes beyond the transmission of “school-like” literacy practices and expands the curriculum to encompass social change for a community. Auerbach (1989, 2001) contributed to the foundation of this model by outlining how curricula should be adapted to draw on parents’ knowledge and experiences. She writes that the primary purpose of family literacy should be the promotion of parents’ decision-making power within the school system, providing them with the means to advocate on behalf of themselves and their children.

Dialogue thus becomes a key concept in these social transformation approaches. Building on a Freirean notion of a pedagogy of change, García-Carrión (2016) described an intervention program grounded in dialogue. She argues that while there is a powerful tendency towards evidence-based solutions in schools, the transformative role in education should instead be based on dialogue “as a critical tool to privilege the voices of those systematically excluded in the process of knowledge construction” (García-Carrión, 2016, p. 155). Drawing on Vygotsky’s (1962) understanding of language as the “tool of tools for learning and development” (p. 157), she shows that community dialogue—based on egalitarian values that prioritize conversation rather than position and social structure—produced hope and social transformation. Similarly, Machado-Casas, Sánchez, and Ez (2014), in a computer literacy intervention for Latino/a immigrant parents, asked what skills they wanted to learn and how they would like to learn it, as full participants actively engaged in the creation of their learning process.

## **2.6 Bilingual Family Literacy Programs**

Parents as Literacy Supporters in Immigrant Communities (IPALS) (Anderson et al., 2011) is an example of a family literacy program that was designed to help immigrant and refugee background families through a multiliteracies, social-contextual model of family literacy (Auerbach, 1995) with program content that is culturally familiar and relevant. This was achieved primarily through the use of bilingual, culturally appropriate pedagogical tools that include culturally relevant content and culturally familiar pedagogical practices delivered in both the first language of the community and in English. In addition to valuing cultural practices, IPALS promoted the development and maintenance of the participating families' first language (Anderson et al., 2011) by creating bilingual materials in 14 languages. Through developing the families' first language and valuing their cultural practices while adding a second language, the program reflected an additive bilingualism orientation (Cummins, Chow, & Schechter, 2006). This finding supports Sneddon's (2008) conclusion that English-speaking facilitators can provide this type of learning opportunity without sharing the first language of the participating families, provided that translation and bilingual materials are available.

In spite of IPALS teaching and translating books into their home languages and English, the adults expressed a need and desire to improve their own language and literacy abilities in English; the program responded by adding an hour of English language instruction to the classes. In the second year, many of the families returned and expressed considerable interest in the English instruction. However, this time they wanted to learn more about computers and the Internet, and particularly using these resources to search for information, to learn how to use email, and to download newspapers and other information from their homeland (Anderson et al., 2011). Dual language family literacy programs address the diverse ethnic and linguistic

composition of schools by targeting home language literacy as well as literacy development in English (Naqvi, McKeough, Thorne, & Pfitscher, 2013).

## **2.7 Review of Parental Outcomes in Family Literacy Programs**

In a study conducted by Swain et al. (2014) with 101 parents participating in family literacy programs with their children, they found the vast majority of parents were positive about their experience. Ninety-seven per cent of parents reported gaining some kind of benefit, and 96% per cent thought that they had continued to benefit from attending the program three months after it ended. The reported benefits included three related areas: improvements in parents' own literacy, personal changes in confidence and self-esteem (including changes in their sense of identity), and a better awareness of how to support their children. Evidence from Carpentieri, Fairfax-Cholmeley, Litster, and Vorhaus (2011) suggested that long-term gains in child literacy are particularly likely when family literacy programs emphasize the importance of providing parents with training not just in educational support skills, but also in socio-emotional support skills. Parents became more interested in improving their own literacy skills and began to place greater value on education and learning (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Swain et al., 2014).

Swain et al. (2014) reported parents gained confidence and self-esteem and formed social and supportive networks. Qualitative studies further illuminate how women in literacy programs, across markedly diverse settings, use educational and community groups as a social space for creating friendships, sharing advice, releasing emotions, and disrupting monotonous housework (Galván, 2001; Horsman, 1990; Prins, 2006; Stromquist, 1997). Walter (2004) explained one such program as “a social space offering them [women] the chance to get together with other women, and to break up their usual routines of work and leisure” (p. 435). Through family

literacy, as women share ideas for solving personal problems and establish friendships outside their usual networks, they access and exchange new forms of social support, including emotional and material resources (Prins, Toso, & Scaffit, 2009). Anderson and Anderson (2018) reported families in an “early intervention program” had developed social networks through their participation in the program. Some of them indicated that they started volunteering in their children’s classrooms and became involved in the school in other ways. Families’ participation in schools and in their children’s education are positively related to their academic achievement (Epstein & Sanders, 2012). Thus, Anderson and Anderson (2018) believed that through various family literacy programs, parents can be supported in developing social capital that allows for greater participation in their children’s education.

## **2.8 Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the evolution of family literacy programs from inception through to current theory and practice. Too often, families’ literacy practices, social practices, and circumstances that are thought to be related to literacy come under scrutiny in the field of family literacy. In keeping with Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez’s (1992) observations of families’ “funds of knowledge,” studies have shown that families in all their cultural and linguistic diversity – their different “ways of being” – participate in a wide range of literacy activities within the home and in daily life. They show that there are multiple pathways to literacy learning in families; that families, despite often difficult circumstances such as extreme poverty and conflict, have strengths and are resourceful; and that for the most part parents, regardless of their own literacy abilities, are “concerned about their children’s education” (Barton, 1997, p. 105). These perspectives on families sit within what is described as

a “strengths” view (Auerbach, 1989, 1995) and represent one of two broad orientations towards families evident in family literacy discourse (Purcell-Gates, 2000; Whitehouse & Colvin, 2001). In this “strengths” orientation, families are constructed as “capable cultural units” (Purcell-Gates, 2000, p. 859).

Across the field as a whole, the parent-child dyad in the context of children’s literacy learning is the pre-eminent construction of family. Parents feature mainly in the context of their role in their children’s learning and in breaking the cycle of under-achievement and, often, of poverty (Darling, 1993). The prominence of this particular construction of families in family literacy reflects the dominance in the field of literacy generally, and in the field of family literacy in particular, of Western ideals of family life and the role of parents and mothers in particular. In the context of this study, it is important not to lose sight of the rich and diverse family “ways of being” also identified in literacy and family literacy research (for example, Moll et al., 1992), nor of the ideological nature of some depictions of families and their literacies that present them as unable or unwilling to support their children’s learning when research shows that this is seldom the case (Barton, 1997).

Important to consider is that parents are generally happy with their experiences in family literacy programs and look to them for both support for their children, as well as for themselves for both academic and social purposes. In order to move away from a deficit model of thinking to a strengths-based family literacy model, research shows a need to involve parents in curriculum design, especially in generating topics relevant to their lived experiences with a strong pedagogical focus on dialogue. The need to have bilingual programming appears to be successful if the resources are available, yet even within a strong program such as IPALS in immigrant communities, parents are asking for more English and Canadian content related to parenting.



More research needs to be done examining the outcomes to parents, notably mothers, who participate in family literacy programs with particular focus on programs designed for immigrant and refugee background families whereby English is not a first language.

This chapter sought to locate this work within the existing literature on family literacy and identify the gap the study is trying to fill. Chapter 3 situates the study within larger conceptual frameworks of multiliteracies, identity and investment, and transformative learning.

## Chapter 3: Conceptual Frameworks

### 3.1 Introduction

This study is framed within three theoretical perspectives: multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996), identity and investment (Norton, 2013), and transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1978). The three frameworks work in a complementary way that facilitates critical reflection at the heart of transformation. Hansman and Mott (2010) suggested that educators find ways to “reach adult learners ‘where they are’ and promote critical reflection in learning situations” (p. 21). This critical reflection is what allows adult learners to “gain access to information, give voice to their ideas, make decisions and act independently, and build bridges to the future by learning how to learn” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 8).

### 3.2 Multiliteracies

Globalization and digitization have reshaped the communication landscape, deeply altering language and literacy education (Lotherington & Jenson, 2011). In response to mass migration and the emergence of digital communications that defined the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the New London Group (NLG) called for a broader view of literacy and literacy teaching in its 1996 manifesto, *A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures* (NLG, 1996). The group argued that literacy pedagogy in education must: (1) reflect the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of the contemporary globalized world and (2) account for the new kinds of texts and textual engagement that have emerged in the wake of new information and multimedia technologies. In order to better capture the plurality of discourses, languages, and media, they proposed the term “multiliteracies.”

While the increased emphasis on cultural and linguistic diversity aligns with theories of literacy as social practice (Street, 1984), the emphasis on multiple communication channels is different. As Cope and Kalantzis (2009) noted, this theory “focuses on modes of representation much broader than language alone” (p. 5). Multiliteracies takes on a more extensive view of literacy to also include non-verbal meaning-making (Jewitt, 2009; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; NLG, 1996). In a broad sense, multiliteracies deals with multiple meaning making approaches, mass communication channels, cultural and linguistic diversity, as well as a wide variety of resources (Jewitt, 2009; NLG, 1996). In other words, cultural and linguistic diversity are viewed as resources for meaning-making that need to be accounted for pedagogically (Early & Kendrick, 2017). The NLG (1996) proposed a pedagogical framework that highlighted the importance of situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice. The multiliteracies case is that all four aspects are necessary for good teaching, but not in a rigid or sequential way (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008). The essence of this framework is that students should be given opportunities to engage in meaningful experience and practice within a learning community, and that conceptual development and understanding should be supported by explicit instruction as required. Students should also have opportunities to step back and critically examine concepts and ideas they have learned in relation to their social relevance. Finally, they should be given opportunities to take the knowledge they have gained further—to put it into play in the world of ideas to understand how their insights can exert an impact on people and issues in the real world.

Further explained by Exley and Luke (2010), a multiliteracies perspective in practice must: (a) foreground inquiry and be situated in the life worlds of learners; (b) provide overt instruction that extends to new knowledge; (c) include critical framing of problems and issues

that address real audiences for real purposes; and (d) result in transformed literacy practices. Taken together, these four criteria can result in transformative pedagogy (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Situated practice refers to immersion in a specific community and how it enacts literacy, focusing on how experts within that community enact literacy and the socio-cultural influences on literacy enactment. Through the use of situated practice in the classroom, educators promote student interaction, discussion, and sharing of ideas. The focus is on the students' thoughts, feelings, and opinions. This is an example of how literacy is a social practice, where students are able to develop their knowledge through relating and connecting to their prior knowledge with others. The NLG (1996) defined situated practice as an "immersion in meaningful practices within a community of learners who are capable of playing multiple and different roles based on their background and experiences" (p. 85). Teachers play a vital role in establishing an environment and set of relationships in which students can validate their socially situated knowledge and value the knowledge generated from their lived experiences (Duckworth & Smith, 2018).

Overt instruction, or transmission pedagogy, is relevant to all kinds of learning and gives way to new knowledge (Exley & Luke, 2010). Explicit instruction and structured guidelines can play an important role in effective teaching/learning in that it includes "active interventions on the part of the teacher and other experts that scaffold learning activities that allow the learner to gain explicit information" (NLG, 1996, p. 86). It assists learners in developing "conscious awareness and control over what is being learned" (NLG, 1996, p. 86). Helping students to understand metalanguage is an example of how teachers use overt instruction to very explicitly make students aware of power and social dynamics in language. Students do better in the target

language and culture if they also have an awareness of specific cultural practices and their meanings – for example, accepted understandings of appropriate eye contact or gestures.

Transmission of information and skills becomes problematic only when it constitutes the predominant or even exclusive focus of instruction. For educators to become partners in the transmission of knowledge, culturally diverse students were required to acquiesce in the subordination of their identities and to celebrate as “truth” the perspectives of the dominant group. Rather, instruction should reflect collaborative relations of power whereby “power” is generated through interactions with others. Students are then able to participate confidently in instruction because their sense of identity is being affirmed and expanded in their interactions with others. They also know that their voices will be heard and respected within the classroom such that schooling amplifies rather than silences learners’ power of self-expression (Cummins, 2009). As Gee (2007) stated:

If people are to nurture their souls, they need to feel a sense of control, meaningfulness, even expertise in the face of risk and complexity. They want and need to feel like heroes in their own life stories and to feel that their stories make sense. They need to feel that they matter and that they have mattered in other people’s stories. If the body feeds on food, the soul feeds on agency and meaningfulness. (p. 10)

This collaborative nature aligns with Auerbach’s (2001) social change perspective of family literacy, where she attributes meaningful dialogue among participants and facilitators as being a key pedagogical process.

Critical framing is a process whereby students are able to construct their own meaning, through reflection, analysis, comprehension, and application of their learning (NLG, 1996). Critical framing highlights for students how their overt literacy practices are influenced

by context, whereby students step back from what they have learned, critique their learning, and extend and apply their learning in new contexts. The research of Duckworth and Smith (2016) reinforced the importance of caring bonds in supporting learners through their educational journey. Their study reveals how teachers, even when constrained by curriculum, can open up a space for critical reflection and dialogue. Using understandings gained through overt instruction and critical framing, students demonstrate that they can apply and revise what they have learned in authentic activities. As Rowsell and Walsh (2011) noted:

Situating teaching based on student needs and competencies, teaching students overtly based on the skills that they have when they enter our classrooms, and most importantly and what students do not necessarily possess, are ways of critically framing their learning to think about multiple modes, issues of power, ruling passions, communities of practices, home and community literacy, the role of their race, culture, religion, and social class in their literacy learning. (p. 4)

And finally, transformed practice involves taking a particularly situated literacy enactment and extending that enactment to other contexts and situations. New knowledge should be embedded in authentic learning where activities are created considering the lifeworld of the student (NLG, 1996) and that allow them to apply new learning to real world situations. The idea is to prepare students for the “real world,” thereby making classroom teaching more inclusive of cultural, linguistic, communicative, and technological diversity. The students should gain an understanding that literacy is more than just print-based texts, and that multiliteracies are not only multimodal, but also represent cultural and linguistic diversity as well as the role technology can play. A multiliteracies approach uses an inquiry-based learning and student-centred approach. Multiliteracies focuses teaching on “modes of representation much broader

than language alone...[that] differ according to culture and context, and have specific cognitive, cultural, and social effects” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 5). It relays the importance to educators of “increasing multiplicity and integration of significant modes of meaning making, where the textual is also related to the visual, the audio, the spatial [and] the behavioural” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 5). Multiliteracies offer a pedagogical approach for teachers to make a conscious effort to move beyond the definition of a single literacy, the design of the lesson plans, the setting of the classroom, and the way learning opportunities are structured overall. Importantly, when developing lessons or unit plans, the integration of the four components should be taken into account.

A multiliteracies theoretical framework views literacy as always socially situated and “starting from the local, everyday experience of literacy in particular communities of practice” (Hamilton & Barton, 2000, p. 379). The way that people learn has to be tailored to their own prior knowledge and previous life experiences. Learning starts with educators learning what their adult learners already know, and then educators create opportunities for bridging onto those experiences.

For non-traditional learners, coming into an adult education space for the first time can potentially be very intimidating. The social nature of literacy is imperative when thinking through how learning can best take place. By acknowledging that there is value in what learners bring to the formal education context from their backgrounds— in community-based education, and informal learning from the workplace and the home—adult educators can tap into the strengths of adult learners. Community literacies are practiced in multiple ways and through an array of mediums (Clover, Butterwick, Chovanec, & Collins, 2015; Kalantzis, Cope, & Dalley-Trim, 2016; Mills, 2015; Tett & Crowther, 2006). The perception that the only valuable adult

learning is legitimated in a formal classroom context with the end result of academic milestones is problematic. For instance, Tett and Crowther (2006) argued:

Rather than viewing the home as a site of educationally constructed failure, it could instead be seen as a source of diverse influences upon the educational process. From this perspective the focus would be on the recognition of the diversity of thought, language, and worldview that reflect the actual lives and experiences of children, families and community members rather than a reproduction of a constructed ideal. (p. 452)

Hamilton and Barton (2000) expressed the same viewpoint that language, learning, and experience must be seen as legitimate in a variety of social settings. These learning experiences enrich rather than detract from what non-traditional adult learners can bring to their learning experiences as they transition into new fields. It is also important to consider the larger structural power relations of non-traditional learners (West, Fleming, & Finnegan, 2013) in adult education and community settings and consider innovative approaches to teaching that will address the needs of diverse learners. Instead of always viewing the development of English language capacities as the responsibility of the individual learner, a multiliteracies approach encourages educators to consider how they can support students with different language abilities to build on their vocabulary, to develop translanguaging abilities, and to participate better in the classroom or community-based context in which they are teaching, thus creating a more inclusive learning environment (Holloway & Gouthro, 2020). In an increasingly diverse world shaped by global migration, multiliteracies take a positive approach to linguistic and cultural diversity, recognizing the complexity and diversity of languages.



### 3.3 Identity and Investment

Identity is an area of increased research interest in the field of language education (e.g., Block, 2007a; Norton 2013), often focusing on student identity (e.g., Duff, 2002; Haneda, 2005; Moita-Lopes, 2006; Toohey, 2018) and teacher identity (e.g., Barkhuizen, 2017; De Costa & Norton, 2017; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005). Much of this research is based on Norton's (2000/2013) work, particularly the notion of identity as a site of struggle embedded in power relations. Her definition of identity has proved particularly helpful in a range of research contexts. Norton (2013) defined identity as

the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future. It is the importance of the future that is central to the lives of many language learners and is integral to an understanding of both identity and investment. (p. 4)

Newcomers to Canada become socialized in their new communities as they learn new skills, new social rules, and new ways to conduct themselves in society, albeit through the lenses of their own backgrounds and experiences. In the case of English language learners, this socialization process also includes learning or improving their English skills. Language learning is not just about vocabulary and grammar, but also about becoming familiar with, knowledgeable about, and functional in a new language community and thus becoming “competent members” of that community (Leung, 2005). Language learning also assists in the process of discovering or adjusting identity in a new environment. Identity has been variously described as “being recognized as a certain kind of person, in a given context” (Gee, 2000, p. 99); “one's self-definition in relation to others and one's group membership” (Park, 2011, p. 8); and “a synthesis of personal, social and cultural self-conceptions” (Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006, p.

6). Thus, the concept of identity can be described as how one is seen by others as well as how one sees oneself, two constructs that interact and overlap.

Norton Peirce (1995) noted “when language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with target language speakers, but they are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world” (p. 16). Lack of language proficiency may serve as a barrier to a person developing their sense of identity in their new country, and may block an immigrant from participating in community, work, or cultural opportunities. However, newcomers can use language knowledge as an aspect of human capital with which they can build their new identities (Adamuti-Trache, 2013).

The definitions cited above for the most part depict social identity as how a person sees themselves in the now. However, there is a temporal aspect to social identity as well. Like Norton (2000/2013), Strahan and Wilson (2006) wrote that “a person’s identity involves more than the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of the current self” (p. 2) but that it also includes the memories and experiences of the person’s past, as well as the hopes and fears of what might be in the future. Thus, the construct of possible selves concerns the ideas the newcomer has of her own future and what she might become in her new home, ideas that are subject to constant revision and redefinition. The various sets of possible selves that enter into one’s self-concept includes the hopes, aspirations, and fears of what a person might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Although possible selves focus on the future, they may derive from experiences, history, and varying representations of the self. Change in self-identity can be connected to transitions in life (Frazier & Hooker, 2006); thus, an immigrant brings their recollections of their former identity and either abandons it, adapts it to their new life, or changes it as a response to new contexts.

Norton (2000/2013) also revisited the construct of motivation, which is seen as an area of psychology dealing with cognitive processes. Norton extended this perspective, arguing that what is traditionally seen as a psychological feature also depends on social factors. She developed the construct of investment as a way of capturing the complexity of a learner's agency in language and literacy learning that signals the complex relationship between language learner identity and language learning commitment (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Norton, 2013). The construct of investment, which can be seen as complementary to the construct of motivation (Norton 2016), is related to an understanding of identity as being variable, socially constructed, and intertwined with power relations. In Norton's case, she argues that rather than seeing students in binary terms as introverted or extroverted, motivated or unmotivated, it is important to view these traits as varying over time and place, and as dependent on a frequently unequal social context. Students whose identities are devalued in the classroom and wider society frequently underachieve academically.

In her study of English language learners in Canada, Norton Peirce (1995) found that all the participants were motivated, but "all the women [participants] felt uncomfortable talking to people in whom they had a particular symbolic or material investment" (p. 19), which could have been inappropriately attributed to a lack of motivation by the women. Along these lines, Norton (2013) is essentially interested in whether students and teachers are invested in the language and literacy practices of a given classroom and community. For example, a student may be a highly motivated learner, but may not be invested in the language practices of a given classroom if the practices are in conflict with students' own beliefs. As Darvin and Norton (2015) noted, "how learners are able to invest in a target language is contingent on the dynamic negotiation of power in different fields, and thus investment is complex, contradictory, and in a state of flux" (p. 37).

Also central to Norton's constructs of identity and investment are learners' hopes for the future, and their imagined identities and imagined communities (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton & Pavlenko, 2019). Imagined communities are communities or social groups to which learners aspire to belong (or avoid) and which influence their language learning behavior in powerful ways (Cummins & Davison, 2007). Learning is seen as more than just the accumulation of skills and knowledge; it transforms who we are and what we can do and, thus, implicates our image of self across time and place. The learner's social identity is constantly being negotiated in the classroom in relation to changing patterns of power in the broader society. Norton (2013) argued that an imagined community assumes an imagined identity, which contributes to the extent of a learner's investment. Kramsch (2013) explained:

Norton's notion of investment... accentuates the role of human agency and identity in engaging with the task at hand, in accumulating economic and symbolic capital, in having stakes in the endeavor and in persevering in that endeavor. (p. 195)

Following Norton (2013), I use investment rather than motivation in order to situate language choice within the broader sociopolitical context of uneven power relations amongst ethnolinguistic communities. Rethinking power and knowledge in this way suggests that the curriculum might be expected to empower students and parents in different ways (Taylor, Bernhard, Garg, & Cummins, 2008). The notion of capital is important in that parents are bringing with them *cultural capital* which "refers to knowledge, educational credentials, and appreciation of specific cultural forms" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 38). In other words, parents bring with them knowledge and life experiences that need to be recognized and valued in family literacy programs. In an attempt to link literacy to learner identity in this study, I look at how mothers entering further education spaces (a family literacy program) catalyzed changes to their

identities. Those interested in identity and language learning are concerned not only about linguistic input and output in language learning, but also in the relationship between the language learner and the larger social world (Block, 2007b; Heller, 2007; Kanno, 2008; May, 2008; Norton, 2000; Potowski, 2007; Rampton, 2006; Stein, 2008; Toohey, 2000).

Language acquisition is a primarily social process wherein speakers negotiate fluctuating identities tied to relationships of power. English language learners not only work to grasp contextual meanings and linguistic structures in their new language, but they also often struggle to find a voice that allows them to position themselves as active members of their new culture (Norton & Pavlenko, 2019). Swain and Deters (2007) presented a “participation metaphor” for learning, arguing that “learning is a process of becoming a member of a community, and this process involves developing the ability to communicate through the language and behavior that are deemed acceptable by the community” (p. 823). In particular, adult learners face humbling challenges as they work to navigate complex social and institutional situations. Moreover, since language and culture are “co-constructed and mutually contextualized” (Shi, 2012, p. 4), one establishes connections and deeper understandings of the target language community in the process of language acquisition (Ros i Solé, 2004). Thus, English language learners do not just acquire the language, they acquire the understanding of the system of social distributions and interpretations of different social phenomena (Warschauer, 2000) and, by doing so, become members of a new community of practice constantly negotiating their identities.

The constructs of identity and investment can be used to frame an examination of how and to what extent women from immigrant and refugee backgrounds in a family literacy program use language learning to help negotiate their new roles in an unfamiliar environment and fulfill the vision they have of their future selves.

### **3.4 Transformative Learning Theory**

When the concept of transformative learning was first introduced by Mezirow in 1978, it concentrated on changes in the individual's meaning perspectives and frames of reference, that is, about the individual's perception and understanding of the nature and character of the surrounding world. The ultimate goal of transformative learning was to assist learners in assessing their current perspectives and approaches to life, and for education to provide an opportunity to enhance these perspectives and approaches (Mezirow, 1991). Transformative learning theory is based on the assumption that a learner's current perspectives and consequent approach to life are derived from their experiences, thoughts, values, knowledge, and skills (Taylor, 1997). Transformative learning occurs when learners critically reassess their current perspective(s) and examine whether their current approach is right for them. This critical self-reflection helps them look at things in fundamentally new and different ways, examine actions they can take to change their lives in fundamental ways, and take action based on new assumptions when making important decisions. "Transformative learning shapes people; they're different afterward, in ways both they and others can recognize" (Clark, 1993, p. 47).

Mezirow developed his concept of transformative learning as fundamentally dealing with the creation of meaning in adults' lives. The term "meaning" is used as the basic concept for how an individual understands themselves, and Mezirow primarily defined and explained transformative learning as the process by which adults can change their meaning schemes, meaning perspectives, and frames of reference (Mezirow, 1978, 1991). According to Mezirow (1991), our meaning schemes and perspectives and frames of reference nearly always stem from our original socialization in childhood, and they basically structure our patterns of understandings, convictions, habits, ways of acting, and the ways we live our lives. They may be either within or

outside our awareness, but in both cases, they are something to which we only make changes when we subjectively find it very necessary to do so. According to Jarvis (2009), Mezirow's definition of Transformative Learning Theory has been extended over the years to include:

the combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person – body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses) – experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person. (Jarvis, 2009, p. 25)

Mezirow (1991) considered the dialogue of the teaching-learning process to be the medium for deeper and reflective learning, supporting students who critically reflect on their assumptions and beliefs as part of the learning process. Dialogue, then, is much more than a transmission of information. Dialogue implies an energetic exchange between a teacher and student that is open-ended. Schugurensky (2002) suggested that when teachers and students “have the opportunity to actively participate in deliberation and decision making in the institutions that have most impact on their everyday lives, they engage in substantive learning and can experience both incremental and sudden transformations” (p. 67). The concept of dialogue calls for a type of conversation that engages values and beliefs (Giles & Alderson, 2008).

When the outcomes of learning only affect the context in which the learning occurred, it should not be considered transformative learning. However, when learning outcomes affect the way people experience, conceptualize, and interact with the world in many different contexts of their lives, then the learning can justifiably be considered transformative. O'Sullivan and

O'Connor (2002) offered the following definition: "Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings and actions" (p. xvii). Building on that definition, Hoggan (2016) undertook a meta-analysis of 206 transformative literacy articles resulting in 28 different codes that were collapsed into six broad categories to describe the outcomes. As discussed next, these categories include: worldview, self, epistemology, ontology, behaviour and capacity.

### **3.4.1 Worldview**

A change to worldview refers to instances where learners experience a significant shift in their understanding of the world and how it works, notably changes in assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes. Mezirow's (2000) description of "assumptions" are "broad, generalized, orienting predispositions that act as a filter for interpreting the meaning of experience" (p. 17). These assumptions encompass the way a person thinks the world works, as well as how it should work and is thus also often described as expectations and values. Scholars write about "confronting" belief and value systems (e.g., Mthethwa- Sommers, 2012), as well as simply changing assumptions about the world and of adopting "new constructions of reality, life goals and moral obligations" (McWhinney & Markos, 2003). Another way some scholars describe this type of change is a shift in orientation, which emphasizes to what a person is paying attention.

### **3.4.2 Epistemology**

Epistemological change refers to learners adopting a new way of knowing. Hofer (2002) defined epistemology as "a person's beliefs about the definition of knowledge, how knowledge is constructed, how knowledge is evaluated, where knowledge resides and how knowing occurs" (p. 4). As Carrington and Luke (2003) maintained, "schooling privileges white middle-class children and families in its assumptions about both the family and the traditional print medium"



(p. 232). Willis (2008) documented the historic privileging of white epistemologies in the creation of IQ tests and reading assessments. Reading textbooks and the English literature canon predominantly feature white protagonists and Protestant, middle-class values (Compton-Lilly et al., 2012). Likewise, some family literacy efforts have been described as promoting white, middle-class visions of literacy (e.g., storybook reading, engaging in school-like literacy tasks, particular types of language games), while the literacy practices and epistemologies of diverse families have been neglected (Auerbach, 1989, 1995; Cairney, 1994, 2003; Taylor, 1997).

### **3.4.3 Ontology**

Ontological change refers to “changes in the way a person exists in the world, the deeply established mental and emotional inclinations that affect the overall quality and tone of one’s existence” (Hoggan, 2016, p.74). One way in which ontological change was described is how a person emotionally reacts to experiences. As Moore (2005) said, “throughout [our] lives, we develop a series of... feelings, responses and associations that make up our life experience” (p. 82). When these habitual elements of one’s lived experience change, the result is transformative. This transformation affects learning outcomes associated with emotions, feelings, the quality of life, and learning to live with joy. Yorks and Kasl (2006) specifically defined transformative learning outcomes as including the way a person affectively experiences the world. Hoggan (2016) described it as changes in the way a person exists in the world, the deeply established mental and emotional inclinations that affect the overall quality and tone of one’s existence. This study is concerned with the type of change that affects the mothers’ whole lived experiences, not the cognitive elements as described by some scholars (e.g., Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006).

#### **3.4.4 Behaviour**

Behaviour change was defined by Hoggan (2016) as actions taken that resulted from and were consistent with a new perspective. Many of these authors followed Mezirow's example when he said that transformative learning includes a different way of acting in the world (Cranton & Roy, 2003). Duerr, Zajonc, and Dana (2003) specified that for learning to be transformational, it cannot be theoretical but must be lived. Similarly, Whitelaw, Sears, and Campbell (2004) argued that transformative learning includes not just a reframing of understanding, but also ensuing action.

#### **3.4.5 Capacity**

“Capacity refers to developmental outcomes whereby learners experience systematic, qualitative changes in their abilities that allow for greater complexity in the way they see, interpret and function in the world” (Hoare, 2006, pp. 8-9). Capacity includes growth in cognitive development that is attained through education as well as a spiritual awakening or a spiritual journey (Morgan, 2010).

#### **3.4.6 Self**

Changes to self refers to a wide variety of ways learners experienced transformative change affecting their sense of self (Hoggan, 2016). The most common type of change to self focuses on ways learners experienced a shift in the way they related to others or to the world in general. Illeris (2014) suggested that the term “self” is too narrow and only accounts for the psychological instances of learning, while the term “identity” accounts for “the combination and interaction between the individual and the social environment and how this influences the development of the individual” (p. 152). This expanded definition is consistent with Hoggan's

(2016) meta-analysis in which 141 authors of the 206 articles indicated that changes to learners' identities or how they viewed themselves was an integral outcome of transformative learning.

Illeris's (2014) expanded definition of transformative learning included cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions: "the concept of transformative learning comprises all learning which implies changes in the identity of the learner" (p. 40) and he placed "self" above all other outcomes. Illeris (2007) offered a fundamental distinction between learning as addition—where something new is added to something that has already been acquired—and learning as change—where the meaning, understanding, or condition of something already acquired is changed, often at the same time as something new is added. Viewed in this context, the term "transformative learning" directly implies a kind of learning as change: to "transform" something is to change or reshape it.

For immigrants and refugees, movements across social spaces are moments of intense learning as they have to modify the structure and the meaning of their lives and adapt to the new social world. Leaving their countries of origin, former communities, culture, work, and language, aspects of their previous identities are also left behind. The process of migration disrupts the inherited frames of reference and the accumulated biographical repertoire of knowledge and understanding, and they are encouraged to learn new behaviors, understand new rules, and to adapt to new values and another type of social organization (Morrice, 2013). Migration is therefore a source of deep learning as individuals confront unexpected changes in their life plans and the need to reshape their lives and reconstruct their identities. According to Mezirow (2000):

A central premise of transformative learning is that when an individual's 'frame of reference' or 'meaning perspective' is discordant with their experience, a 'disorientating

dilemma occurs,' individuals begin to critically reflect on and question the validity of their inherited meaning perspective, and transformation of perspective can occur. (p. 8)

Taylor (1994) linked this to the notion of “culture shock,” which is the premise that learning occurs when individuals are faced with situations that are new and unfamiliar, or where they are confronted with what they do not know and perhaps need to know. It also supports arguments put forward by Mojab and Carpenter (2011) that stress the need for learning and educational programs to recognize the struggles of people’s lives consistent with the review of literature in Chapter 2.

### **3.5 Chapter Summary**

The NLG (1996) proposed a new form of transformative pedagogy whereby learning is defined as a “process of self-re-creation” aiming for “cultural dynamism and diversity” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Transformative pedagogy is based on four dimensions that deal with specific pedagogical acts; they are: (1) situated practice with its pedagogical act of experiencing; (2) overt instruction with its pedagogical act of conceptualizing; (3) critical framing with its pedagogical act of analyzing; and (4) transformed practice with its pedagogical act of applying.

The chapter positions family literacy within a discourse of transformation. In other words, family literacy can be seen as offering spaces in which individuals can (re)discover their agency: an enjoyment of learning and success as learners that connects with their lives outside the classroom. In today’s world of globalization and multiple modes of communication channels, the multiliteracy pedagogy offers the tools and the mediums to make learning relevant to learners’ lives. In addition to basic reading, writing and math skills, learners need to understand digital technologies and develop critical learning capacities to function in a rapidly changing

society. This is relevant not only for children and young adults, but also for learners at all stages in life. In the case of this study, immigrant and refugee women are developing new language, employment, and citizenship capabilities in the context of family literacy.

The NLG (1996) noted that “as there are multiple layers to everyone’s identity, there are multiple discourses of identity and multiple discourses of recognition to be negotiated” (p. 70). Cope and Kalantzis (1997) and the NLG (1996) stressed that it is necessary to create conditions for diverse identities to be negotiated in the way that they complement each other, resulting in participants expanding their “cultural and linguistic repertoires” (p. 15) that will assist in accessing more diverse discourses.

The chapter draws on multiliteracies, identity and investment, and transformative learning theory as conceptual frameworks to investigate how learning takes place and can be encouraged among the participants in this family literacy study. Critical reflection is central to connecting the three frameworks and is “at the heart of adult literacy and ESL practice” (King, 2000, para 4). The next chapter presents the methodology employed in this research.

## **Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I outline the research design and methodology used to investigate the research questions in the context of this study. As stated in Chapter 1, the following questions framed data collection and analysis:

- (i) How were the mothers' investments integrated into the practices of the R2R program?
- (ii) How was the identity "mother" co-constructed within the practices of the R2R program?
- (ii) To what extent were the mothers' identities transformed by the practices of the program?

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. Creswell (2007) 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 R2R family literacy program and in the homes of the participating families, I chose to carry out a case study using ethnographic methods. In this study, the case is the R2R family literacy program and the unit of analysis is the co-constructed practices of the program. I use the

term “co-constructed” to represent the interactions between the mothers and the practices of the program. In other words, the unit of analysis is the practices of the R2R program that were constituted by all parties’ interactions. “Co-construct” acknowledges the agency of the mothers and how their investment helped shape the program.

I conducted this case study research in five phases explained throughout this chapter. The first phase occurred during the first class on January 16, 2019, after consent was obtained, wherein I collected background information about the mothers and learned their reasons for joining the R2R program, thus providing me with initial data points. Phase two took place between January 23 and June 19, 2019 and included personally participating each week in the R2R program, questionnaires, focus groups, home visits, and observing the TESOL program (adult-only English class) at Belmont School. The third phase took place between June and September 2019, whereby I conducted an iterative analysis by looking back on all the notes, analyzing final questionnaires, and conducting focus groups. Phase four (September - December, 2019) involved exploring the impact of the program through home visits with the focal mothers, as well as further analysis of the data and going back to the literature through December 2019 in order to determine the extent to which the R2R program was transformative, as by the definition, these changes need to be sustained over time. The final phase (September 2019 – March 2020) involved analyzing the data for the purpose of developing codes and determining the themes while following up with the focal mothers at six months past program completion (through December 2019). The following sections provide substantive explanations of each phase.

## 4.2 Research Context

As indicated, the first two phases of the study took place from January 2019 through June 2019 in the R2R program located at the Terrace Childcare Center in east Vancouver. The R2R program is run by VFEC, whose mandate is to positively impact low literacy levels in Vancouver's inner-city areas and other locations throughout the province of British Columbia by providing a co-coordinated, comprehensive, integrated-services approach to family literacy and lifelong learning. The goal of the R2R program is to lay the foundation for learning by providing parents and significant caregivers with the tools and knowledge needed to foster literacy and a love of learning in their children's early years.

The program is based on the Kenan Family Literacy Model Program (Darling & Hayes, 1989), sometimes referred to as the Kentucky Model, which focuses on issues related to "environments which enable adult learners to enhance their own literacies, while at the same time, providing environments that promoted the literacies of their children" (p. 1). Darling and Hayes (1989) determined that regardless of types of programming carried out in schools, students will never be successful without accounting for their home environments. Within that model, family literacy programs are built on four components: direct child (children engaged in learning activities without their parents), direct parent instruction (parents without their children while children are engaged in the direct child activities), parent-child instruction (engaging in literacy activities together), and parent support (a component of the direct parent where parents freely raise issues and concerns).



### 4.3 Case Study Research

According to Yin (2018), case study design should be used when the focus of the study is to answer “how” questions and to understand a real-world case and “assume that such an understanding is likely to involve important contextual conditions pertinent to your case” (p. 15). This case study is grounded in the practices of the R2R program and serves to answer this study’s research questions as previously indicated. The process of designing the study was iterative and I moved back and forth between field work and writing, data analysis, and interpretation. My initial questions reflected a desire to study the practices of the mothers more than of the program, but the themes that emerged led me to redefine my case as the R2R program and the unit of analysis as the co-constructed practices employed within the program. The study examined the practices of the R2R program that serve both academic and social purposes and include building community through communication, sisterhood, and enhancing mothering skills in Canada.

This case study is both explanatory and descriptive (Baxter & Jack, 2008). It is explanatory in that it seeks to answer questions that serve to explain the relationship between the program implementation and program outcomes, namely, important connections within the program that are too complex for survey or experimental strategies (Yin, 2018). It is also descriptive in that the analysis also serves to describe the program and the real-life context in which it occurred (Yin, 2003, 2018). The use of multiple methods to collect and analyze data is encouraged and found to be informative in case study research, where together they provide a more comprehensive view of the issue being studied (Yin, 2018). By emphasizing the study of a phenomenon within its real-world context, the case study method favors the collection of data in natural settings, compared with relying on “derived” data (Bromley, 1986, p. 23).

Yin (2003, 2018) and Stake (1995) suggested binding the case so as to keep the scope of the research manageable, and, as such, the boundaries of the R2R program (in this particular case) are by time and place (Creswell, 2003) and activity (Stake, 1995). This study took place between January 9, 2019 and June 5, 2019. The R2R program met every Wednesday morning from 9:30-12:30 and all the activities that took place within the program that involved the mothers were included in the data collection (discussed later). In order to evaluate the extent to which the practices were transformative, follow-up research continued for six months after the program was completed between July 2019 and January 2020.

#### **4.4 Ethnographic Methods**

Both case study and ethnographic methods were used in the study. While case studies focus on the behaviors or attributes of individuals, ethnography aims to understand and interpret the behaviors, values, and structures of social groups with particular reference to the cultural basis for those behaviors and values (Duff, 2002). Hence, I utilize both case study and ethnographic methods. To do so, I draw upon various types and sources of information for triangulation purposes, a research strategy that Duff (2008) and others point to as very useful in qualitative research more generally, and case study in particular. Data, methods, perspectives, and theories can be triangulated, in order to produce either converging or diverging observations and interpretations. The use of several kinds of data (as outlined below) enables the process of triangulation – using multiple data sources to find out whether different kinds of data lead to similar interpretations (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013).

Ethnographic methods, which usually emphasize prolonged observation and emic perspectives, guided the collection of data (Heath & Street, 2008). As Hannon (1995) noted,

“test-based evaluation misses so much... the meaning of the experience to the participants, parents, children and teachers is ignored. To get at that may require... sustained observation... over weeks or months” (p. 162). Due to the collaborative nature of the study, my role in this research process was interchangeably that of an observer, participant observer, organizer, collaborator, classroom support, or assistant for emerging needs (going forward, when I use the term “researcher” I employ it to encompass all of the aforementioned roles). Ample time to observe and interact with the participants also strengthened the ecological validity of the research (Brock-Utne, 1996). Dyson and Genishi (2005) noted that observations contextualize the research in terms of describing the setting, the participants, and other details of daily life in the classroom and homes.

#### **4.5 Participants**

Enrolment in the program included 12 mothers and 15 preschool-aged children with three of the mothers having two children simultaneously enrolled. Nine of the mothers were newcomers to Canada who had lived in Canada for three years or less. None of the mothers spoke English as a first language and 10 of 12 mothers were enrolled for the first time in an English-based family literacy program. The enrollment at the program start date included mothers only (although the program is open to men and women) from China (1), Colombia (3), Democratic Republic of the Congo (1), Japan (1), Mexico (5), and Nigeria (1).

The program allows for universal access (all are welcome) and operates on a first come, first served registration. This ensures a mix of literacy levels, ethnicities, and socio-economic levels among participants. That said, many of the women found each other on the Latina Moms Facebook group, and knew each other through programs run outside of VFEC by the R2R

facilitator, Lara, as is reflected in the large number of Spanish speakers in this R2R class. Parents who join with greater English proficiency act as resources for the program and role models and translators for other parents. Two of the mothers have been in the R2R program since its inception six years ago and are now attending with their third child.

Parents that sign up do not need a certain minimum level of English proficiency; however, they must be open to the program instruction and dialogue being delivered in English. The logic behind this policy is to encourage conversation between all of the participants and to discourage use of languages that would preclude others from understanding and joining the conversations. When parents are interacting with their children and having informal conversations with each other, they may freely speak in whichever language they prefer; the English medium guideline is only in place when everyone comes together in a group. I chose four focal participants from the study in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding as to how the practices of the R2R program were transformative to the mothers' experiences outside of the program. Spending time with these four mothers also provided me with greater insights as to why the mothers joined the program and their investment in the program (why they came back each week).

At the outset, I did not know how many mothers would welcome me into their homes or regularly attend the program. Of the 12 mothers who originally signed up, only one dropped out after she gave birth in the spring (but returned with her baby for the final class). Of the 11 remaining mothers, eight were Spanish speakers. Eight of the mothers warmly welcomed me into their homes, and from this group, I chose four focal mothers for the study. I wanted my focal participants to comprise women of both immigrant and refugee backgrounds in order to account for a range of experiences. For this focal group, I sought out newcomers who were English

language learners, rather than mothers who had lived in Canada for four plus years and were permanent residents. Of the four women, two were recent immigrants from Mexico and Columbia by way of Spain, and two recent refugees from Mexico and Nigeria. Three of the mothers speak Spanish and one speaks Edo as their mother tongue languages (see Table 4.1 for an overview). They have a wide range of education – one mother is a trained surgeon and one mother never had any formal schooling before arriving in Canada.

**Table 4.1*****Participants***

<b>Name of Mother</b>	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Mother Tongue</b>	<b>Length of Time in Canada*</b>	<b>Age of Children**</b>	<b>Status in Canada</b>
<b>Carly</b>	Mexico	Spanish	13 years	6, [4], 2	Permanent resident
<b>Ingrid</b>	Colombia	Spanish	15 years	12, [3]	Permanent resident
<b>Jozi</b>	Nigeria	Edo	3 years	[3 – Sari]	Refugee
<b>Kate</b>	Colombia	Spanish	10 years	10, 7, [3]	Permanent resident
<b>Eliza</b>	Mexico	Spanish	2 years	[2-Maya]	New immigrant
<b>Lucy</b>	China	Mandarin	1 year	[3]	New immigrant
<b>Peta</b>	Mexico	Spanish	2 years	[4], [2]	New immigrant
<b>Luisa</b>	Colombia	Spanish	2 years	6, [2 – Lea]	New immigrant
<b>Mosa</b>	DR Congo	Swahili	3 years	17, 15, 11, 8, 5, [3]	Refugee
<b>Myumi</b>	Japan	Japanese	1 year	[2]	New immigrant
<b>Susan</b>	Mexico	Spanish	2 years	7, [5], [2]	Refugee
<b>Tati</b>	Canada	Spanish and English	Born in Vancouver	6, [3], [2]	Permanent resident

\* At the start of the program

\*\* The number in the square brackets indicates the age of the child who participated in the R2R program, as well as their name if mentioned in the study

\*\*\* Grey rows indicate the focal mothers

The children in the program range in age from eighteen months (must be walking independently) to five years old. The program has three staff, two early childhood assistants (who remain with the children during the direct child component), and one early childhood educator, who is a graduate from the VFEC TESOL program and went on to get their certification to run the program. The program ran weekly on Wednesday mornings from 9:30-12:30. The program structure was as follows: i) from 9:30-10:30 the parents and children together are involved in an art project and shared parent/child reading, ii) from 10:30-11:00 the parents and children together are involved in circle time including music, dance, games, and a story of the day, iii) 11:00-12:00 the parents and children are separated for concurrent direct adult and direct child activities where the topics generated by the parents and facilitators are covered, and iv) 12:00-12:30 the parents and children come back together for a hot lunch. Sample topics included: helping children with reading and writing, numeracy, children and TV, responsibility, and social skills. New to the program this year was the introduction of technology, with the parents using a multilingual digital story program, Storybooks Canada.

## **4.6 Focal Participants**

### **4.6.1 Jozi**

Jozi grew up in Nigeria speaking only Edo. She did not attend school (as her father did not permit it) and was never taught how to read or write. In November 2015, when Jozi was seven months pregnant (and 31 years old), she was badly beaten and feared not only for her own life but for her unborn baby's life as well. Once she recovered, she was determined to leave Nigeria because, although she had very little understanding of the world (she had no idea where Canada was), she knew she needed laws that would protect her and her child from her abusive

husband. Later that month, after a difficult journey through Mexico and the United States, Jozi arrived in Vancouver.

Jozi's counsellor from family services connected her with Mosaic, where she studied English (her first formal education) for two years. After developing a trusting relationship with the Executive Director of VFEC (Jane), Jozi joined the adult-only classes and the R2R program.

When I first visited Jozi at her home in January 2019, she and her three-year-old daughter were living in a one-bedroom government-subsidized apartment near the R2R program. The apartment had a couch, a TV, a plastic table, and four books on the floor. The apartment was dark – there were no lamps and minimal lighting. While Jozi indicated she did not like to cook, the size and condition of the kitchen may have been factors.

Jozi was attending three adult-only programs at Belmont School on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. While Jozi attended classes from 9:30-2:00, the VFEC programs provided child minding for her daughter, Sari, and lunch on each of the days. On Wednesday mornings Jozi and Sari attended the R2R program. Jozi told me she was lonely, and always with Sari outside of her school classes. She told me that in Nigeria she was never alone and was always surrounded by family and friends. Jozi had an iPhone and complained that all Sari liked to do was play on her phone.

#### **4.6.2 Eliza**

Eliza left civil unrest and challenging work conditions in both Guadalajara and Mexico City, with her husband and their then two-year-old daughter seeking a more peaceful life in Vancouver. Eliza was trained as a general surgeon in Mexico and was a practicing surgeon for three years before coming to Vancouver, where her medical degree was not recognized. While



she studied English during her studies, concentrating on reading, she had limited oral skills in English prior to coming to Canada.

Eliza's husband speaks French as a first language, English as a second language, and learned Spanish while working and living in Mexico; their goals were to teach their daughter, Maya, all three languages, with Spanish as her mother tongue.

Eliza was drawn to Spanish-speakers when she arrived in Vancouver and approached people when she heard her familiar home language. One day, while shopping at Ikea, she met a Spanish-speaking woman who told her to join a group on Facebook called "Latina Moms in Vancouver." It was on Facebook that Eliza met Lara and heard about the R2R program. Eliza signed up for the program in the hopes of finding a Spanish-speaking group of friends for both herself and Maya. Moving to a new country with no family, friends, or job, and being home alone with a two-year-old was isolating for Eliza, who was used to a very active and full life in Mexico.

In Eliza's apartment, there were a large number of books on bookshelves, a keyboard and guitar prominently displayed, and a separate desk and workspace with a computer. Eliza enjoyed playing the piano and her husband, the guitar. Maya's room had a large collection of toys, and numerous books in three languages. Maya's first language is Spanish, and while she understands all three languages spoken in her home, at the beginning of the study she only spoke in Spanish regardless of what language was spoken to her.

#### **4.6.3 Luisa**

Luisa grew up in Colombia in a Spanish-speaking home, and met her husband David, when she and her mother moved to Spain. David, in particular, was unhappy with life in Spain, due to limited job opportunities, from a downturn in the economy. David was worried about his

daughters' education, in that education in Spain was class-driven and, in his words, "if you have no money, you go to the worst possible school with poor facilities, poor ambience, and bullying."

David accepted a job from Sony Entertainment, who sponsored and paid for his family to move to Vancouver in 2017. David and Luisa arrived in Vancouver with their two daughters (aged five and one month old), speaking only a few words of English since both went to Spanish-only elementary schools and had never spoken English until arriving in Canada. Both David and Luisa shared how difficult it was to move and adjust to a new culture and a new language.

Early in 2018, Luisa met Kate (a mother already enrolled in the R2R program) through their older girls and went for a coffee. In turn, Kate asked the R2R facilitator (Lara) if Luisa and her daughter Lea could join the program.

#### **4.6.4 Susan**

Susan's family is from Guadalajara, Mexico, and they have refugee status in Canada. Susan and her husband have limited English-language skills, and much of our conversation took place over Google Translate because while their children initially translated much of the conversation in the beginning, they were not comfortable with them translating all the information. At the time, their children were seven, five, and two years old. When I asked why they moved to Canada, Susan typed "we were victims [of political unrest]. It was hell." She explained to me that they "stayed in house one year. No one else." "Crazy," "Difficult." To escape, Susan's husband secured tourist visas for them, and they left with only the clothes on their backs. She told me they brought "family and love." "New life in Canada." They arrived in Vancouver in October 2017. Shortly thereafter, Susan found Lara on the Latina Moms Facebook page and joined the R2R program.

#### 4.7 Data Collection Methods

After consent was obtained, data were collected through the following methods (See Table 4.3 below, for an overview) and recorded as field notes in my notebook, which were comprised of one section for observations and one for reflections:

1. **Participant observation.** This included observations on all 12 mothers in the R2R program, of which I was an active participant in the groups. Descriptions of these observations were recorded in field notes, which included a section where I reflected, raised questions, and theorized on what I was observing. I was able to take brief notes during the program and then elaborated immediately following. These notes were later transcribed onto my computer, and further elaborated upon throughout the week.
2. **Questionnaires.** All 12 mothers initially provided personal information including details of countries of origin, languages spoken within the home, types of literacy events being carried out in their daily lives, and reasons for signing up for the R2R program (see Appendix A). Upon completion of the program, a second (and final) questionnaire was distributed (again, to all 12) in order to gain insights as to how the program may or may not have transformed the mothers in terms of their feelings and/or expanded repertoires of practice (see Appendix E). Both questionnaires were completed in the direct adult part of the program. I offered to have the materials translated for the women when I introduced the study, and they all indicated they wanted to try and fill out the questionnaires in English. Lara was available for Spanish-English translation, which was the only language from which translations were needed. The rest of the mothers had a high enough level of English proficiency that they could answer all the questions in English.

- 3. Research Conversations.** I use the term “research conversations” rather than “interviews” because of the connotations an interview carries of an unequal and unidirectional exchange and distribution of power (Duckworth & Smith, 2018). In this study, research-related conversations were framed to foster, and sustain, a sense of equality between participants and researcher. These exchanges were typically reciprocal and dialogical, as stories were exchanged, and opinions and feelings shared as I also shared stories about my own life (see researcher positionality, section 4.9). These research conversations took place both informally and formally both in the program and the mothers’ homes. In the R2R program, there were many informal conversations that took place with all the mothers during lunch, transitions, and at the arts and crafts table. Some were one-on-one and some included two or three mothers with me at the same time. The more formal conversations included predetermined questions that I used as guides, but I allowed the conversations to flow organically and reciprocally as I wanted the mothers to have the opportunity to share their own thoughts and feelings that I may not have anticipated in my questions (see Appendix C). There were three visits to each of the focal mothers’ homes whereby the research conversations were both semi-structured (e.g., asking parents questions), and open narrative (e.g., allowing the mothers to share their responses and take the conversations where they chose).
- 4. Focus group discussion.** Participants had the opportunity to discuss a question or topic that invited different perspectives, including commonly shared ones and differences of opinion, all of which can provide valuable insights for research (Kitzinger, 2005). These discussions took place during program time with all 12

mothers and Lara. I would begin by asking a specific question and the mothers would respond as they pleased. The participants viewed the questions as being research motivated. There were two focus groups, one at the start at of the program (see Appendix B) and one at the end (see Appendix D). I audio recorded the focus groups and transcribed the recordings verbatim as field notes.

5. **Home visits.** As mentioned, I visited each of the focal mothers' homes on three separate occasions. The first meeting took place as close to the program start date as possible, the second visit near the end of the program, and the third and final visit between four and six months after program completion. On the first meeting, I did not record the visits, as I was more concerned with being respectful of the mothers allowing me into their homes, in addition to the personal nature of the questions I was asking, especially to the women with refugee backgrounds and their stories of how they came to Canada. Immediately after leaving, I wrote in my notebook to the best of my ability descriptions of what I saw and what was said in the most respectful way given the enormity of what they shared with me. Anthropologist Rita Astuti (2017) pointed out the tensions between fieldwork and writing, arguing that "moving from fieldwork to ethnography is hard...All of us ... have probably felt that we were doing violence to that experience [of fieldwork] just by putting it down on paper—by taming it, reducing it, simplifying it for analytical and theoretical purposes" (p. 10). On my subsequent home visits, I brought my notebook and took limited notes during our conversations such that I would be able to remember the ideas and topics we discussed. I had my notebook each week at the R2R program, and the mothers were accustomed to me jotting down notes. In addition to the four focal mothers, I visited

an additional four mothers in their homes (see Table 4.2) on one occasion each, as they indicated in their consent that they would be willing to participate in home visits. While I had already selected the focal mothers, I did not want to exclude anyone or seem as though I favored certain mothers over others.

- 6. Observations.** I observed the mothers each week in the R2R program and wrote notes throughout the program that I elaborated on within an hour of leaving the program for accuracy. I made some observations during my home visits, mainly about space and literacy artifacts, more so than behaviors. On two occasions, I visited the TESOL program at Belmont School where three of the focal mothers were studying English in a group with 25 other students. I sat at the back of the classroom and recorded my observations as field notes.

**Table 4.2**

*Home Visits*

Mother	Home Visit 1	Home Visit 2	Home Visit 3
Carly	January 29		
Eliza	January 18	April 8	October 25
Ingrid	February 12		
Jozi	January 20	April 14	October 16
Luisa	January 31	June 10	November 13
Peta	January 29		
Susan	February 12	August 28	December 5
Tati	March 18		

**Table 4.3*****Overview of Data Collection***

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Data Sources</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Research Question</b>
<b>Phase 1</b>  First class after consent has been obtained: January 16, 2019	Collect background information, home language, countries of origin, and education levels, as well as reasons for joining the program	Initial questionnaire Initial focus group (audio recorded)	Mothers (12) in the R2R family literacy program	Question 1. How were the mothers' investments integrated into the practices of the R2R program?  Question 2. How was the identity "mother" co-constructed within the practices of the R2R program?  Question 3. To what extent were the mothers' identities transformed by the practices of the R2R program?
<b>Phase 2</b>  Data collected during the program, January 23-June 19, 2019	Understand and observe the practices in the program each week	Observations in program (recorded as field notes)	Mothers in the program (12)	Question 1. How were the mothers' investments integrated into the practices of the R2R program?
	Gain more in-depth information as to the reasons the mothers signed up for the program, their feedback on the practices of the program, and a more comprehensive account as to how	3 home observations for each focal participant (recorded as field notes)	Focal mothers (4)	Question 2. How was the identity "mother" co-constructed within the practices of the R2R program?  Question 3. To what extent were the mothers' identities transformed by the

	the practices of the program had been transformative			practices of the R2R program?
<b>Phase 3</b>  Iterative analysis, June – September 2019	Comparing initial data points to determine change over time, looking for patterns and themes in field notes, interviews, and focus group discussions	Final questionnaire (to be compared to initial questionnaire)	Mothers in the program (12)	Question 1. How were the mothers' investments integrated into the practices of the R2R program?
		Research conversations during home visits that were recorded as field notes	Focal mothers (4)	Question 2. How was the identity "mother" co-constructed within the practices of the R2R program?
		Focus group (audio recorded)	Mothers in the program (12)	Question 3. To what extent were the mothers' identities transformed by the practices of the R2R program?
<b>Phase 4</b>  Exploring effects post program completion, September – December 2019	Determine which mothers from the program have enrolled in further education programs and their reasons for (or not) pursuing further education; how the mothers feel about the R2R program's effects	1 home visit to each of the focal mothers, research conversations and 2 visits to the R2R program in October and December	Focal mothers (4)	Question 3: To what extent were the mothers' identities transformed by the practices of the R2R program?
<b>Phase 5</b>  Data analysis: September 2019 – March 2020	After all data was recorded and transcribed, codes were developed from the data by looking at repetitions and other patterns. These in vivo codes were mapped out through NVivo, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CASQDA), and then combined into codes and themes based on certain data points.			



In the final focus group that took place on June 5, 2019, I shared my emergent findings with the mothers, Lara, and Jane, and asked them for comments and feedback, which I incorporated into my study findings. Additionally, on October 20, 2020 I shared the main findings of the study with Jane on a Zoom call as a meeting was not possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic. She thanked me for sharing the results with her and told me that “your results put into words what we are trying to do – thank you!” The combination of data collection methods provided codes and themes that gave rise to the women’s reasons for remaining invested in the R2R program and the outcomes of the program on their lives. It provided me with multiple perspectives and ideas of how different participants reported or reflected on how the practices were transformative, including deep engagement with the focal mothers in their homes. The conversations corroborated the insights, concerns, and opinions that the mothers in my study shared, providing me with additional insights as to the barriers faced by immigrant and refugee background women, and their needs with respect to family literacy programming and support, which further enabled me to triangulate my findings.

#### **4.8 Data Analysis**

Data analysis began on the first day and continued throughout the study as I looked for recurring themes and emerging patterns in the activities of the mothers in the program. My interpretation of the data was informed, in part, by insights developed through prolonged engagement with the families, persistent observation of and conversations with the mothers, constructs identified in the literature, and secondary sources. 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

facilitate the description of what happened in the study. They described analysis as 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.

This study followed an iterative research process, where the questions, data collection tasks, and data interpretation were continually refined as the research progressed. The initial data points were taken from the initial questionnaire seeking to understand the reasons the mothers signed up for the program, as well as the mothers' feelings and attitudes about the literacy practices taking place at the start of the program. I looked in multiple directions, from emic and etic perspectives surrounding the data, as well as existing theories, in order to arrive at justifiable claims (Duff, 2008; Heath & Street, 2008). After all data was recorded and transcribed, I used NVivo to look for codes within my data followed by a thematic content analysis as a method for "identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Frieze, Soratto, & Pires, 2018, p. 8). Themes capture something important about the data in relation to the research questions and represent some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2013), and are an outcome of coding. These codes were mapped out through NVivo, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CASQDA), and then combined into categories and sub-categories, based on certain data points.

Both Yin (2003, 2018) and Stake (2010) recognized the importance of effectively organizing data. Using a database improved the reliability of the case study, as it enabled me to track and organize data sources including field notes and audio files for easy retrieval at a later date. This provided me with a place to both transform my data (audio) into written form, as well

as label units of my transcripts and field notes with descriptive terms for coding. CAQDAS provides unlimited “bins” into which data can be collected and then organized. In addition to the creation of bins, these programs facilitate the recording of source detail, the time and date of the data collection, storage, and search capabilities. These are all important when developing a case study database (Wickham & Woods, 2005).

#### **4.8.1 The Practices of the Program: Research Questions 1 and 2**

I initially went through the data line-by-line and generated 97 descriptive codes that included speaking English, feeling happy, parent/child reading, topics in the direct adult space, speaking the mother tongue language, arts and crafts, feelings of isolation, and so forth. From these initial codes, I looked for ways to combine them that gave rise to more complex issues, allowing me to merge the data into seven codes (see Table 4.4 below), which generated three themes that I later understood to be “the co-constructed practices” of the program, and the unit of analysis for the case, discussed next. I was able to see the themes and patterns that emerged not only about the practices of the program, but how the mothers brought these practices to life through their participation and agency in their own learning showing me that the practices belong to both the mothers and the program and are thus co-constructed. Through the coding of the data, I was able to see which practices the mothers valued the most in an attempt to determine how learner investment was integrated into the practices of the program (discussed fully in Chapter 5). Table 4.4 provides a summary of the codes, categories, sub-themes, and themes used to identify the co-constructed practices of the program and issues around motherhood which specifically address Research Questions 1 and 2.

#### ***4.8.1.1 Community and Communication***

In order for newcomers to not only navigate, but also integrate into target communities, communication is essential. Communication, and more specifically speaking and reading English, allowed the mothers to harness control over their lives and validated the belief that they could realize their imagined identities (as speakers of English able to integrate into their new communities). Learning English is integral to solving problems (making phone calls, speaking to teachers) and feeling comfortable in day-to-day living (filling out forms, responding to emails and texts).

Community building is a practice directed toward the creation of community among individuals (in this case, the mothers and facilitators). A wide variety of activities can be utilized for community building and notably from this study include lunch, direct adult time, and shared parent child reading. The R2R program offered opportunities for building community wherein the mothers showed a great deal of investment. This co-constructed practice was coded by the instances when the mothers engaged with speaking or reading in English (inside and outside the program), captured through my observations or their verbatim comments. While the R2R program provided opportunities to communicate in English, the mothers' contributions were integral to the practice and it is the interactions between the mothers speaking English and the opportunities provided by the program that make evident how the practices were co-constructed between the mothers and the program.

#### ***4.8.1.2 Sisterhood and Family Literacy Programs***

The mothers in the program formed a sisterhood, which can be defined as a strong feeling of friendship and support among women, and sisterhood was a recurring theme throughout the program. This sisterhood encompassed a social and supportive network that included interactions

between the mothers, between the mothers and facilitators, and the mothers' mention of "family" that extends beyond the parent-child dyad. The interactions between the mothers and the program were essential to co-constructing the practice; notably the creation of the social network that transcended a program-specific network to one that extended outside of the program and beyond its completion, which explains the coding as "sisterhood" as opposed to "network." The mothers saw the formation of friendships as a way out of being isolated and lonely invested a great deal of themselves into the expansion of their social networks. The codes were developed based on all the interactions whereby the mothers connected, felt a sense of belonging, supported each other, and shared experiences as mothers.

#### ***4.8.1.3 Motherhood and Parenting in Canada***

The codes developed with respect to motherhood and parenting in Canada were generated primarily during the direct adult component of the program where the mothers came together to learn without their children. The conversations included both interactions inside and outside of the program and included references to parenting styles, advice, hopes, and goals. Given that the mothers helped develop the curriculum, they explicitly shared their parenting concerns as they explained the topics they wished to learn. The mothers were equal participants in generating the curriculum and hence, co-constructed the theme of motherhood and parenting in Canada as they discussed issues relevant to their life worlds. I was able to generate a theme that captured outcomes of the curriculum and direct adult time as they related to parenting, and motherhood more specifically. I combined the coding of the data and theme development for Research Questions 1 and 2 as the codes relating to the identity "mother" emerged when exploring Research Question 1 and the co-constructed practices of the program. I chose not to separate them as the overlap was too great.

**Table 4.4**

*Summary of Theme Development as They Apply to Research Questions 1 and 2*

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Sub-Themes</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Filling out forms, bonding with children, shared reading, new conversations, technology	Reading English	English language learning	<b>Building Community through Communication</b>  <b>RQ 1</b>
Solving problems, control over their lives, silencing of mothers, confidence, comfort in speaking English	Speaking English		
Expanded social networks, greater happiness, loneliness	Family	Social and supportive network	<b>Sisterhood</b>  <b>RQ 1&amp;2</b>
Relationships, emotional distress	Facilitators		
Emotional support, harmony, relationships, advice	Mom to mom		
New mothering styles, questions, home practices, feelings about being bad, good and better mothers, goals, hopes, advice	Parenting Issues	Direct adult time	<b>Enhancing Mothering Skills in Canada</b>  <b>RQ 1&amp;2</b>
What the mothers wanted to learn, ways of knowing, dialogue, learning from facilitators, learning from mothers	Curriculum		

#### **4.8.2 Identity and Transformation: Research Question 3**

After a preliminary inductive analysis as described above that illuminated aspects of the practices in the program, I turned to the literature for some explanation that would help uncover what my data was suggesting about the changes I was seeing in the mothers. It was at this time, halfway through the program, that I became interested in transformative learning as a way to explain the “transformations” I saw taking place within the mothers (this is fully discussed in Chapter 7). As an example, a recurring code was the word “happy,” which I identified as important. I looked to the literature and found that transformative learning outcomes explain these feelings of happiness and hopefulness, as were expressed by the mothers. Mezirow (2000) was very specific about what transformative learning was in terms of its outcomes and the processes that led to them. His focus was on people’s meaning-making processes, and that transformative learning led to processes that resulted in individuals being “more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22). Transformative learning attempts to explain how our expectations, framed within cultural assumptions, directly influence the meaning we derive from our experiences. The theory of transformative learning addresses the revision of meaning structures resulting from new experiences.

As explained in Chapter 2, Hoggan (2016) identified the outcomes of transformative learning into six distinct themes: worldview, self, epistemology, ontology, behavior, and capacity. These codes are strongly related to each other, yet unique enough that they can be defined separately (Stuckey, Taylor, & Cranton, 2013). However, examining these themes in the context of the R2R program, it is possible to theorize changes to a person’s worldviews,

epistemology, ontology, behavior, and capacity as all contributing to a shift in one's identity (what Hoggan refers to as "self"). Hoggan (2016) stated that "changes in learners' identities or how they viewed themselves was an integral outcome of transformative learning" (p. 72) and used the terms "self" and "identity" interchangeably. Illeris (2014) prioritized "self" over all of the other outcomes and considers changes to a person's identity as "a necessary delimitation of the approach and practice of transformative learning" (p. 161). Therefore, extending the work of Illeris, I separated "self" from the other five codes and made it a higher-level theme that encompasses all others and provides tangible codes in an attempt to operationalize changes to "self" (which I refer to as identity throughout the study). My analysis began as inductive (explaining Research Questions 1 and 2) but changed to deductive (for Research Question 3) as I then placed my descriptive codes in the five identified themes. Table 4.5 provides a summary of the inductive codes that sent me to the literature, where I then placed my codes in a deductive analysis. The sub-themes and themes I used were based on Hoggan's (2016) transformative learning outcomes representing worldview, epistemology, ontology, behavior, and capacity. These codes were developed from the data collected during the R2R program from January through June 2019.



**Table 4.5*****The Codes and Themes Used to Operationalize Changes to Identity***

<b>Examples of Inductive Codes</b>	<b>Sub-Themes</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Judgement, cultures, food, geography, holidays	Assumptions, beliefs, attitudes	<b>Worldview</b>
Websites, WhatsApp, accessing information, community resources, technology, computers	Utilizing more ways of knowing	<b>Epistemology</b>
Happiness, well-being, depression, joy, crying, belonging, love	Emotions & feelings	<b>Ontology</b>
Reading out loud, parent/child reading, home reading, read more, understand more, importance of reading, library	Reading	<b>Behaviour</b>
Speaking English to each other, speaking to children, confidence speaking, less shy, more comfortable speaking, understanding	Speaking	
Healthy cooking, TV shows, trying new things	Acquiring new facts and skills	
English classes, cooking classes	Furthering education	<b>Capacity</b>
Aspirations, new jobs, training for new jobs	Employment	
Going to church, reading the Bible	Spiritual	

#### 4.9 Research Positionality

I was the only person in the program (including teachers and participants) who spoke English as a first language and was Canadian born, which positioned me as somewhat of an outsider to the group, at least to start. I recognize that my position— as an English-speaking Caucasian Canadian teacher who believes in Western ideologies about the importance of reading to children—may have shaped the dynamics of my research conversations, how I view literacy practices, and how I understood (or heard) my participants’ own perceptions of how they needed to perform during these interactions. I recognize I was an outsider entering “a kind of initiation leading to rapport” (Toohey, 2018). I sought to develop mutually warm and respectful relationships with all the mothers, the facilitator, and director.

I shared the role of “mother” with all the women in the R2R program. It was in this capacity that I believe I was legitimately able to connect with the other mothers and build rapport in spite of our differences. During the research conversations that took place both inside and outside of the R2R program, I shared equally in my experiences pertaining to raising my two children from an honest perspective. I shared stories of my highs and lows as a parent and endeavoured to support the other women on their journeys without imposing my values and beliefs on them.

I took responsibility to reflect on my own practices; become aware of the ways in which a colonized, Eurocentric system of education impacted the program; reflect critically on the instructional choices we made on a routine basis; and finally, to examine, create, and enact alternative possibilities. For Cummins and Early (2011), this means continuously shaping an image of our own identities as educators, an image of the identity options we highlight for our students, and an image of the society we hope they will help create (p. 156). Throughout the

design, implementation, and report of this study I have learned that it is through personal relationships and taking on new identities (i.e., relaxing our hold on the dichotomous labels we assign ourselves, such as “participants/researchers,” “students/teachers,” “children/parents”) that we come to a real understanding of the phenomenon we study, and allow for truly credible knowledge about the spaces we share. I endeavored to promote values of equality and social justice among students and teachers alike.

I return to the idea that “all the women [participants] felt uncomfortable talking to people in whom they had a particular symbolic or material investment” (Norton, 2013, p. 19). It is important to note that although I felt a sense of a two-way relationship based on trust and respect, not everyone is comfortable interacting with new people, and I may not have always obtained an accurate picture of what was happening in the women’s lives. I respectfully approached my study as one in which my participants and I were sharing knowledge and repertoires of practice (both ways), and I was mindful not to judge or appear like I was “preaching” to families. I carefully balanced these ideas with Barad (2007) and Toohey (2018), who argued that researchers have an ethical responsibility to “intervene in the world’s becoming,” and that moment by moment, we have a responsibility to intervene, a perspective I adopted throughout my study. If the need arose, I shared my perspectives with the mothers as a way to add to their repertoires, not replace them. Above all, I endeavored to be respectful to the mothers and was guided by the principle “do no harm” throughout my study.

#### **4.10 Limitations of Study**

All research has limitations, by scope, design, theories, characteristics of the researcher, and many other factors. In my particular study, the parents in the program had varying degrees of

English proficiency, and one limitation was how well they were able to answer the questionnaires and effectively communicate with me throughout the program as well as in their homes. According to Purcell Gates (1993), there are many problems associated with the use of questionnaires and interviews. She posits that it is human nature to provide answers based on: i) what the respondent thinks the researcher wants to hear, ii) the respondent's emotional state at the time, iii) the respondent's understanding of the questions, and iv) the respondent's attitude toward the researcher. There was a small sample size of 12 mothers in the study, eight of whom were Spanish speakers. The Spanish speakers found the program on the Latina Moms' Facebook group and were looking for a program with other Spanish speakers. Therefore, it was important to triangulate and corroborate the data from these mothers with others in the program such that the findings would be more representative of the group as a whole. The program sign-up is based on a first come, first served nature in the hopes of creating a heterogeneous group; however, certain groups of participants may not have been able to access the program, limiting the scope of the study. There was a core group of seven mothers who came each week to the program, and the other five were less consistent for a myriad of reasons, including work schedule changes, sick children, and snow days that prevented access (buses) to the program. This, in turn, made attendance a limitation because there were different women participating in the discussions each week.

#### **4.11 Chapter Summary**

This chapter describes the case study and ethnographic methods that guided the research, data collection, and analysis. Data were collected from the 12 mothers throughout the six months of the R2R program in the form of participant observations, questionnaires, research

conversations, in-class focus group discussions, home visits, and observations. After the data were transcribed and imported into NVivo, I began to analyze the data using thematic content analysis, first looking for codes and then identifying the themes. Throughout my data collection and analysis, my guiding premise was to do no harm and respect the women, the program, and the data I collected.

## **Chapter 5: Findings: Learner Investment and the R2R Program**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In the context of the R2R program, my first research question was: How was learner investment integrated into the practices of the R2R program? This chapter discusses the various practices of the program as identified through a thematic analysis outlined in Chapter 4 as building community through communication, sisterhood, and enhancing mothering skills in Canada, as well as how the mothers' investment shaped the program. Through their investment, the mothers were equal participants in constructing the practices, and as such, the practices cannot be solely attributed to the program; rather, they were co-constructed by the mothers and the program. I will describe the relationship between the identified practices and learner investment by showing how the mothers viewed the program as a means to help them realize their own imagined communities (Kanno & Norton, 2003). I will begin this chapter by reporting on why the mothers signed up for the program and go on to explain the practices of the program and how the mothers responded to each of the practices, highlighting the interactions between the women and said practices.

Norton (2013) posed the question: "What is the learner's investment in the language practices of this classroom or community?" (p. 6). For example, a student may be a highly motivated learner but may not be invested in the language practices of a given classroom if the practices are racist, sexist, or homophobic, and possibly in conflict with students' own beliefs. As Darwin and Norton (2015) noted, "how learners are able to invest in a target language is contingent on the dynamic negotiation of power in different fields, and thus investment is complex, contradictory, and in a state of flux" (p. 37).

As explained in Chapter 2, the family literacy program is based on the Kenan Model whereby there are four integrated components that form a comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of families, each with their own set of practices: “i.) basic skill instruction for parents or caregivers, ii.) preschool or literacy education for young children, iii.) regular parent and child interaction, and iv.) parent education/support activities” (Darling, 1993, p. 3). This study did not focus on the direct literacy education for the children as the direct parent instruction ran concurrently and the mothers were the focus of the study. I begin this chapter by highlighting the reasons the mothers signed up for the R2R program and then move on to describe the themes of the program, which I identify as the practices of the program. After identifying the practices, I realized that to only attribute the practices of the program to the program would remove agency from the mothers and as such define the practices as being co-constructed by the mothers and the program illustrating the lived and dynamic program aspects. The practices were the recurring themes that seemed to be the basis for the mothers’ enjoyment of the program, the areas they identified to be the most beneficial, and where they appeared to be the most invested (as identified in Section 4.8). I then discuss how, through the uptake of the program, the mothers’ investment in these practices catalyzed changes to their lives.

## **5.2 Reasons for Joining the R2R Program**

Based on the initial questionnaire, focus group, and home visits, the reasons the mothers gave for joining the R2R program can be broken down into three main categories. The first was attributed to parents hoping to find a social network; the second was in pursuit of their own learning; and the third was linked to mothers’ understanding of their children’s literacy learning. The mothers often had overlapping reasons for joining the program. It was not always easy to

place them in one specific category because their reasons were hard to disentangle. For example, many of the mothers reported wanting to improve their own English so as to be able to help their children with homework.

### **5.2.1 Social Network**

My data indicates that the women at the beginning of the study had limited social support and social ties with people outside of the program and few opportunities for “social distraction” (Stromquist, 1997, p. 94). Aside from attending classes, the mothers seldom left the house, which tends to increase isolation and depression (Edin & Kefalas, 2005). As Luisa told me in my initial home visit (January 31): “When I come here, I don’t know anybody. I don’t go anywhere. I don’t socialize. I just stay home and take care of my kids.” Eliza shared a similar story with me on my first home visit (January 18):

I moved to a new country with no family, friends, or job, and being home alone with a two year was isolating and depressing for me. I was used to a very active and full life. I am not enough for Maya and feel like a bad mom when I am too tired to play with her. Many of the mothers found the R2R program on Facebook while looking to connect with other mothers. In the case of the R2R program, they were primarily Spanish-speaking women looking to find other Spanish-speaking mothers in the pursuit of finding a friend network, with motherhood and language being the perceived fulfillment from the hopeful connections. Also, from our initial visit, Eliza continued to say that she felt isolated at home with a baby, did not speak the language and felt very alone: “I found the R2R program on Facebook and joined to meet other moms like me.” I interpret the “like me” in her response to mean looking to make friends who were also Spanish-speaking.

Similarly, on my first home visit with Jozi (January 20), she told me:



I am lonely. I am alone all of the time with Sari. I am depressed for the last months. I have no one here. I miss my life in Nigeria because I was never alone. I join the R2R program so I can be a better mother to Sari and so she is not alone. She has no one else. No family. No one but me.

All of the mothers stated that they were looking to expand their social networks and signed up for the R2R program to “make new friends.” Susan told the mothers in the first focus group on January 30 that she spent the first seven months in Vancouver alone and unable to speak English. She said: “I come to here to meet other moms. Have been alone. Was alone in my house for seven months.” There was a great feeling of honesty, vulnerability, and support in the room and all of the mothers nodded emphatically and echoes of “me too” could be heard from the group.

### **5.2.2 Mothers’ Learning**

In relation to signing up for the R2R program in terms of mothers’ own learning, the mothers gave a mix of reasons that largely centered around two goals: becoming more proficient in speaking and reading English and learning local parenting styles. Nine of the twelve mothers were newcomers to Canada (had lived in Vancouver three years or less at the start of this study) and their comments reflected a desire to learn to speak English. During lunch in the second week of the program I was speaking with Luisa and Mosa. Mosa explained: “If you don’t speak English, you feel like nothing. People treat you like you’re stupid, so you don’t speak.” She said her kids tell her not to read, so she feels embarrassed, even to read to her four-year-old. Luisa agreed with Mosa and went on to say: “I ask people to speak slow and they just start to yell. It is embarrassed for me.” Many of the women stated that they wanted to “fit in” with the parents here in Canada. As Peta contributed: “I make mistakes with my kids here. I am more tough with my kids than other mothers. I can see that.” Even Tati who was born in Canada (but spoke

Spanish as a first language) said (verbatim from field notes, home visit, March 18) that she comes back year after year to a slightly different program, but the conversations are always new, and she strives to always become a better mom.

Other mothers indicated they wanted to improve their English in the hopes of getting a job. Jozi is hoping to improve her English skills so she can pass the test required to work with senior citizens, which is her eventual goal. Not speaking or reading English is a huge barrier to the resettlement process. The women want to learn English largely for social reasons, but also to help their children with their homework and to ultimately improve their ability to find job opportunities. On a home visit with Jozi (April 2019), she told me that her dream to work with seniors requires an English proficiency test. The mothers saw English as a necessary investment in order to realize their imagined identities as being “good” mothers who are able to provide for their children both in terms of academic and financial support. The women were negotiating what it meant to be a mother in Canada, what kinds of jobs were potentially available to them, and what skills they required, while also considering how expanding their social networks and becoming more proficient in the English language would improve their lives. It is, therefore, the centrality of motherhood, the identity “mother,” that is the driving force for these women to become adult learners and join a family literacy program to both meet new mothers and learn English.

### **5.2.3 Mothers’ Understanding of Children’s Literacy Learning**

The last reason the mothers gave for signing up for the R2R program was to learn about how children are taught in Canadian schools and how they best acquire literacy in order to support them. Mothers’ understanding of their children’s literacy learning was instrumental in

nature, and research has shown this has been the underlying hook commonly used by programs to attract parents (Rose & Atkin, 2007; Swain & Cara, 2017; Swain et al., 2014). For some mothers, this was of particular concern as they had no formal education of their own and were uncertain about how to best support their children, which was of paramount importance to them. For example, Jozi, who had no formal education before arriving in Vancouver, said: “I have to learn how to teach Sari the alphabet. How can I teach her if I never learn it before?” Susan went on to say: “I am very afraid to speak English... My kids is angry to me now. I need to learn and help my kids.”

These sentiments of wanting to support their children were echoed by all of the mothers irrespective of their educational background. When I met with Luisa (January 31, first home visit), she told me that reading was very important to her. She said: “When I imagine my life and the futures of my daughters, I want for them English.” She feels inadequate as a mother because she does not speak English and cannot help her older daughter with her reading and homework: “I need to learn about English so I can be better mother to my girls.”

### **5.3 Co-Constructed Practices and Mothers’ Investment**

As discussed, the themes that emerged from the data were later identified as the co-constructed practices of the program that were primarily generated based on feedback and comments from the mothers. I look at these practices as a way to understand why the mothers came back to the program each week, what they valued most, and how this translated into their investment

. In other words, I focused on the relationship between the practices of the program and the mothers’ investment in the program, and the intersection between the two.

The mothers were positioned as both teachers and students, which exemplifies how the practices of the program were co-constructed by both the mothers and the program. Carly shared: “I am blessed that I can speak English and communicate - I like to watch the other girls develop and help them because I was there before. I love that part. I feel proud to teach the other moms.” And her experience, in turn, helps the other mothers imagine themselves as capable of becoming competent speakers of English: “I see you can do it and I know I can do it. I learn so much from you.” This teacher-student interaction took place in all of the modeling the parents did, in particular shared reading time and arts and crafts. I commented in my field notes:

When Jozi saw the other moms give their kids markers to ‘write,’ she did the same and Sari scribbled her own word. Luisa’s daughter didn’t want to read, and Luisa said to her, “look at all of the other mamas reading to their kids.” And I watched Lea look around the room and sit quietly with Luisa as she read with her.

The themes were not generated as independent silos; rather they are overlapping and, at times, dependent on each other. For example, codes that contributed to speaking English and ultimately “building community through communication” also came up in different parts of the program and contributed to the social and supportive network that became a “sisterhood.” As such, I would first like to discuss the specific times, the “where,” in the program the mothers appeared most invested—which were lunch, the direct adult time, and the shared parent/child reading—and then explain the “how,” through dialogue and direct instruction, and finally the “who,” the facilitators and other mothers who equally contributed to each of the themes’ successes.

## **5.4 Program Activities that Yielded the Greatest Investment**

Based on the coding, the parts of the program (activities) where the mothers expressed the greatest amount of benefit and enjoyment were during lunch, the direct adult time, and the shared parent/child reading. It was during these activities, which comprised 90 minutes of the total program duration of three hours, that the majority of the codes were recorded about the practices of the program in which the mothers were most invested. The following activities elucidate the women's contributions to the program, how their investment shaped the program, and how power was distributed between the program and the mothers through shared leadership and not a top-down model of instruction.

### **5.4.1 Lunch**

Lunch took place at the end of the program session and was always lively and full of unstructured conversations between the mothers. Each week, a hot meal was served along with lettuce and baby carrots, and whatever was not eaten was packed up and sent home with certain mothers who were in the most need of extra food (as determined by Jane and Lara). The mothers and children were free to sit wherever they liked, and I noted that the mothers sat in the same seats each week. While lunch was a part of the program that included both parents and children, it was in this space that I first noted that the collective group began acting like a "family" over time.

Conversations in English took place between different mothers; personal stories were shared about home countries, domestic violence, parenting concerns and issues; new romances and plans were made to see each other outside of the program. These conversations contributed to the building of community through communication, as well as the sisterhood that was created. Language was foundational to the building of both practices. It is apparent how much the

mothers contributed to the practices, as the interactions between the language, the people, and the activity brought to life the practices, with the mothers' investment being key to their co-construction.

#### **5.4.2 Direct Adult**

The direct adult component took place in a room in a building next door to the main R2R program site. It included the mothers (without children), Lara, and me. Lara set out hot water, tea, coffee, and cookies each week. We sat around in a circle assembled from couches and chairs; the space had a living room feel to it. Some of the mothers would sigh as they sank into the couch and remark that this was their only hour to themselves in the week. The hour always began with informal conversations and questions about how everyone's weeks had been since we last gathered. There was a warmth and genuine care and concern to hear how everyone was feeling.

Lara then handed out instructional materials that related to the weekly themes (listed below) that were based on questions and topics generated by the mothers in weeks past. The way in which the topics were selected validated the women's participation in the creation of the curriculum and allowed for collaborative relations of power. Building on ideas generated by the mothers, the facilitators were connecting the curriculum to the experiences and prior knowledge of the mothers, which, in turn, made the mothers feel invested in the weekly topics and exchange of ideas. It was during the direct adult time that the theme of "enhancing mothering skills in Canada" was most coded, as it was in this time that the mothers generated questions, had direct instruction on said topics, and came back to the group to share their expanded repertoire of parenting practices and resulting changes to themselves (see Chapter 7).

Coding for “building community through communication” and “sisterhood” were also paramount during the direct adult time as the mothers spoke primarily in English (with the exception of translanguaging and language barriers). It was in this space that the mothers remarked on their English-speaking abilities, took chances, and allowed themselves to be vulnerable through speaking a new language. They also made themselves vulnerable through the sharing of their lives—their pasts, their hopes, and their dreams for their futures—which is powerful and solidified their friendships beyond a social and supportive network.

There was no set time in which to complete a topic and eight topics were covered over 20 classes. Lara followed the mothers’ lead and allowed them the time they needed to cover each unit. The following topics were presented over the six months of the program:

- Early literacy
- The importance of play in early childhood development
- Responsibility and social skills
- Assertive communication
- Childhood safety awareness
- Guiding your child with positive discipline
- Screen time and young children
- Healthy eating for children

The format was the same each week: Lara would either bring a new topic (with a handout and online resources), or we would continue readings from the previous week(s). This structure allowed for direct instruction in reading, speaking and Canadian mothering skills – each of these reinforcing the reasons the mothers signed up for the program.

The mothers all indicated that the direct adult time was their favourite part of the program. As stated by Carly (April 10, direct adult time, field notes): “The direct parent time is gold,” which was emphatically agreed upon by all. It was in this time and space that the mothers brought their own background and lived experiences, their current situations, good times, dilemmas, and struggles, as well as their hopes and dreams for the future, to the discussions. The following comments from Jozi and Eliza from the final focus group (June 5) speak to how grateful the mothers were for the direct adult time:

Jozi: This moment [direct adult] is for me; is the best...very grateful for this space.

Eliza: This [direct adult] is a safe space... we're all so non-judgemental of each other – we say anything... tight knit group that we know we can always ask each other for things, especially advice.

I would suggest it was in this safe and caring space where hope acted as a change that fueled the mothers' lives (Duckworth & Smith, 2018).

### **5.4.3 Parent/Child Reading**

Each week, the mothers had time for shared parent/child reading. At the start of the program (the first three weeks), none of the mothers were reading books with their children – it was more of a time where the parents watched while their children played. Recognizing that storybook reading is a cultural phenomenon (Heath, 1982), and that it is challenging to integrate new cultural practices into the lives of families, Lara and I asked the mothers if they enjoyed the time allocated to parent/child reading. Their responses indicated that they *wanted to* read with their children but had difficulty because they felt they were not able to read English well enough themselves. They were also concerned that their children did not enjoy being read to as they seemed to have little/no attention span to sit down and listen to books being read out loud. This



is consistent with research that has found parents may lack confidence in their own parent/child book interactions due to lack of experience in shared reading, limited English literacy skills, or lack of English language proficiency resulting in few to no English literacy practices in the home (Brown, Schell, Denton, & Knode, 2019; Wessels, 2014).

Based on the mothers' feedback and observations, I reached out to an organization and received a \$500 grant to purchase children's books at a local bookstore. I selected a myriad of books including books with no words, no illustrations, in braille, tactile, rhyming, and so forth. When the mothers and children saw the bright new books, they were visibly excited. Of note, Lara presented the books from the R2R program having nothing to do with me. I explained that they could interact with the books in any way they felt most comfortable, and in any language they preferred; that it was their time to sit with their children and share a story or words in any way they wanted. The mothers seemed invested in the new books from the first opportunity to use them. It was as though they could see themselves as readers because both the books and the instruction surrounding "how" they could read with their children gave them the agency to make reading attainable and also fun.

According to Norton (2016), "The extent to which language learners exercise such agency in social interaction can be partly explained by ... investment" (p. 476). There was a change in the mothers' willingness to exert the effort involved in reading once the new books arrived. It is clear that "motivation" was not the issue because they were always "highly motivated" to learn how to read; it was one of the reasons they initially signed up for the program and the second highest code recorded in the data. What changed is that they became invested in the books as they could read them by themselves with some degree of confidence and see themselves as readers as a result.

It was at this half-way point in the program (March 2019) that the mothers began enjoying the shared reading time with their children. It is interesting to examine the numbers of mothers who were engaging in the shared reading with their children over time. Based on data from my field notes, in January, 3 of the 12 mothers were engaged; in February, 5 of the 12 mothers were engaged; and by March, 12 of the 12 mothers were not only reading books with their children but appeared to be enjoying the process. The 100% participation was sustained for the remainder of the program. In the final focus group (June 5) the mothers spoke about their increased reading at home. As an example, Kate shared:

Since I started the program, I am reading more with my kids – I went home and pulled out the books my older son read – my 10 year old son now wakes up and reads – the program helped me reinforce the importance of reading – I am going to the library more – the program did help a lot.

Ingrid echoed the same sentiment:

I forgot about reading and started reading again – when you brought the book about your mom, my grandma was important to me and I started reading to my kids and the time you brought the books to take home – now with the internet, I forget about books – you gave us free books.

The mothers appeared to be enjoying reading with children and this enjoyment was carried out from the program and into the homes of the mothers.

## **5.5 Pedagogy**

The R2R program's pedagogy was based on dialogue and direct instruction, both of which are discussed next, which were crucial to the success of the three co-constructed practices

identified: building communication through communication, sisterhood, and enhancing Canadian mothering skills.

### **5.5.1 Dialogue**

Dialogue was a consistent thread between and among themes. The R2R program was predicated on dialogue. Dialogue is one of the ways that communication, sisterhood, and mothering skills were brought to life in the program whereby there was equal participation between the program and the mothers. Auerbach (1989) suggested that family literacy programs should include “parents addressing child-rearing concerns through family literacy work. By providing mutual support and a safe forum for dialogue, parents can share and develop their own strategies for dealing with issues” (p. 178). As has been previously stated, the mothers valued the conversations that took place during the direct adult time – this was a practice in which all the mothers were invested. In a dialogue, all parties take the risk of describing and presenting the truth as they see it, as well as listening and receiving the perspectives of others. During dialogue, something fundamental changes in and between parties when honest words have been shared (Jaffe-Notier, 2017). As reported by Swain et al. (2014), discussion skills contribute to social cohesion. Using dialogue as pedagogy focuses on critical inquiry, and encourages students to learn through asking, listening, and changing. The NLG (1996) maintained that for pedagogy to be truly relevant to learners’ lives, it needs to “recruit, rather than attempt to ignore and erase, the different subjectivities, interests, intentions, commitments, and purposes that students bring to learning” (p. 18). It is important to know the community in which families live and to create a space for open dialogue, keeping in mind that this may be more difficult in groups whose members have limited English abilities. Even if students have difficulty expressing themselves in

English, it is important to learn as much about their lives and the place of literacy in order to make curriculum meaningful.

During the direct adult time in the R2R program, the mothers had the opportunity to bring in their prior knowledge to the conversation, generate questions based on their own life worlds, and talk through their concerns, which ultimately altered some of their views (see Chapter 7). The mothers also shared their future hopes and dreams as they evolved with their new skills and ideas of what was possible in their range of imagined identities.

### **5.5.2 Direct Instruction**

Each week during the direct adult time, Lara followed a curriculum that began with an overview of the topic and handouts with print information. The following breakdown by the eight topics covered details how direct instruction took place within the direct adult part of the R2R program and highlights how the mothers were invested in the topics each week. It was the joint effort by the program and the mothers that facilitated the co-construction of the practices. I describe the types of conversations shared between the mothers and facilitators in an attempt to show how the curriculum evolved over the weeks in order to reinforce the mothers' investment and interest with the topics. This type of pedagogy, which positioned the mothers' interests as paramount to the curriculum, had a profound effect on the success of the R2R program as expressed by the mothers.

#### ***5.5.2.1 Topic 1: Early Literacy (January 16-February 6)***

The newcomer mothers all began the program speaking only in their mother tongues to their children (with the exception of Jozi, who always spoke English to Sari). Given the mix of languages spoken in the program, as an inclusive measure the program encouraged that English be spoken between the mothers and facilitators. The rationale is that it becomes exclusive to have

a group of three mothers speaking Spanish and one non-Spanish speaker. The women embraced the opportunity to speak English to each other and were encouraged to use Google Translate or translanguaging when they were at a loss for vocabulary words in English. Translanguaging brings together “different languages, semiotics, and modes” (Lin & He, 2017, p. 229), thus enhancing the communication of the participants when educators acknowledge and incorporate it into their teaching to improve multilingual competencies. Holoway and Gouthro (2020) argued that:

It is critical, therefore, for educators to think about contexts in which they can support their EAL students by providing opportunities to enhance their fluency in English such as having opportunities for communicative engagement with native speakers in community-based learning contexts and provide activities within their learning contexts to encourage students’ abilities to expand their vocabulary. (p. 11)

The mothers enjoyed the idea of speaking English with each other because they were eager to learn to speak English; however, they were concerned about speaking English to their children while in the program, which generated many questions and issues. Peta began the discussion with a broad question: “How do you raise bilingual kids?” Lucy was more specific and shared that “my kids don’t like my English accent.” There were many questions about the gains of second and third languages, including Luisa asking: “Is it confusing for the kids?” Lara and I generated a list of their questions with the promise that whatever was not addressed during the first class would most assuredly be discussed in subsequent classes. The mothers were also looking for answers from each other, not only from Lara and me. Eliza assured the group that “some kids prefer their native language” so that the mothers do not feel badly about their accents and reading abilities, but mothers should also recognize that their children may just be more

comfortable using their mother tongue, which seemed to reassure the mothers. Through the distribution of leadership, the mothers were afforded the opportunity to both teach and learn from one another, which ultimately shaped the program's practices.

The other topic that was of great concern to the mothers was reading. Some questions were specific to second language acquisition, such as when Eliza asked: "What language should I read to Maya in? I only read and speak to her in Spanish, so she knows it. She will learn English at school." Other questions were more geared to reading with children in general, such as Ingrid's question: "What do you do if your child doesn't like to read? Should I read in more than one language?" However, some questions were very personal and encapsulated feelings about their own reading, rather than about teaching children how to read. As Mosa said: "I am embarrassed my kids read and speak better English than me."

The above questions and queries gave rise to the early literacy curriculum that the mothers were immediately invested in, as they were brought into the process of developing the curriculum. Lara and I gave many examples as to what literacy encompasses. We spoke of singing, dancing, art, storytelling, talking, and cooking. We covered early literacy and phonemic awareness and the mothers felt reassured that they, too, were engaging in literacy with their children. After Lara and I gave some feedback and instruction, the other mothers added their experiences to the conversations; the program success involved input from not only the facilitators, but from the mothers as well. Tati told the group (field notes, January 16):

With my oldest, I tried to read only in Spanish, and he resented me. He wanted to be successful at school. Once I valued English as much as Spanish, he became more open to both languages. My three kids are all bilingual and we speak 'Spanglish' at home.

Carly built upon this idea and shared that she chooses to “let my kids decide if they want to respond to me in English or Spanish, but I only speak Spanish.” Carly and Tati have been in the program the longest (four years each) and speak English fluently. The other mothers look to them for advice as they see themselves and their children as bilingual speakers and trust in how Carly and Tati were able to achieve the futures they imagine for themselves.

On the second week, an open access, online storybook program called Storybooks Canada (<https://www.storybookscanada.ca/>) was introduced to the mothers. It is available in approximately 20 of the top immigrant and refugee languages spoken in Canada. The mothers were introduced to using technology for educational purposes and to support them with bilingual reading. In the group, the languages spoken were Tagalog, German, Spanish, Edo, Japanese, French, and Portuguese. All of the mothers were excited to hear and see their home languages and they became quickly invested in the stories.

Eliza said she only had a limited number of books and games for Maya that she brought with her from Mexico, and she remarked how happy she was to receive “the gift of 40 stories in three languages,” as they speak Spanish (her mother tongue), French (her husband’s mother tongue), and English in their home. The women seemed to like the program and were eager to try it with their children. Within two weeks, two of the mothers began sharing their use of Storybooks Canada with the group. Tati shared that she used it with her boys (aged six and four) in English and Spanish, and that they showed it to her mother who also loved it. Luisa shared that she used it with her six-year-old daughter and that she loved the toggle feature between English and Spanish not only for her daughter, but also for herself. These conversations were generative in that week after week other mothers reported trying the program as well. Susan set a goal of reading one story per day beginning at Level One so that she could then read it to her

youngest daughter. Jozi used the program because Sari loves her phone and prefers reading using a digital app rather than a print book. The mothers all reported using the audio feature and found it helped them with pronunciation.

On the third week, we discussed parent/child reading during the direct adult time in response to the lack of reading during the shared parent/child reading time. The mothers' comments suggested they were insecure about reading in English because of their accents, as they were not proficient readers of English and only read in their mother tongue languages in their homes. Many commented that they did not have books in English in their homes. There were only approximately 15 books available from the program for the mothers to read, many of which had a lot of words per page and were quite dated. In addition, the mothers told us they did not know how to teach their children how to read and asked us for guidance. Jozi stated, "I don't know how to read myself, so how can I read with Sari?"

In response, I brought in three books to share with the mothers in the direct adult time: *Press Here*, an interactive book with very few words per page, *The Book with No Pictures*, with very little text and no pictures, and *The Black Book of Colours*, which is only illustrated in black and has braille on each page. We talked about choosing books that would facilitate conversations between the mothers and their children and not just focus on reading the words on the page while they were learning to read. I explained phonological awareness to the mothers and the importance of rhyme. Not all the mothers understood the concept of rhyme, and I had the word translated into their languages. They appeared to be so happy when they understood what was involved because they realized they were able to perform the tasks that would help them/their children become readers of English (their imagined identities), which they saw as necessary to



live in Canada. Susan had so much relief and excitement once she understood: “Ahhhhh... rima!!”

#### ***5.5.2.2 Topic 2: The Importance of Play in Early Childhood Development (February 13-27)***

The handouts centered around the idea of play between parents and children, as well as play between children. The ideas and topics were carried forward as were generated by the mothers as in the early literacy unit. Many of the questions and concerns raised by the mothers were with regard to children playing on their own. Eliza shared: “I am tired and don’t always feel like playing.” She went on to say that she “feels like a bad mom because I run out of patience for spending time with Maya.” Eliza is bored at home yet does not always want to play. Luisa agreed and said she feels the same way: “I have to clean and cook and don’t have time entertain my children.” Luisa asked: “How do your kids play alone so you can cook and clean?” The mothers offered their suggestions as to how they are afforded some time to themselves in their homes. Many of the mothers said that they use television to entertain their children when they have to cook, clean, or even just need a few minutes to themselves. All the mothers nodded in agreement. Arts and crafts were another suggestion put forth by four of the mothers, who said they made playdough and always had markers, playdough, and coloured paper available if they wanted their children to play alone.

Lara addressed the issue of how the final art product should look especially if their children were going to feel successful working on projects by themselves: “It’s not about the completed project; let your children be free to create their own work.” She brought up the notion of letting go of how a finished art project should look because during the arts and crafts time in the R2R program, the mothers did the craft by themselves with little or no input from their children. They did not allow their children to experiment with materials first and they tried to

model how to complete the activity before allowing the child to attempt it on their own. This finding is consistent with Anderson and Anderson (2018), who attribute certain practices to the fact that families hold different cultural models of learning. During the last month of the program (May 2019), I observed none of the children at the art table with the mothers. I asked the three mothers with whom I was sitting why they thought that was the case and their responses were as follows:

Jozi: Sari would rather play.

Tati: The kids want to be together like the moms.

Luisa: I always do myself.

In a follow-up conversation with Jane in February 2020, she (independent of my sharing this finding) suggested the parents would enjoy an art class separate and apart from their children – that when she reviewed all the program feedback, adult crafts were something in which the parents expressed an interest. The cultural differences in learning as well as their own interest in crafts could explain why the parents were content doing the crafts alone and did not insist that their children join them at the table. Duckworth and Tett (2019) suggested that multimodal approaches, which include images, arts and crafts, and music, can be a move towards reflection and transformation. Learners can gain confidence by shifting away from a rigid print-based system that generates perceptions, expectations, beliefs, and actions in a particular context, and moving towards creativity that encourages learners to think beyond a competence-based approach to literacy.

The idea of board games was proposed as a great way to play with their children. Board games have a beginning and an end, which the mothers liked in theory because they did not always enjoy playing abstract (pretend) games with no set time limit. We all agreed it would be

fun to see what games everyone played in their homes and that we would all bring in a game to share the following week. All the mothers, including Lara and me, brought in board games to share with each other the following week, indicating they all felt invested in the topic and were excited to share their game. We all went around the circle and explained what we liked about each game and how to play. Many of the board games were in Spanish and the mothers explained how they sometimes played them in English while having the Spanish text visible. Lara shared that mothers can freely access board games at libraries and community centres, and she followed up by sending the link on the WhatsApp group.

#### ***5.5.2.3 Topic 3: Responsibility and Social Skills (March 6)***

The mothers spent most of this topic reading the handouts with very few questions. The idea of social skills was generated from mothers with younger children who were asking about how to promote social skills within their children. Luisa stated: “I want more for Lea to be sociable. She is scary [scared of] people.” One mother suggested they exchange contact information and the mothers agreed to get together for their own benefit as well as the socialization of their children. Tati said that: “Just going out helps socialize kids. Especially this program.” Carly followed up with: “You cannot socialize your kids alone. Take them out and teach them how to fit in.” As a result of this conversation, the mothers decided to get together outside of the program so they and their children could all have more opportunities to socialize.

During this session we (collectively) discussed behavior expectations in restaurants, cars, school, dinner time, and getting ready for bed. A big take-away for the mothers was when Lara told them to be role models for their children. Several mothers brought this idea back into the conversation (over the duration of the program) and when I met with them in their homes. A few of the mothers told me they did not realize the importance of role models until the R2R program.

The other mothers, as well as Lara, became role models and part of their imagined identities. Norton's (2016) research suggests that "a learner's imagined identity and hopes for the future will impact his or her investment in the language and literacy practices of a given classroom, and subsequent progress in language learning" (p. 477).

#### ***5.5.2.4 Topic 4: Assertive Communication (March 13, Spring Break April 3-10)***

Lara began this unit by asking the mothers if they knew what "assertive" meant. None of the mothers offered any questions or comments, so as a group we read from the handout. This was somewhat of a deviation because the mothers usually had some prior knowledge and questions about a topic from the start. The mothers always took turns reading the handouts out loud as a way to practice their reading. Once the idea of assertive communication was explained, Eliza asked: "How should you speak to your kids if you're mad at them?" Most often, when a question was asked to the group, Lara and I would first defer to the other mothers to respond. Tati offered: "I tell my kids to 'use your words' when they are crying or having a tantrum." Carly modeled how she speaks in a calm and slow voice. Ingrid reinforced Carly's notion of using a calm voice: "I always yell at my kids but they don't listen. I learn that my son is more responsive when I speak quietly than when I yell. But still I sometimes yell!"

Lara then explained the idea of using "I messages" because it is a more effective approach than starting a sentence with "you." She explained that people do not like when you point fingers and say what *they* did, rather tell them how their actions made you feel. Jozi discussed being extremely frustrated with Sari and her tantrums, which she does not know how to stop. She explained to the group that she just wants Sari to stop screaming so she usually gives in to her demands. Kate responded by saying: "Sometimes you have to ignore behavior to get it to stop. I found that worked especially with things in stores. Just let her cry and keep going." Jozi

thanked the group for the conversation and told them she felt as though she had some new ideas for how to speak to Sari. She appeared empowered because as we were walking back to the main room for lunch, Jozi told me she feels ready to let Sari cry, that she understands she will be doing her a favour by teaching her how to behave. I agreed with her that it is our job to teach our children – that we do not do them any favours by letting them run wild. At the end of our conversation, Jozi hugged me and kissed my cheek and told me she loves the advice she is getting from the other mothers, because she feels like she can be a better mother to Sari.

#### ***5.5.2.5 Topic 5: Childhood Safety Awareness (April 17-24)***

This topic was met enthusiastically by the mothers. Carly opened the discussion with: “What if I die in front of my kids?” In response, one mother suggested they fill out the health app (no cost, standard on cellular phones) on their phones. Most of the mothers were not familiar with the app and we spent time in the session with all the mothers filling out the emergency information on their phones.

This topic generated other themes and questions specific to Canadian culture. Carly spoke about drugs and warned the mothers about needles on the playground. Peta added: “There is lots to be careful of.” The mothers seemed concerned about potential dangers that they did not feel prepared for, and Lara suggested going to more places with their children, thereby exposing them to more people and situations. They shared ideas relating to the dangers of watching television, as Tati told the mothers to “be vigilant about what your kids are watching.” Ingrid has an older son and she counseled the women “to know your kids’ friends.”

As many of the mothers were new to Canada, they were commenting that such issues did not exist in their home countries and that they were appreciative of the advice, especially as it related to the scope of potential dangers and how to mitigate them. The conversation made Jozi

nervous because Sari has a tendency to run away from her. As such, Jozi asked: “What do you do if your child runs away from you?” Carly suggested a harness and explained to Jozi and the other mothers what a harness looked like and how it worked. Carly went so far as to bring Jozi a harness the following week. The gestures and conversations between the mothers highlighted the real friendships and the sisterhood that had formed throughout the weeks.

#### ***5.5.2.6 Topic 6: Guiding your Child with Positive Discipline (May 1-15)***

The opening sentence in the handout read, “The Canadian Paediatric Society strongly discourages the use of physical punishment on children, including spanking.” This statement guided the conversation for the entire first week. Jozi asked: “What is a spank [spanking]?” Lara explained that a spanking involves hitting your child as a way to discipline them. Peta seemed glad the topic came up and told the group: “I spank my kids. I take a parent class and they say no to spank kids.” Tati was quick to reply and told Peta that “it’s okay to spank your kids in Mexico, but not here. It’s cultural.” We discussed culturally specific ways of disciplining children. The mothers all agreed they wanted to discipline their children in keeping with societal norms because they felt like “bad” mothers when they spanked or yelled at their children in public; they were invested in learning the practices of local parents. The moms engaged in a discussion about how others judge us as parents. Jozi told the story of how one woman reprimanded her in A&W when Sari fell off a chair. Luisa spoke of being embarrassed at the reaction of others to her parenting. She said she parents worse when others are watching her and judging her.

Lara and I reassured the mothers they are not “bad” mothers, as did the mothers to each other. Carly’s advice to the mothers was to “ignore people around you, stay calm and do what feels right to you.” Lara agreed and validated Carly by offering a strategy of “breathing through

those difficult parenting moments and not to worry about other people.” Lara and I made sure we addressed the notion of their feelings about being “bad” mothers as they claimed they felt in some moments. While Lara and I reassured the mothers that they were not “bad” mothers, they seemingly felt better hearing those words from the other mothers who saw in each other that they were all “good” mothers. The interplay between the mothers was as crucial to the program as the interaction between the program (facilitators) and the mothers.

#### ***5.5.2.7 Topic 7: Screen Time and Young Children (May 22)***

Lara opened the discussion with a statement that gave rise to instant conversation and questions: “You have to disconnect to connect.” The mothers discussed the importance of replacing phones with conversations or oral story telling. However, the mothers suggested this was easier said than done. Ingrid genuinely asked: “But how do you take the phones away?” Jozi was unsure what else to do with Sari in the absence of her phone: “The only time I get any quiet is when I give Sari my phone. She is addicted to my phone.” The mothers all agreed (myself included) that we had all used television and cell phones as tools to keep our children busy while waiting for food in a restaurant, at a doctor’s office, and in our homes so we could cook or clean or even just have a few minutes of time to ourselves, and that these actions do not make us “bad” mothers.

Each new topic brought about more opportunities to feel human; that we all need some time alone without feeling the pressure to constantly entertain our children. There were some alternatives to screen time that were offered such as Tati’s suggestion of putting toys out, and Carly added that her kids loved to play with spoons and pots and pans. Ingrid even brought up that “TV helps with learning English. You can watch in English or use subtitles so that every

time you and your kids watch, they are learning English.” Again, there was constant interplay between the mothers, as leadership was always distributed in the R2R program.

#### ***5.5.2.8 Topic 8: Healthy Eating for Children (May 29)***

The healthy eating topic was a favourite amongst the mothers, and they were eager to listen to the reading of the handout and discuss the topic. They asked questions such as (verbatim from field notes):

Peta: How do you cook healthy on a budget?

Liz: What snacks do you send to school?

Tati: What are some favourite dinner recipes?

We discussed snack ideas and Lara explained how the grocery store was laid out with produce and fresh food along the periphery and processed items in the middle. We all agreed to send our favourite recipe to Lara on WhatsApp so we could have 12 more dinner ideas. Lara told the mothers about a free cooking class where the goal was healthy cooking on a budget. She sent the information through the WhatsApp group and four of the mothers signed up. The mothers shared some of the healthy food substitutions (Greek yogurt for sour cream, whole wheat flour for white) they learned so the rest of the mothers could also benefit from the classes they were taking. There was such a palpable feeling of wanting the best for each other; not holding back any information that could be of benefit to anyone in the group.

Over time, I recorded instances of conversations taking place outside of the direct adult time that were carried over into lunch. For example, I recorded a conversation (verbatim from field notes) between Kate and Jozi during the lunch immediately following the healthy eating discussion:

Jozi: Sari don't like to eat. I need to force her to eat.



Kate: I don't force my kids to eat. They will eat when they are hungry.

Have you tried any new recipes?

Jozi: Sari don't like her food touching

Kate: Try a plate with dividers. She might prefer her food if it's not touching.

Jozi: What is a plate like that?

Kate drew a picture for Jozi and told her she would bring her one to try the following week (which she did). Not only did they share ideas with each other, but they would take the ideas, links, and resources to their homes and communities and discuss and/or integrate the new ideas with their family and community members. As an example, Carly told us that:

I share with [my husband] and discuss the conversations what I learned, the experience complements what we are learning... helps me as a mom to teach the children; even like we're talking about behaving in the streets, safety – this morning I reminded Isabella (her eight-year-old daughter) when you stand on the corner, you stand back in case a car loses control. This class helps me teach my children in many ways.

The above examples highlight how the R2R program enhanced parental support by engaging the mothers in active learning activities (Kaminski, Valle, Filene, & Boyle, 2008). Active learning can be defined as “involving students [mothers] in doing things and thinking about what they are doing” (Bonwell & Eison, 1991, p. 19). In contrast to passively listening to information provided by teachers, active learning stimulates parents and engages them in higher-order thinking about their own behavior (Kaminski et al., 2008). Active learning activities include modeling, opportunities to practice, and interactive discussions that pose the challenge of requiring highly developed teacher skills to act as role models able to stimulate parents (Teepe, Molenaar, Oostdam, Fukink, & Verhoeven, 2019). The data suggest that the mothers were

invested in the practices that involved active learning whereby they had space to offer input in the learning process. When I asked Jane about potential changes to circle time, she indicated that the ECEs had limited teacher training so she could not make changes to the program content and decided to cut out the circle time entirely. These actions contributed to making the mothers feel even more invested in the program as a whole because their input was seen as being valued.

## **5.6 Participants**

All of participants of the R2R program contributed to the success of the program. In this case, I define “participants” to include both the facilitators and the mothers.

### **5.6.1 Facilitator**

Embedded in the practices of the program was the facilitator, Lara, who the mothers identified as an important source of support. Lara was integral to facilitating the sub-themes of the program, which are: English language learning, social and supportive network, and direct adult time (see Chapter 4). As stated, it was the interactions between the program and the mothers that gave rise to the extension of those sub-themes, giving rise to the lived, dynamic program with themes (practices) that extended to building community and sisterhood and enhancing mothering skills. Lara’s input was instrumental in the co-constructed practices of the program and her desire to distribute the leadership among the women.

The R2R program strives to address the gaps in services that stop parents and families from succeeding. When we work with existing service providers, we maximize our shared human, financial and knowledge resources, as well as establish important connections between the families, the school and the broader community (no link/reference to protect anonymity).

Over the years, Carly expressed that she especially appreciated Lara's advice and was inclined to trust her because she was also a newcomer to Canada who had been through the English programs at Belmont School herself ten years ago. Lara took every opportunity to remind the mothers "I was you. I worked hard and asked Jane if I could work." Carla followed up by sharing with the other mothers that Lara arrived in Vancouver with limited English proficiency, a young son, and no education. Carla reinforced that Lara's story is important because "she gives advice based on personal experience. And look [gestured] where she is now."

Several mothers described how the facilitators provided guidance, informal counseling, and advice and made themselves available outside the program, acknowledging that we [Lara and I] drew on our own social capital to connect them with other groups and organizations as much as possible. Kate acknowledged those connections in saying: "You connect us to some people who can help us if you can't." As an example, during the direct adult time, Carly announced she was worried she would be evicted from her apartment; her neighbors had been complaining about her family because, as she said, they referenced "too much noise and too many guests." She said they had been receiving letters from the strata (a strata corporation is responsible for managing common property for the benefit of all owners in the property) for a few months and that they did not understand all the complaints or know how to respond in a way that would allow them to stay. I told her that she was welcome to share the letters with me and I would explain them to her, and if necessary, introduce her to a lawyer I knew to help them respond. Carly cried to the group and said, "I feel better just talking to you all." The underlying problems with Carly's strata are not only that did she not have the literacy to access the issues, but that she did not have the social capital outside of the R2R program. Without sharing a personal story, Ingrid added: "If you have a problem, they're right there to help."

Outside of the R2R program, Lara sent out links through the WhatsApp chat (see Table 5.1) to inform the mothers of free community events, classes, and resources. These links provided much-needed social activities for the mothers to help them get out of their houses and enjoy time with their families. Jozi told Lara: “You help me get through the weekend with your activities. I don’t know what to do without your ideas.”

Luisa and her family struggled with job security and financial difficulties that she shared in the direct adult time. Both Lara and I offered suggestions, connections, and resources (including grocery gift cards from VFEC). When her husband found a job, Luisa baked a cake and brought it in to the direct adult class (May 22). She thanked the mothers, and Lara and me specifically, for helping her family through such a difficult time and told the group how relieved she was that her family would be okay. She was very emotional and cried while thanking everyone. Susan had a similar experience when she needed help with her resettlement process and added (direct adult, May 22): “You guide us and give us help. When I have hard times, you helped me get through what has happened to me.” At times, there were no words spoken, only the palpable feeling of agreement and continued support.

Lara took care to realize the needs of each mother. There was no issue that escaped Lara’s attention and she tried to make all moments count. During lunch, she gave them tools for encouraging their children to eat vegetables. This was recognized by Eliza, who gratefully said (direct adult, May 29): “Now I give Maya spanakopita because she learn to eat spinach here.” Also shared by Peta: “Lara always gives the kids carrots and lettuce. Now my kids eat.” Lara would pack up the left-over food and send it home with a mother who was in need, and discreetly give out grocery store gift cards and transit cards. She would send out job links for the women and their husbands as they moved through job and financial insecurities.

Jozi repeatedly shared her need to connect with more people in her life. She found the evenings and weekends long. I asked her what she might enjoy outside of school time, and she said she wanted to go to church. I Googled churches near her home and I agreed to pick her up that Sunday and accompany her and Sari to church. I went with them for three weeks until Jozi had developed her own network at church. She made new friends with whom she sat (and continues to sit) every week. This led to celebrating holidays and a friendship outside of church with one family.

Each week, through the WhatsApp group, Lara would send a message to confirm attendance for Wednesday's class (the replies from the mothers could only be seen by Lara). The following excerpt is an example of a typical weekly message:

Lara: Hello moms,

We hope you had a wonderful weekend. Please confirm your attendance. Looking forward to seeing you all on Wednesday. [smiley face]

Lara

If the women did not respond, she would follow up one-on-one to find out why they were unable to make it and to check to make sure that everything was okay. Lara was quite surprised to find out when it came up in the direct adult class (May 15) how meaningful the texts were. Mosa initiated the conversation by saying: When I get the text that says, "Are you coming?" I feel so happy. Lara, God bless you for what you do." And then Carly spoke up: "I feel wanted here. Lara sends a reminder to come because she wants us here." These comments were followed by Liz, who said that "the texts Lara sends make me feel cared about... 'Why aren't you coming?' and "you really care – not just another drop-in" [mothers all agreeing and nodding heads].

Lara listened with tears in her eyes, as she had no idea how far-reaching her messages to the mothers were until it came up that morning. All the mothers nodded and agreed that the messages Lara sent made them feel special. The WhatsApp group was a special bridge between Lara and the mothers. She would follow up after each session with suggestions for resources that we discussed as a group. The following table was put together directly from the WhatsApp chat to provide the specific follow-up messages sent by Lara.

**Table 5.1**

*Weekly Messages Sent in the WhatsApp Chat*

Date (2019)	Message
January 16	Links to free eyeglasses
January 30	Links to Chinese New Year celebrations
February 13	Snow day activities (links)
February 27	Saturday night game night
March 6	Vancouver Inspiration Pass – free cultural and recreational pass program that allows families and teens to get out and explore their city in a whole new way (with link to sign up)
March 13	Spring Break activities (link)
April 5	Free family events in Metro Vancouver with a link to sign up
April 10	Copy of the new schedule with more direct parent time built in
April 11	Indoor activities for a rainy Saturday
April 16	List of words that aligned with our discussion on assertive parenting (for example, instead of “be quiet,” “can you use a softer voice?”)
April 17	Tati shared an Easter party with Lara to share with the group
April 18	Easter long weekend activities
April 24	As a follow-up to our discussion on child safety, Lara sent out the link for child ID kits.
May 4	City of Vancouver link for Family Fun Fair on May 11 <sup>th</sup>
May 12	Sent out Happy Mother’s Day wishes
May 15	Link to Lynn Canyon Park for the moms to go hiking
May 21	Link to outdoor pools in Vancouver
May 24	Link to free family events for the long weekend
June 3	Links to free family activities for the month of June
June 5	Link to free Filipino festival
* June 8	Link to Italian Day festival on Commercial Drive
* June 9	Link to lakes in Vancouver
* June 10	Link to Saturday family movies for \$2.99
* June 18	Link to moms 2019 Summer Bucket List

\* Denotes after program completion

Authentic relationships, especially between facilitators and learners, are necessary for the learners to emotionally develop the confidence and trust in order for transformations to occur (Duckworth & Smith, 2018). Overall, the mothers described the facilitators as encouraging, caring, open-minded, understanding, and non-judgemental. Specifically, Eliza said (focus group, June 5):

Lara makes me feel so good. Michelle loves us and supported us so much. She is so kind... she is so supportive and loving. You make us feel so good. You are just so supportive [crying] and Jane, your advice is so useful.

This type of informal counseling, both with peers and teachers, allowed women to gain new information, share burdens, and release emotions, activities with important yet often overlooked pedagogical implications (Galván, 2001). The relationships and feelings between the mothers and facilitators were reciprocated. When I look through my field notes, week after week I comment on the relationships. For example, on February 20 I wrote:

As the moms walked in, there was such a warm, nice feeling between the moms and me. I feel a strong connection to these women, and we have very open and honest conversations that bring people together. There is no pretense or judgement. It's quite a remarkable feeling to be on this journey with this group.

And on April 24 (verbatim from field notes), I wrote:

I was away the week before and was warmly greeted by the moms who were all very concerned about [my son's name] who had his wisdom teeth removed. We are a cohesive group and the women have come to know a lot about me and my life through our honest conversations. Susan told me her husband got his work permit and Ingrid showed me a picture of her new boyfriend. Eliza texted me while I was away to wish [my son's name]

good luck and immediately asked me about him. The mothers and facilitators have developed something very special and feelings that are hard to explain.

As an example of the mutual respect developed between facilitators and mothers was the evolution of circle time, which involved the mothers and children singing, dancing, and listening to a read-aloud by one of the early childhood educators (ECEs). Notwithstanding my observations that the children were not focused on the activities, the mothers were seemingly not engaged either. Ingrid (home visit, February 12) shared that she felt that the singing and dancing made the kids full of energy and it was then difficult to calm them down after and have them focus on reading. After recording in my field notes week after week that neither the mothers nor children appeared engaged in circle time, I asked Tati about it immediately following a circle time on April 3 (field notes). She said she felt that circle time was “boring,” and she was “ready to sit down and talk to the other mothers.”

I relayed my observations and the feedback to Jane, who then came and met with the mothers the following week during direct adult time. Jane asked the mothers what could be done to make the circle time more meaningful. As a unanimous group, the mothers told Jane they did not enjoy circle time and wanted to extend their direct adult time by 15 minutes each week. Jane listened to the mothers, validated their feelings and concerns, and made the change to the program the following week. The mothers seemed to feel invested in the program because they were empowered as active participants with agency to modify the curriculum as opposed to passively following a curriculum that they were not enjoying.

In an email exchange with Jane on February 11, 2019, she summed up the relationship between the mothers and facilitators (verbatim from email):



Dear Michelle

You can see why I do this work.

For me, it isn't about learning English or math or how to help your child and you get ready for school...it is, and always has been about the women and men and children that we meet and support, who grace our doorways and share a meal, laughter and their precious lives with us, who come from away - some/most transient and displaced by war and other atrocities, that find us and makes VFEC the beacon of hope that we truly are. They/we enrich each other's lives in ways that are not easily measured, but I know that at its essence it's about love...the only thing in the end that really matters...

This excerpt highlights the essence of the R2R program in that above all, it is built upon genuine care and concern for the people who pass through the program.

### **5.6.2 Relationships Between Mothers**

The sharing of ideas, hopes, dreams, and advice among the mothers was key to the success of the program. The mothers looked forward to their time together and came back each week for the hour spent in a family room-like setting, drinking coffee and eating cookies. I commented in my fieldnotes (April 3) that "the mothers appear so happy when they sit down with their coffee/tea – it's as though they sink into the chairs and immediately feel like they're at home." The mothers would come to the program more than an hour late if they could make it in time for that time together. Ingrid (field notes, April 24) shared with the group that she only comes to have time to talk with the other mothers: "I love the time with moms. It's a time for me. I never have this time. I have lots of time with my kids. I come for you [gestured to the circle of mothers]." During the final focus group (June 5, field notes), Luisa shared:

I love the friends I am making, followed by Peta: I know other moms now and have friends. Eliza was nodding and added: I am excited to invite you all to Maya's birthday party next week! I had no friends before you all [weepy while talking]. Also, during the final focus group, Luisa noted: I feel welcome and safe. This time [direct parent] very important to me with other mothers what I need to do. It is very good because we share opinions. I learn from you all.

The notion that the women learned from one another supports all three of the themes identified as the practices of the program. They spoke English to each other in spite of feeling embarrassed at the beginning of the program. They supported each other through language and parenting struggles; everyone's feelings were validated when they spoke up. Susan said, "You make me feel special [gestured to the other mothers] ... I appreciate the other mom's advice... other moms say I have this problem – oh, me too." All of this created and contributed to the beautiful sisterhood between the women in the program.

## **5.7 Analysis and Discussion**

The themes identified in Chapter 4—including building community through communication, sisterhood, and enhancing mothering skills in Canada—were mainly evident during lunch, direct parent time, and shared parent/child reading time, as these were the activities in the program where the mothers had the greatest opportunities to speak in English, share stories, advice, concerns and so forth in a supportive and empowering group of mothers, as well as expand their networks with the facilitators. As mentioned, many of the codes were overlapping and the three themes were hard to separate. As Jozi said, "I saw a friend I haven't seen since November, he was like, seriously Jozi, your English has improved so much! It's since

all of you, and Lara, Jane and Michelle. I love you guys with all my heart.” This excerpt highlights the connection between communication, sisterhood, and parenting.

The codes in the data show that the sub-theme English language learning (which comprises reading and writing) accounted for the most codes in the R2R program. This desire to read and speak English was based on the mothers’ needs and aspirations, and not operating under a parent-deficit model that often features single practice solutions such as sending books home as a means to increase time spent reading with children (Auerbach 1991). Many such programs often focus on one type of literacy event, such as story reading, at the expense of others of which many undermine oral forms of literacy and cultural-specific practices. Using the life experiences of the mothers and asking them to generate the topics acted as a safeguard to ensure the curriculum was relevant to their needs and valued their practices. It also helped the facilitators understand the culturally and linguistically diverse lived experiences of the families navigating challenging social situations - a positive outcome of family literacy programs as identified by Anderson, Smythe, and Shapiro (2005). In some ways, parents were being assimilated into the dominant culture with the sharing of Canadian values and norms and by having an English medium of instruction; however, it can also be seen as a form of inclusion, acting as a way of providing parents with more inclusive understandings of their target communities. This is consistent with findings from Watkins, Razee, and Richters (2012) that “emphasises the need for teachers to teach English in English and refrain from using other languages not spoken by all students” (p. 138) in literacy-based programs for non-English speakers.

The type of instruction, which began with new information, linked overt instruction to situated practice which, in essence, becomes more like teacher scaffolding than teacher-centred transmission pedagogy (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008). In the case of the R2R program, the two

happened concurrently, as the situated practice arose through the discussions of the material presented and the material presented a result of discussions. Each question generated was discussed in great detail by the facilitators and the mothers. When appropriate, community resources and online resources were made available. Examples included libraries (books, felt boards, puppets), free online reading programs, story times, apps, and free teaching materials. Lara followed up each week on the WhatsApp chat and provided more free resources, both online and community based. Overt instruction and situated practice are two important components of multiliteracies pedagogy (NLG, 1996).

I look to multiliteracies as a model that incorporates many of the successful features of the R2R program. Multiliteracies consciously, consistently, and explicitly draws upon cultural diversity as an asset in learning and gives attention to the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity amongst learners, including offering innovative approaches to language acquisition and support for English language learners (Gee, 2001; Ntelioglou, Fannin, Montanera, & Cummins, 2014). As Cope and Kalantzis (2009) argued, “The logic of multiliteracies is one that recognizes that meaning making is an active, transformative process, and a pedagogy based on that recognition is more likely to open up viable life courses for a world of change and diversity” (p. 175). During direct adult time, the main pedagogical practices were overt instruction, situated practice, and critical reflection that led to transformed practices, which are the four tenets of the multiliteracies framework (NLG, 1996). In the context of the R2R program, critical reflection took place both outside and inside of the program. Inside the program, critical framing took place during the ongoing dialogue each week during the direct adult time. Through these weekly conversations, the mothers had the opportunity to come back to the group and discuss what they tried, what worked (and did not), and to learn from their new experiences. Linking critical

reflection to overt instruction and situated practice through dialogue and questioning made the concepts and experiences more grounded and concrete, and less theoretical and ideological, thus providing tangible practices and ways for the mothers to invest in their goals in signing up for the program.

## **5.8 Chapter Summary**

This chapter addressed the first research question: How was learner investment integrated into the co-constructed practices of the R2R program? Learner investment was integrated into the R2R program such that the practices of building community through communication, sisterhood, and enhancing mothering skills in Canada evolved into co-constructed practices between the mothers and the program which resulted in a distributed form of leadership. Programming shifted away from teacher-directed, top-down, standardized curricula and took an egalitarian approach, with a sharing of power between the teacher and the student in learning, the curriculum, its contents, and methods. The degree of the mothers' investment shaped the program and enhanced the range of opportunities available to them through the practices of the program in two main ways: social and academic. The social aspects of the program that kept the mothers invested were the social network, lunch, and the relationship with facilitators, and the academic aspects included English language learning and parenting (mothering in this case) information exchanges. Both the social and academic were presented through the curriculum that was co-created by the mothers and the program and predicated on dialogue and the type of instruction that validated the mothers' life worlds.

The findings from this study highlight the multiple functions of family literacy programs for immigrant and refugee background mothers, and the ways both academic and social

outcomes are shaped by not only the practices of the programs, but also the degree of parental investment in the practices of a given program. Family literacy programs more broadly play a crucial social function, providing women with a space to encounter others in similar situations and, in turn, to discover, as Jane said (field notes, February 20, informal conversation), “that they’re not alone in this world.”

In this way, community-based adult education organizations facilitate access to such resources as emotional support, expanded social networks, and relief from loneliness and emotional distress. Family literacy programs provide a site for social interaction where individuals can exchange advice, information, encouragement, and other resources. In many cases, practitioners also provide access to material resources through referrals to social service agencies, information about employment and children’s schooling, community service events, access to food, transportation, and free childcare. Walter (2004) noted that “the affection and respect the women [in his study] had for the literacy teacher, was a key aspect in the creation and valuing of the social space” (p. 435). This important social component took place in the R2R program while the mothers became more proficient speakers of English, learned about Canadian culture, and had opportunities to share mothering advice and concerns.

The following narrative illustrates how the direct adult classes connected with and harnessed the agency and aspirations associated with motherhood in shaping a new learning identity for Jozi. She expressed how she is invested in her daughter’s future and has felt increased confidence while learning new literacies. By the end of the program, as shared in the final focus group (June 5), her future aspirations center around being the best possible role model/mother for her daughter:

It [R2R program] gives me confidence. It makes me feel better. It makes me feel more like I can go and get what I need to achieve and... be who I want to be. I just want to be like... someone with a job. Have money. I want to be able to treat Sari. I used to get holidays when I was younger, and it was exciting, and I want to be able to do stuff like that. At the moment we are alone, and I can't really do that. Now I know I can do it.... I want to give her the best childhood and I need to work and get a job and make some money. I've been through times of depression, but now I try and stay positive... I've been at the lowest place in life... You all made me stronger. I want Sari to look up to me. I want to be able to buy a car and drive her and have her be proud of her Mom. I will work as hard as I need to for her. I want to be the best Mom for my girl.

Early in the program, Jozi expressed feelings of being stuck in a reality from which she saw no way out. The R2R program provided her with a way forward; learner investment enhanced her range of possibilities for how she saw her and her daughter's future selves. The happiness and dreams to which she aspires, she now believes are possible. As Darvin and Norton (2015) explained, "it is through desire and imagination that they are able to invest in practices that can transform their lives" (p. 46).

In sum, family literacy programs need to recognize that immigrant and refugee background parents come to educational programs with many strengths. Family literacy program practitioners need to find ways to incorporate the parents because not only do parents want to learn, but they also have much to teach.

## **Chapter 6: Findings: Motherhood and the R2R Program**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The second research question in the study was: How was the identity “mother” socially constructed within the R2R program? The constructs of “bad” mothers, “good” mothers, and “better” mothers came up repeatedly in the data and, as such, I sought to investigate the extent to which the co-constructed practices in the R2R resulted in changes to how the mothers viewed themselves – changes to their identity “mother.” Mentioned as a reason for signing up for the program was the notion of learning how to become a “better mother” through the curriculum. The mothers alluded to feeling like “bad” mothers at the beginning of the program in a variety of ways, such as not being proficient speakers of English, difficulty in helping children with homework, not being familiar with Canadian parenting, or even judging themselves due to their own perceptions of what it means to be a “good” mother. Regardless of mother tongue and years in Canada, all of the mothers mentioned wanting to be “better” mothers at some point during the program. Some of the mothers did not mention this phenomenon until the end of the program as they gained confidence and felt they became “better” upon reflection by the end.

Given this analysis followed an iterative and recursive process, and at times a deductive process, I went back to the data with the sole purpose of categorizing the notion of becoming “better” mothers. Insights from the data show that changes I initially coded as “behavioral changes” are, in fact, behavioral changes relating to motherhood. The mothers learned from each other and the facilitators each week through dialogue and overt instruction, and a large component of what was being learned were parenting strategies that made the mothers feel “better” about their abilities to be “good” mothers. Some strategies included: using “I messages,”



taking deep breaths when stressed, replacing sugary grocery shopping items to avoid tooth decay, using patience, building a social network, avoiding yelling, and so forth. Such were the behavioral changes that contributed to the mothers feeling like “better” mothers – feeling better about their new arsenal of strategies. This research suggests the mothers underwent significant identity transformations and that the co-constructed practices of the program changed how they felt about themselves as mothers.

## **6.2 The “Good Parent”**

The review of literature as discussed in Chapter 2 discusses deficit models of families and family literacy programs and speaks to having moved (even if just in rhetoric) from a deficit model to a strengths-based model. However, family literacy ideology is in competition with beliefs beyond these programs in a much wider context of how parents are viewed in Western societies. The “good parent” of the preschool child is a figure frequently invoked in discussions of how to give children the best possible social and educational chances in life (Nichols et al., 2009). In the changing policy landscape of early childhood education and care, “Westernized” governments are assuming increasing authority in relation to “proper” child-rearing and preparing young children for school, believing they have a legitimate and active role to play in assisting parents in doing the best they can by their children (Gillies, 2005; Millei & Lee, 2007; Nichols & Jurvansuu, 2008). Such socio-political climates foster a proliferation of both government-supported and commercially sponsored services and products designed to assist parents in this process of taking on the identity of the “good” parent. I argue that this phenomenon is of relevance to family literacy educators and researchers because of the ways in which governments are placing particular importance on literacy learning and assessment in the

early years of life (e.g., Grieshaber, 2000; Nutbrown, Hannon, & Morgan, 2005) and, therefore, raising expectations that parents and other caregivers of preschool children will take on increasing responsibility for children's early literacy learning.

Whether through purchasing educational resources, classes, or through social interaction, the key identity for the parent is that of guarantor of the child's future educational success (Nichols et al., 2009). If children are seen as "ready," the "good parent" has played their part. What may establish a "bad parent" identity would be the idea that their children are somehow not ready, and parents are to blame, as was the belief of many of the mothers in the R2R program.

### **6.3 Motherhood Discourse**

Recognition of the role of the family in learning has a long history in Canada. The first known Canadian family educator, Adelaide Hoodless, born in 1857, made the prescient statement "A Nation cannot rise above the level of its homes" (British Columbia Women's Institute, 1892). Hoodless saw education as a means of implementing social reform and worked tirelessly to promote the education of families. Known for her directness, Hoodless said, "Educate a boy and you educate a man, but educate a girl and you educate a family" (British Columbia Women's Institute, 1892). Her point was that the home and what is learned there are central to education. In this statement, she also placed the responsibility of educating children on mothers.

What it means to mother is quite complex, as women often have a variety of roles and responsibilities that are in constant flux that can shape their identities (Rizk, 2019). While motherhood is largely a social construct (Gatrell 2005; Griffith & Smith, 2005), expectations of motherhood are a reality for most women. Expectations of motherhood often center around

educational practices with children, which has been documented as a highly gendered phenomenon (Lareau, 2011; Nichols et al., 2009). Studies have often proposed that there is a positive and important relationship between the level of parental involvement and school achievement (Dudley-Marling, 2002; Lareau, 2011; Lynch, 2008; Nutbrown et al., 2005). Helping their children with school achievement was a key reason the mothers gave for signing up or staying in the R2R program.

Griffith and Smith (2005) coined the term “mothering discourse” as a way to capture the “work, care, and worries of mothers in relation to their children’s schooling” (p. 33), and how such discourses can largely structure the work that mothers participate in. Mothering discourse can shape the way mothering is experienced and the expectations that come along with it, and ultimately influence mothers’ own perceptions of their roles as their children’s first and most important educators (Carson, 2009; Dudley-Marling, 2002; Gilbert, 2008; Griffith & Smith, 2005). Such discourses help make visible the invisible sets of expectations that women as mothers are “supposed” to take part in, in relation to their children’s educational practices. Such expectations maintain that mothers will go above and beyond what is taught in school – taking trips to libraries or reading to their child every night for instance – all of which are extras to the education children receive at schools (Griffith & Smith, 2005) including family literacy programs.

#### **6.4 Mothers in the R2R Program**

There were two distinct groups of mothers in the R2R program: proficient speakers of English who had lived in Canada for many years and newcomers at the start of the program with limited English proficiency. I often wondered why some of the mothers who were proficient

speakers of English came back to the program. It was only after analyzing the data that I realized these two streams of mothers all had the same end goal: the desire to become “better” mothers; this identity “mother” brought the women together. Identity in general is viewed as a bond that brings people together and allows them to relate to each other. Identity extends to people “a common sense of space of unified sameness” (Letherby, 1994, p. 12).

While their reasons for initially joining the R2R program may have reflected an academic or social orientation, their reasons for staying and the benefits gained were much greater than their initial focus (although a few did articulate the desire to become “better” mothers from the outset). The mothers stayed because they were provided with opportunities that supported their goals, gave voice to their needs and social practices, and seemed to enhance their personal growth especially in the area of motherhood. During the last focus group (June 5), Jozi said: “Now I feel stronger... I have learned what to expect and what not to... and I enjoy Sari more and am a better mother to her. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.” This was followed by Peta, who concluded the focus group by saying: “Now we are all stronger mothers.” All of the mothers stood up and hugged Peta and each other, and there was a hard-to-describe feeling of strength and accomplishment from the mothers.

The data show that the mothers made gains in both social and academic areas, regardless of why they initially joined the program. Initially, the mothers with limited English proficiency viewed language and literacy education as the means to become “better” mothers, while the returning mothers viewed the parenting curriculum and increased social networks as their means to becoming “better” mothers. The following three sections account for the social and academic domains and are broken down by: motherhood and parenting, motherhood, English and Canadian culture, and motherhood and social networks. They explore the various reasons

the mothers signed up for the R2R program and how these goals resulted in feeling like “better” mothers by the end of the program.

#### **6.4.1 Motherhood and Parenting**

The R2R program included mothers who return to the program year after year. For example, Tati, who was born in Vancouver, has been returning to the program for four years. When I asked her during a home visit on March 18 why she continues to come back, her reply was as follows:

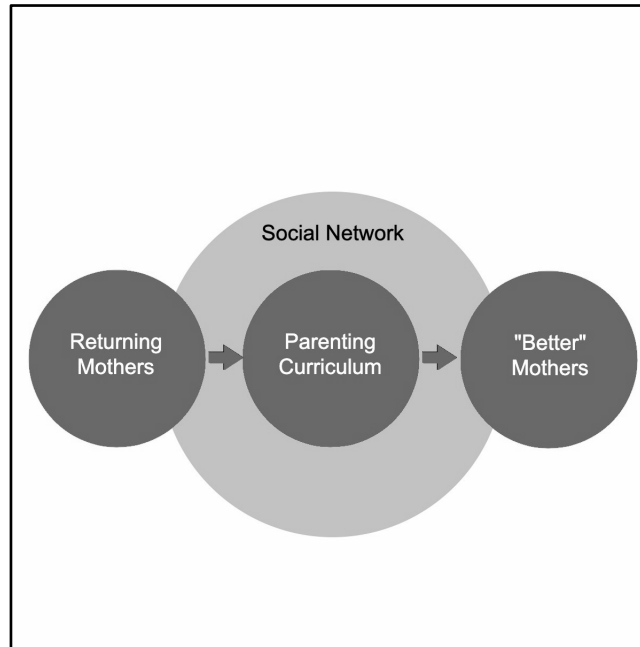
Every year, I make new friends that are enduring. I continue to see these women outside of the program long after the program ends. I come back year after to year to a slightly different program, but the conversations are always new, and I strive to always become a better mom.

Ingrid returned for a second year and explained to me when I was in her home (February 12) that: “I feel badly that I didn’t have enough to offer Emilio [13-year-old son] and decided to try and become a better parent the second time around.” Carly has also been in the program with Tati since its inception four years ago. When I visited her home (January 29) and asked her why she returns each year, her response was “I have learned how to become a better parent.”

As shown in Figure 6.1, the returning mothers came back to the R2R program because they wanted to become “better” mothers and saw the curriculum, along with the input of the other mothers, as a means to achieve that goal.

**Figure 6.1**

***The Relationship between Returning Mothers to the R2R Program and Their Idea of Becoming “Better” Mothers***



#### **6.4.2 Motherhood, English, and Canadian Culture**

There are many issues to resettlement that include the uncomfortable feelings newcomers sense from speakers of the dominant language that, in turn, create what Derwing and Waugh (2012) call “social distance” In a report on the relationship between language skills and the social integration of Canada’s adult immigrants, Derwing and Waugh (2012) noted that the greater the social distance between two linguistic groups, the harder it is to “bridge into” the new language, which is due in part to the difficulty of finding native speakers who are willing to talk to newcomers with limited language skills.

In the context of the R2R program, this social distance was felt by the mothers as judgements against them relating to their ability to be “good” mothers. The mothers often spoke about feeling judged by others as previously discussed in Section 5.5.2.6. Over lunch one day

with Mosa (field notes, April 10), she explained that she avoids speaking English at work as much as possible because she is embarrassed. She said: “I know how the other workers feel about me. They don’t really listen to me. I can feel it how they look at me.” The following excerpt was taken verbatim from my fieldnotes (February 6) from the direct adult session:

The moms engaged in a discussion about how others judge us as parents. Jozi told the story of how one woman called her out in A & W when Sari wouldn’t stay with her and kept running back and forth to a chair while she was trying to order. Finally, she let her play on the chair and Sari fell off. The woman at the next table called her a bad mom and another woman stood up for her saying she warned her daughter repeatedly. Luisa spoke of being embarrassed at the reaction of others to her parenting. She said she parents worse when others are watching her and judging her; that she never had the same feelings of being judged like she has since coming to Canada. Carly told her to ignore people around her. She said she lets her kids just cry in the middle of the mall and she just walks away. Carly told her, ‘Relax, don’t sweat. It doesn’t matter what people think of you.’ To which Jozi replied, ‘They don’t treat you the same as me because you don’t sound different like I do. They think I am a bad mom.’

The feelings expressed by Jozi speak to the idea of social distance and how people speaking the dominant language make newcomers feel inadequate, which compounds the fact that they are insecure to begin with. This creates an “us vs. them” mentality and is the basis for why family literacy practitioners need to validate newcomers’ knowledge, language, culture, and experiences, which is critical in educational spheres.

The mothers in the study experienced ongoing difficulties navigating unfamiliar and complex social, legal, education, and government systems and structures, as well as in

communicating with service providers. Some expressed sadness that they struggle to maintain parental authority and confidence while being reliant on their children's greater English language proficiency, which was described as a source of stress for some mothers. For example, in my first home visit with Luisa (Jan 31), she said: "I no always feel like the mother. Valeria [6-year-old daughter] read and I no understand and no help." Additionally, on my first home visit with Susan, her eldest son helped with English translation at the start of our meeting until Susan expressed sadness that: "I no want Juan to speak for me. He is too young to know," and she switched to Google Translate for the remainder of our visit. Mosa expressed her embarrassment about reading to her four-year-old daughter: "My [older] kids tell me not to speak or read in English, so I feel embarrassed to read, even to Tess." The mothers felt the pressure to be "better" mothers based on their own feelings of insecurity stemming from their lack of English proficiency. Luisa lived in Vancouver for less than two years when she joined the R2R program and a reason she gave me for joining the program was that "I need to learn about English so I can be better mother to my girls" (home visit, January 31).

The mothers' discussions around the language barrier and communication difficulties illustrate feelings of being overwhelmed by the many demands and challenges of resettlement. Language proficiency is an essential part of resettlement and both directly and indirectly affects well-being through increasing self-efficacy, reducing social isolation, and enhancing educational and vocational opportunities (Watkins et al., 2012), all of which facilitate building community through communication and enhancing mothering skills in Canada.

In describing program benefits, many mothers suggested they learned new ways to accomplish what they were already doing. For example, cooking healthier in their homes (they were already cooking, buying groceries, etc.) made them feel like they were taking better care of

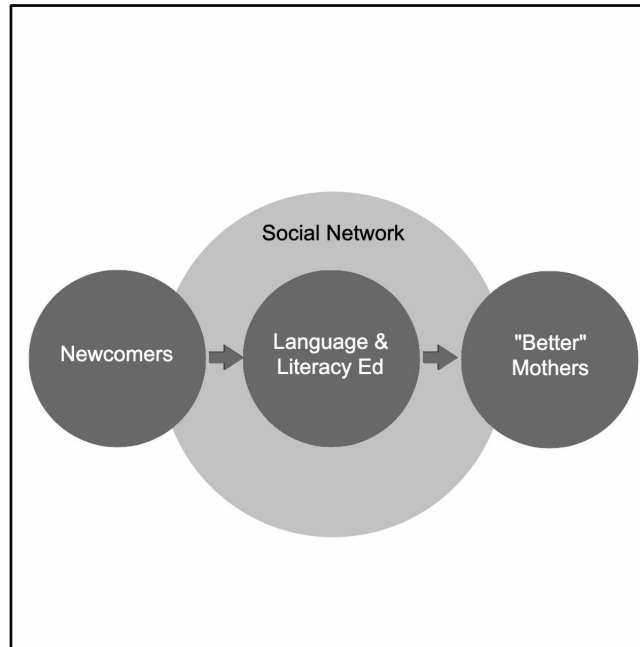


their families and made them feel like “better” mothers. Literacy supported their personal and family goals (homework, reading, corresponding with teachers) and expanded their worlds in important directions. Some of the mothers attempted to fit literacy into the ongoing activities in their lives: homework, Bible reading, games, cooking, conversations, and work outside of the home for a few of the mothers.

The research suggests that the mothers see language and literacy as a necessary means to integrate into their new communities, which to them is largely about ensuring their children are doing well by achieving academically and socially. Literacy learning is directly linked to identity, belonging, and citizenship. Educators ought to develop new literacy programs that build upon an asset model of human development and learning that recognizes and affirms the unique experiences and literacy practices of learners from all over the world (Magro, 2019a). Figure 6.2 illustrates how the mothers view language and literacy education as a way forward to become “better” mothers with the support of a social network.

**Figure 6.2**

***The Relationship between Newcomers to the R2R Program and Their idea of Becoming “Better Mothers”***



The mothers spoke of wanting to do homework with their children, read with them, have culturally appropriate conversations, volunteer in their children’s schools, and have their children’s friends come over without a language barrier. They view language and literacy as ways to be viewed by others as more competent as mothers which, in turn, affects how they feel about themselves and their ability to help their children achieve academically. By instilling confidence and positivity in the mothers, the program helped them feel more confident by removing barriers to making friends and feeling comfortable in their children’s schools. Newcomers also look to family literacy programs, often as a tangential reason, to learn cultural expectations of parenting in order to help with their integration to Canadian society. As Peta said in the direct adult class (field notes, May 8): “We raise our children different. Need to raise here. I want to be a good mom and make my children proud.”

Some of the mothers even spoke of leaving their countries of origin for the purpose of attaining a better education for their children. When I visited Luisa and her husband, David, in their home (January 31, 2019), they explained to me (taken verbatim from my field notes) why they moved to Vancouver in spite of the financial struggles they knew awaited them:

David spoke of the education in Spain which he was worried about for his daughters in that it is class driven ‘and if you have no money, you go to the worst possible school with poor facilities, poor ambience, and bullying. They claim education is free, but they make you pay for books and other costs.’ He went on to say that books cost upwards of 450 euros per year/child. ‘We can never afford. What can we do for our girls? We have to leave. We have to give them opportunity.’

Part of the opportunity David and Luisa spoke of is learning English in order to help not only their daughters’ integration into school and a new community, but also for the two of them to attain their own opportunities in Canada.

#### **6.4.3 Motherhood and Social Networks**

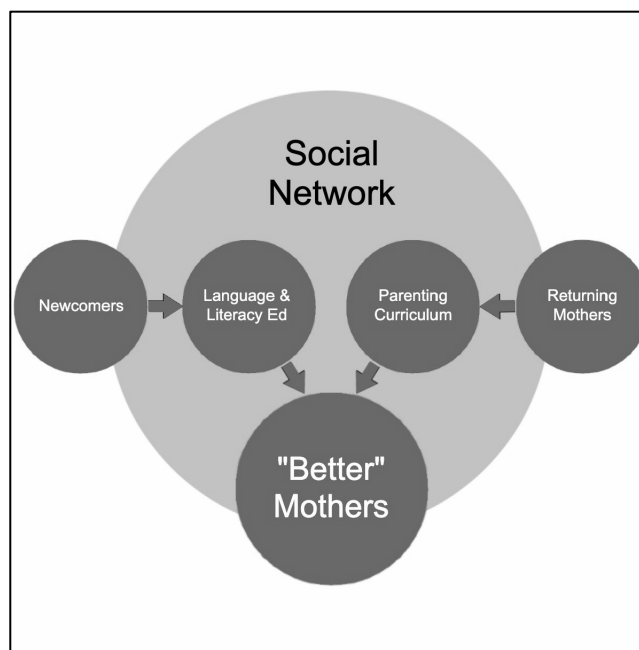
All of the mothers discussed signing up for the R2R program to network with other mothers. Parenting issues and the desire to become “better” mothers span all cultural and socioeconomic lines and it is therefore important to consider how this issue can be incorporated into the context of family literacy programs. The format of the R2R program, notably the direct adult component followed by lunch, encouraged building a social and supportive network whereby there were opportunities to foster and encourage open and honest dialogue. It was in this space where many of the mothers’ feelings about their views on parenting (amongst other areas) were raised, questioned, and reflected upon. Insights from this research suggest that the interactions between the mothers and facilitators helped change their perceptions of themselves

as mothers as they were able to incorporate new views and ideas into their existing repertoires (see Chapter 7).

The development of social networks was integral to the success and likely retention of participants in the program. The mothers spoke of feeling isolated and “trapped” at home alone with their children. This contributed to their feelings of not wanting to “play with” and spend time with their children day in and day out, which added to their feelings of being “bad” mothers. They perceived of not wanting to play with their children all day as being “bad” mothers, but they realized through dialogue with other mothers that their feelings were rooted in their own feelings of loneliness and boredom. As a result of the program, the mothers reported feeling closer to their children and being better able to handle their day to day lives. As Eliza said in the final focus group on June 5: “No one enjoys being alone all day. This gave me the chance to be with other moms like me. And when I come home, I have more patience for Maya. I feel more happy to play together.” Figure 6.3 shows the social network as being integral to both the acquisition and development of language and literacy, as well as the acquisition of new parenting skills and strategies, all leading to the mothers’ changing views of themselves in their identity “mothers.”

**Figure 6.3**

***The Foundation of the R2R Program Rooted in the Social Network Based on the Mothers' Perceptions***



The following excerpt, taken verbatim from my fieldnotes on May 1 from the direct adult conversation, highlights how the social network tied in with the curriculum served to transform the mothers' feelings about themselves:

Jozi asked, 'What is a spank?' Peta said she was at a parenting class that said not to spank your children and that she does spank her kids and feels like a bad mom. Tati said it's cultural; that in Mexico it's okay to spank your kids, but not in Canada. Lara told Peta she is not a bad mom but could look to alternate ways of discipline if she feels badly or like that behavior makes her feel like a bad mom. She said no one is 'bad'; we make bad decisions and take bad actions, but we are not bad people.

As a follow up, I went to visit Susan four months after the program ended in her home (October 2019). The following excerpt verbatim from my field notes highlights the changes Susan identified that impacted her identity as a mother as a result of the program:

MG: Have you changed as a mother as a result of the R2R program?

Susan: I change myself

I was very strict mom

Now I don't do like that

I ask lots of questions after school

It's fun

I feel good now

I now not so strict

So good country

Now my kids talk to me

Because of help from you and Lara and the others [mothers].

The women needed various forms of capital, for example the ability to hire tutors (which was suggested to Susan), to be able to stay at home to help their children, to negotiate English and the dominant culture, to share information with knowledgeable friends and family, and to help their children with their homework.

Even as they acquired increased levels of economic, cultural, social, and educational resources, they continued to face boundaries of exclusion, many of which may have been based on their own perceptions: their English was not good enough, their children would not speak English, and they were not of the right culture or did not speak the dominant language. Several mothers said that they had very little or no contact with their children's school or teachers, and

often attributed this fact to their inability to speak English. Luisa (field notes, direct adult, April 10, 2019) shared her experience at a “Meet the Teacher” night at her daughter’s school: “When I attend some meeting, and when there is, when there are only Canadians, Canadian parents there, I feel very nervous. And when I speak English, always I feel nervous. They are looking at me, they are listening to me then.” Eliza shared a similar feeling of not wanting to confront her daughter’s teacher when she was feeling that Maya was unhappy. The mothers gave Eliza the confidence to speak up when she next saw her daughter’s teacher and she was invited to come in and observe the class. She was proud of herself when she came back to the mothers the following week and shared: “I learn what made Maya cry and I solved with her teacher. Thank you for listening and helping me.” Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall, and Gordon (2009) stated that parents who were previously marginalized can gain “voice and presence” by getting involved with their children’s school. The mothers in this study spoke about the changes in their relationship with the school as a result of attending the R2R program and those resulting interactions on how they felt as mothers. Eliza further said that “the conversations we had helped me to become a better parent. I feel more confident to speak to Maya’s teacher” (field notes, final focus group, June 5, 2019). Luisa also shared gaining confidence at her daughter’s school: “You show me new ways to talk to Lea’s teacher. I used translator before. Now I email in English so I remember what to say. Make me feel like I am a good mom now” (direct parent, field notes, April 10). It is evident that when family literacy programs engage parents effectively, relationships between home, school, and community can be transformed and social capital acquired.

Although not expressed as a reason for signing up for the R2R program, all of the mothers (except Jozi) spoke about how they were raising bilingual children, as it came up in week one of the direct adult time. It was a recurring topic as it was of great concern to the

mothers to maintain their home languages while wanting their children to integrate into their English-speaking communities. Upon analysis, this idea contributed to the theme of building community through communication and contributed to the mothers' feelings about their mothering.

### **6.5 Motherhood and Raising Bilingual Children**

The mothers all indicated the tension between wanting their children to know their home languages so they could communicate with their families (in their home countries), as well as learning English so they could integrate into their target communities. A site of struggle for the mothers was how to change and transcend marginalization, yet remain true to their beliefs, values, hopes, and dreams in a way that did not merely imply submissive assimilation. Changes in parenting practices must therefore be regarded as meaningful by the parents. Many of the conversations that emerged from the mothers suggested they wanted to learn Canadian norms in ways that are recognized as appropriate, adequate, and “good” from an institutional perspective. In some cases, the mothers explicitly pointed out their struggles specifically in the area of longing to fit in vis-à-vis English language learning versus wanting to maintain their home language(s).

While the mothers all spoke of (at one time or another) their desire to speak English, and of wanting their children to be successful at school by speaking, reading, and writing in English, they feared and resisted speaking English in their homes. In my initial conversations with the mothers, they spoke of their home languages as being tied to their cultural heritage, while English was largely operational in the sense that it was the language of instruction at school and acted as a means of integrating, getting a job, understanding the history of Canada, establishing



contacts, and connecting with the English-speaking community. Many of the mothers found the R2R program through the Latina Moms Facebook page as they were looking to meet other Spanish speakers. As an example, Peta said during my home visit (January 29, verbatim from field notes):

She wants her kids to be around other kids speaking their home languages as well as English. Speaking Spanish is very important to Peta, so her kids can communicate with their families and to keep the door open in case they wish to return to Mexico one day.

Although looking for that home language connection upon signing up for the program, the needs and wants of the mothers changed as they met the other mothers. The following excerpt on January 18 is taken verbatim from my field notes from my first home visit with Eliza, who is raising her daughter with three languages (her mother tongue is Spanish, her husband's is French, and since moving to Canada, English has been added):

Interestingly, her hope was to connect with Spanish speakers, but her favourite contact is the Japanese mom whose family is also raising their son with three languages:

Japanese, German, and English. Both women have a lot of concerns as to how to best teach all three languages and like to discuss their challenges, concerns and successes.

Many of the children represented their two languages (home language and English) equally in some contexts because they went to school all day and picked up English quite quickly. The mothers seemed to fear and embrace their children's acquisition of the English language as they had concerns about their children not having acquired enough of their mother tongues to be able to maintain their home language or reach a high level of proficiency.

A competing concern, however, was that the children would be overwhelmed by additional language classes outside of English. When I initially met with Luisa (and her

husband, David) in their home (January 31), Luisa said: “Valeria [six- year-old daughter] wants we to speak English in our home. She wants me to learn to read. I afraid she won’t also speak Spanish. And she will forget because she is so young.”

While Peta began the program with a Spanish-only policy in their homes, as the program progressed, she began allowing her children to watch television in both English and Spanish, as she realized that if she wanted her daughter to feel comfortable speaking English outside of their home, that she must not position it as “wrong” inside their home. She even changed her messaging to her children to reinforce how she felt (verbatim from field notes, direct adult, March 6):

She [Peta] is trying to encourage her daughter to speak English because as she tells her, ‘You’re in Canada and you need to speak English too.’ Her daughter is slowly warming to the idea of speaking English when they are out.

As the months progressed, and perhaps as a result of the R2R program, an affective side of English language learning developed whereby the mothers equated happiness with the gains and benefits of their new language. It seems they became comfortable with the idea of hybrid identities, whereby they combined elements of their lives from their home countries with elements of their new lives in Canada. This was particularly evident in conversations about language, food, and holidays. As an example, Tati shared that on Mother’s Day, her husband bought tortas and explained to the mothers (who did not know) what tortas are and how they incorporate Mexican culture into their home largely with food. She further shared the following excerpt with the mothers (verbatim from my field notes, May 8):

Tati’s family speaks ‘Spanglish’ at home. Her husband speaks primarily in Spanish to the kids and she speaks a mix of both. Tati’s mom came in the apartment and joined us

and told me she wishes Tati spoke more Spanish to her kids. It is extremely important for both Tati and her husband that their kids maintain Spanish, however the kids show no preference within the home to what language they prefer to be spoken to, but often reply in English. Tati and her husband are happy with the mix (Spanglish). They use many Spanish terms in their daily lives, for example, the kids call their parents: *mama* and *papa* and their grandparents: “*abuela*” and “*abuelo*”, their uncles: “*tio*”; milk is always “*leche*” and more is “*mas*.”

The mothers looked up to Carly and Tati’s advice (verbatim from my field notes on March 18):

My observations are that the women seek out Tati for translations and advice. She and Carly appear to be viewed as the ‘*mamas*’ of the group. It could be their English proficiency, personalities or length of time and/or comfort in the program. I believe it has to do with their having raised bilingual children and the ease and comfort they share going between English and Spanish with their own children. I see it when they [Tati and Carly] talk about language, culture and their (and their children’s) connections to their parents(grandparents) who live in Mexico. The mothers often write down comments and nod their heads in agreement when Tati and Carly speak.

Tati and Carly represent the other mothers’ imagined community of having successfully raised bilingual children.

Luisa’s older daughter became proficient in English within the first school year living in Canada, which caused changes in their family dynamics as the “student” and “teacher” roles reversed. This caused Luisa to view her children’s learning as integral to her own. English became associated with what she was not yet able to do, as she felt her limited English skills held her back from functioning in Canadian society, including helping her daughter with her

homework, as is fundamental to feeling like a “good” mother. The data suggest that while Spanish is still the only language spoken at home and will remain Luisa’s tie to the family’s cultural heritage, she has also developed, in some sense, a familial connection to English because of her daughter. In an attempt to bridge their new and old lives, Luisa saw English as a necessary investment for herself in order to be a “good” mother.

## **6.6 Analysis and Discussion**

Cultural expectations of motherhood do not exist in isolation, but are in fact, learned both from mothers’ own experiences, and from so-called “experts” – teachers, doctors, spouses, children, and other mothers (Rizk, 2019). Mothers often learn what they should or should not do in response to social pressures, norms, and values in a given cultural context. The arrival of newcomers would therefore suggest that some change would have to take place given that the societal context has changed for these new mothers. Darvin and Norton (2015) explained how entering new spaces requires language learners to convert their existing capital into something that is valued in their new spaces, which may be a site of struggle given that what may be valued in their home countries could be devalued in their new countries (for example, language and parenting practices).

When immigrant and refugee background mothers seemingly do not change their ways, educators seem to look for the reasons why they show a lack of parental involvement in their children’s education. This research shows that, consistent with previous research, some immigrant and refugee background parents lack the host community knowledge of what is expected of them and how to live up to their parental responsibilities in their new country of residence (Bitew & Ferguson, 2010; Dennesen et al., 2007; Ibrahim, Small, & Grimley, 2009;

Vera et. al., 2012). For instance, Bitew and Ferguson (2010) wrote that in Ethiopia, parents traditionally only contact schools when there are severe problems with the child. Consequently, Ethiopian immigrant parents in the United States tended not to contact the schools, unless they thought there was a serious issue that needed to be addressed. Additionally, researchers found that many immigrant and refugee background parents are perceived both by teachers and by themselves as lacking the necessary skills and competencies in order to adequately support their children either because of language difficulties, personal educational attainment, computer illiteracy and/or time issues due to strenuous work hours (Bitew & Ferguson, 2010; Ibrahim et al., 2009; Ladky & Peterson, 2009). As a result, researchers and policy makers need to ask the question of who and what must change, as well as how we can work on facilitating the social transformation of immigrant and refugee background mothers to counter marginalization processes in a way that allows for them to maintain their own cultural ways of being while undergoing transformation.

While expert advice is regularly offered under the umbrella of “parents,” in reality, the directives that are given tend to be addressed specifically towards mothers – often containing prescriptive messages about how “good” mothers should behave, which suggest that mothers should devote most, if not all, their time to raising their children (Gatrell, 2005). Yet, despite the fact that there remain broader expectations of mothering, there are profound differences in terms of how parental involvement is experienced, as not all mothers have access to the same social, economic, and cultural resources to support their children’s schooling (Dudley-Marling, 2002; Lareau, 2011). Helping children with homework or providing enriching after-school activities often entail time, space, money, and equipment (technology) that not all mothers or “parents” can afford.

Despite the best of intentions of being welcoming to all, there is reason to suggest that family literacy programs are also highly gendered, as they unwittingly perpetuate stereotypical depictions of literacy as a woman's domain (Gadsden, 2004). While such programs, in general, refer to "parents" through both oral and written messaging, scholars suggest it would be much more accurate to speak of "mothers" instead (Casper, 2003; Nutbrown, et al. 2005; Rizk, 2019; Smythe & Illeris, 2002). In the context of the R2R program, one of the mother's work schedules changed and she was unable to bring her two children to the program so she asked Jane and Lara if her husband could bring her children to the program. Both Jane and Lara had reservations about what a man/father would have done to the dynamics of the group. They were happy with the ways the mothers appeared to be bonding and the extent to which they appeared to be invested in the program and they did not want to change the positive dynamic of the group. Given the program was at the half-way point and the women had bonded in very meaningful ways, Jane and Lara decided that they would keep the R2R program for that session to "mothers" only, which is counter to their "universal access" program philosophy. In keeping to mothers only, the focus of the curriculum was bound by defining the women's learning in relation to their children as mothers.

Examining mothering discourse in the context of schooling calls into question the practice of assigning mothers individual responsibility for their children's success. Moreover, it challenges educational programs such as family literacy to rethink the ways they target mothers for self-improvement. Is teaching mothers how to be "better" mothers reasonable in the face of these women's challenging circumstances? Is it fair to expect mothers to transform circumstances that may be well beyond their choosing? Is it appropriate that family literacy programs decide what constitutes a "better" mother and a "successful" education?

In the context of their children's schools, immigrant and refugee background parents are expected to recognize the norms of the school and act accordingly (Hill & Torres, 2010; Rolander, 2018). Attending parent-teacher conferences, becoming active members of the parent teacher association, helping their children with their homework, and signing papers sent home from teachers are all responsibilities that parents are often expected to recognize; however, parents from cultures with different educational norms are not privy to these expectations and may be mischaracterized by school staff as apathetic about their children's education because of their apparent lack of participation (Hill & Torres, 2010). These assumptions—that immigrant and refugee background parents should be familiar with school norms and that they are apathetic about education—cast them as uninvolved in their children's education and place them at a power disadvantage in their children's school.

## **6.7 Chapter Summary**

This chapter discusses findings from the second research question: How was the identity “mother” co-constructed within the practices of the R2R program? A prominent focus in this study is the mothers' profound hopes and desires about their children's' futures. In her study of women living in Mexico, Price (1999) suggested that the mothers were reworking the site of “inner landscapes” of “hopes, dreams, and fears, those spaces within which women reflect on their lives and plan for the future” (p. 49). Central to the mothers' hopes and dreams was the desire to ensure a “better” life for their children than their circumstances may have allowed. In the R2R program, the mothers expressed that they longed for a better future for their children and that they turned to education as a solution.

In the co-constructed practices of the R2R program, findings from my study suggest that immigrant and refugee background mothers seek to “do parenting” differently when they arrive in Canada. This co-constructed process is not merely a process of acquiring certain knowledge or unreflectively taking on the customs and norms of Canadian culture. Interventions based on deficit assumptions of immigrant and refugee background parenting practices attempt to teach skills and know-how that adhere to a too narrow understanding of what parenting is. This research suggests that it is important to consider processes of change where parents ascribe meaning to new parenting practices through active, situated, and reflective approaches to learning. Supporting the mothers by breaking down the barriers and removing the construct that they were somehow “bad” mothers led to a new and positive mothering identities that could, in turn, impact their children’s education and catalyze transformations within the family.

In summary, outcomes from the data suggest that there were six main ways the mother identity was co-constructed through the practices of the R2R program:

- 1) The mothers learned to critically think about behavioural situations (involving their children) and, as a result, to try to solve problems in a positive manner.
- 2) The mothers learned new communication styles such as active listening and using “I messages” to help talk about feelings and important issues.
- 3) The mothers learned to spend more positive time with their children through new ideas and activities that alleviated the boredom they felt prior to the program.
- 4) The mothers changed their thinking and patterns of behaviour to become more positive by including small changes in behaviour such as taking a deep breath before responding to a crisis.



- 5) The mothers discovered new perspectives and gained deeper insight into what is important in their own lives, which they wanted to share with their children to instill pride in their mothers.
- 6) The mothers shared parenting advice with other mothers and gave support to one another, which boosted the mothers' confidence and self-esteem and validated their efforts to be "good" mothers.

Overall, the findings suggest that the mothers' perceived themselves as being "better" mothers by the end of the program.

## **Chapter 7: Findings: Identity and Transformation**

### **7.1 Introduction**

In examining the third research question—To what extent were the mothers’ identities transformed by the practices of the program? —I drew on the theory of transformative learning as explained by Mezirow (1991), and the outcomes based on Hoggan’s (2016) definitions. I investigated the interactions between the mothers and the co-constructed practices of the program, and the extent to which transformation of the mothers’ identities could be seen as an outcome of the program.

The core elements of transformative learning theory include authentic relationships, dialogue, and critical reflection (Taylor, 2009), with the opportunity for women to share their life experiences at the heart of their transformative experiences (Brooks, 2000). Cooley (2007) suggested that the space where women gather facilitates friendship, trust, and transformative learning. While relationships are an integral part of transformative learning for both men and women, studies by Taylor (2009) and Cooley (2007) suggested they are especially important for women, and even more so for marginalized women (English & Irving, 2012). The collective aspect of women’s experiences in groups is significant as well. English and Irving (2012) suggested that women who draw on their life circumstances and work together with other women can undergo transformation.

As explained in Chapter 5, the co-constructed practices of the R2R program impacted the mothers’ strong social network as well as English language learning through shared dialogue and critical reflection. This chapter looks at the impact of these co-constructed practices of the program on the identities of the mothers. Following Norton’s (2013) definition of identity, one

must consider how a person understands their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future. Transformation implies a change or alteration into something qualitatively different (Illeris, 2014). I take the word “transform” from Mezirow’s (1978) theory of transformative learning and use Hoggan’s (2016) theory to operationalize Norton’s aforementioned definition.

## **7.2 Pedagogy, Critical Reflection, and Changes to the Mothers’ Identities**

The pedagogical design used in the R2R program created opportunities for the mothers to engage in meaningful practices within a learning community that supported their developing understanding and conceptual repertoires through explicit instruction at teachable moments. After the mothers critically examined their new literacies in terms of social and cultural relevance and critical reframing, they then had opportunities to apply their new knowledge and forms of expression in ways that impacted their own lived realities.

The starting point for any educational programming must recognize that “our own ways of knowing are no longer the ultimate authority” (Weinstein-Shr, 1995, p. 112). The task, then, is to listen to students, to find out about their lives and cultural contexts, and to make room for their literacy practices in teaching. The premise here is that “the best teachers are those who can listen and learn, not just impart what they know to others” (Street, 1995, p. iii). Teachers need to be aware of their students’ needs and desires so they can then create an atmosphere of inquiry where students feel comfortable asking questions and requesting help with various daily life tasks. A culture of inquiry helps with student engagement because the ideas are being generated by the students and in turn makes the teachers aware of the lived experiences (literacy and otherwise) of their students.

Mezirow (1998) argued that “learning to think for oneself involves becoming critically reflective of assumptions and participating in discourse to validate beliefs, intentions, values and feelings” (p. 197). In this case, it was the participation in the discourse of family literacy that provided the opportunities, topics, and space for said learning to think for oneself. Two common themes of Mezirow’s theory (1997) are the centrality of experience and critical reflection in the process of transformation, which is consistent with the findings in Chapter 5 that highlight how both elements were central to the R2R program. The learner’s experience is the starting point and the subject matter for transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997). Such changes presuppose what Mezirow has termed “transformations,” which are profound, demanding, and quite different from the kinds of learning dealing with the acquisition of knowledge and skills. To facilitate such transformations—i.e., to acquire a broader understanding of one’s insights, attitudes, and perceptions regarding the outside world—usually involves reflection.

However, when systematically reflecting on our insights and assumptions, according to Mezirow (1996), it is not enough to consider how or why one has experienced, thought, felt or acted in various situations. The most important considerations are those concerning how to act in new, similar situations on the basis of new experience and understanding. When doing so, one applies critical reflection, which is the core of transformative learning. Furthermore, as another important feature, Mezirow (1991) mentioned that crucial changes in connection with transformative learning take place when the results of reflection are implemented in practice through different ways of acting. It is not enough to discuss and consider, thoughts must also be manifested in action, which may also involve realizing that one cannot always in practice fully live up to the mental transformations one has been through.

The program's pedagogy was such that the mothers brought in their prior knowledge and generated questions as inquiry and resulting topics, and the facilitators also used overt instruction to supplement the topics, dialogue, and a WhatsApp chat to facilitate the critical reflection. This type of instruction, which included the co-constructed practices between the mothers and the program, led to changes in the mothers' identities. The program provided opportunities for: overt instruction, such as providing the handouts, bringing in their prior knowledge, and providing opportunities to practice skills and parenting techniques, whether in the parent-child reading time, arts and crafts or lunch time. The essence of the program was during the direct adult time, whereby there was a space for the mothers to engage in meaningful dialogue and critical reflection that enabled them the opportunity to share their journeys.

### **7.3 Changes Over the Six Months**

The result of the pedagogy in the R2R program facilitated changes to the mothers' identities including changes to worldviews, epistemology, ontology, behaviour, and capacity (defined in Chapter 2). These themes are the result of a deductive analysis following my initial coding of the data, and then looking to the literature to explain certain phenomenon as explained in Section 4.8.2.

#### **7.3.1 Worldview**

A change to worldview refers to the mothers having shifts in their understanding of the world and how it works from a macro level in terms of understanding geography, cultures, holidays, and geopolitical systems to a more micro level of changes in attitudes, beliefs, values, and expectations. Another way worldview has been described is how the mothers made meaning of their experiences both from their past and current realities (Hoggan, 2016).

Many of the mothers had no formal schooling and had little familiarity with different cultures, food, and holidays. Over time, through the sharing of information between the mothers and facilitators, everyone contributed to explaining their home countries, languages, holidays, and food unique to each of the mothers' home countries. For example, the theme one week was Chinese New Year. A few of the mothers had never heard about Chinese New Year before the class. Over the next two weeks, seven of the mothers sought experiences in Vancouver to see and participate in local events including eating Chinese food, visiting China Town, and watching the New Year's parade and fireworks. The week following the class on Chinese New Year (February 13, field notes), the mothers discussed their experiences that were generated from the class and Lara's follow up WhatsApp link to resources for Chinese New Year activities. Jozi shared that: "Thanks to Lara, I went to the parade to watch Chinese New Year." Susan contributed: "I never eat Chinese Food before. I take my kids to Metrotown to taste." And Peta told us: "I learn about dragons and the colour red." Changes in worldview align most closely with Mezirow's (2000) description of "a set of assumptions – broad, generalised, orienting predispositions that act as a filter for interpreting the meaning of experience" (p. 17). These assumptions encompass the way a person thinks the world works, as well as how they think it should work.

When discussing Mother's Day, through the sharing of how each family celebrated the day, we were able to learn about certain family traditions. One of the mothers explained that she and her mother made *tortas*, a food many of the women had never heard of. Tati explained that it is a Mexican sandwich that her family has for lunch on holidays. Luisa made *empanadas*, another food not all of the women knew. The discussion was lively, and Lara suggested we share recipes from our homes that our children love to eat.

Looking at the program through a multiliteracies lens, Martin (2011) noted that a multiliteracies framework draws attention to how “discourse patterns reflect reality sets or worldviews adapted by cultures, and literacy is embedded within them” (p. 224). The way that language is used to represent reality is shaped by various cultural insights and collective experiences, so if educators acknowledge that vocabulary from different cultures represents different, nuanced understandings of reality that students have been taught within their own first languages, then educators encourage students to think critically about how extending their vocabulary in English will also affect the way that they will understand the new culture in which they are participating or living within. Often, when discussing the origin cities of the women, the mothers would take out their phones and look on their maps to learn the geography. Jozi shared that when she was fleeing Nigeria, she had no idea how big the continent of Africa was; she thought she had to leave the entire continent in order to escape the difficulties she was leaving. She chose Canada not knowing where it was, or any other countries outside of the African continent

Learning about culture included learning about Canadian culture and norms. One topic covered was about positive discipline. As discussed in Section 5.5.2.6, the opening sentence in the handouts cites the Canadian Pediatric Association that strongly discourages the use of physical punishment including spankings. Jozi, as an example, did not know what a spanking was, and the mothers discussed which cultures were accepting of spankings and which were not. Through these conversations and interactions, the women said they became less judgemental about themselves and others over the course of the program. As pointed out by Kate: “The program has provided very useful information for me and my children... the

experiences and comments from the other moms have also been very important. I like to know different points of view that help me raise my children.”

Many of the mothers expressed this change in attitude during the final focus group (June 5). As explained by Eliza:

I learned and I still learning not to judge other moms because for me it used to be easy to judge - I realize every mom is doing her best - so I cannot judge anymore - every mom wants to be the perfect mom; no one wants to be a bad mom - I changed my attitudes and sometimes just stay quiet now - we are all equals.

Luisa echoed similar sentiments:

I have new perspectives such as not to be so hard on ourselves - we're not perfect, we all have good days, bad days - not just me... other moms have the same struggles and we are honest about them and not pretending everything is always great.

It was through such shifts in thinking that the mothers were also able to see their value as mothers. Jozi shifted away from judging herself as a “bad” mother: “I used to think I am a bad mother. I forgive myself now and know Sari will be okay.” Jozi was able to be less judgemental of herself through the conversations she participated in with other group members.

### **7.3.2 Epistemology**

Epistemological change refers to the mothers learning new ways of knowing and new ways of accessing knowledge. Ladson-Billings (2003) noted that “how one views the world is influenced by what knowledge one possesses, and what knowledge one is capable of possessing is influenced deeply by one’s worldview” (p. 399).

Over the course of the program, the ways in which the women accessed information expanded and included different ways of “knowing” than when they first started. One big change



in the mothers was their increased use of technology including apps, websites, and digital storybooks. Lara communicated with the group using WhatsApp, whereby each week she would pass along different links to free programs taking place around the city. The mothers had not previously realized how easy it was to access local program information. Sandra was thankful for the information Lara passed along, as her family was able to go away on a two-night camping trip. She was so excited upon her return, sharing pictures and stories with the other mothers. She remarked that: “I alone for so long. I did not know so many programs for families.” Luz also shared that: “I followed the link Lara sent and went to Lynn Canyon for hike with my family.” These resources provided opportunities for the mothers to get out and enjoy recreational activities they did not otherwise know were available to them, providing the mothers with affordable and meaningful ways to engage with their families outside of their usual routines.

As another example, three of the mothers expressed an interest in obtaining their driver’s licenses. I showed them the ICBC app and explained that they could practice their reading while studying for their Learner test. We discussed different ways to read with their children (outside of print-based text) and Ingrid suggested: “I like to use Netflix for audiobooks. You can find books like the Hungry Caterpillar.” I shared that my daughter never liked to read books, but as soon I began offering her audiobooks, she developed a love of reading. Three weeks later Kate said (direct adult, initial focus group, January 30):

I forgot about audiobooks. My older son read no problem. My middle one, not so much. Since I gave him his book on audio, he is happy to read. He no longer fights with me to do his reading. Thank you for the suggestion.

Three weeks into the program, I introduced a multilingual storybook program to the mothers called Storybooks Canada (<http://www.storybookscanada.ca/>), an open access digital

program developed at the University of British Columbia that has 40 illustrated stories in many languages spoken by refugees and immigrants in Canada. I explained to the mothers that [in the case of Storybooks Canada] the program was built on a mobile platform and all they needed was their phone, that they need not look at computers, which acted as a barrier to using technology with their children. The mothers were excited to see their home languages in the program and appeared enthusiastic about trying the program with their children.

As the weeks passed, the mothers came to the program reporting that they were using technology with their children and were enjoying reading with them more. Myumi shared: “My son never liked my accent to read English. Now I read the Japanese and the program [Storybooks Canada] read the English.” When I went to visit Luisa in her home (first home visit, January 31), she showed me a collection of books that she retrieved from the garbage room in her apartment. She had a stack of books in Korean that, she told me, “I use for pictures and tell stories from myself.” She was so excited to tell the mothers, “I so happy to have Spanish books because I have none in my home. It is a gift of 40 stories for my family. My husband can use with the girls too.”

Carly said she was using the French-English translations for her daughter and the Spanish/English with her other kids. She is trying to learn Portuguese herself and is using Storybooks Canada to further her own learning. Additionally, she has friends who speak Punjabi and Spanish to whom she introduced the site. She told me they were thrilled to have a multilingual resource available to them. Carly felt empowered as a teacher to share information and teach her friends how to use the program: “Now I was the teacher to them!” Susan also spoke of being the teacher for her children: “I learn a story so I can read to my kids.”

Just as educators in the school system recognize the importance of supporting the development of digital literacies for children and adolescents, educators in adult, continuing, and higher education are also concerned with the need to foster these kinds of learning opportunities as well. “In a world where electronically produced text carries meaning, exclusion from digital technologies can have disempowering consequences – especially for life in the home, community, and workplace” (Hamilton, Tett & Crowther, 2012, p. 4). Adult educators can play an important role in facilitating discussions amongst adult learners to encourage them to think broadly about how habits and attitudes greatly impact levels of comfort with digital literacies. Rowsell and Walsh (2011) pointed out that “designing on-screen has not only transformed how we make meaning, but also, transformed ways of reconstructing and renegotiating our identities” (p. 56). They thus argued that technologies also have to be understood as socially situated and that technical know-how is only one aspect of working with new technologies. Curran et al. (2019) argued that it would be beneficial to have “a better understanding of the role and the use of digital and mobile technologies as a resource to support the self-directed learning processes of adults in the 21st century” (p. 79).

This study suggests that the mothers experienced growth in epistemological complexity throughout the R2R program, consistent with Taylor and Elias (2012) who stated that “transformative learning does not refer to just any kind of learning but to the sort which incites deep changes to our frame of reference and lets us “know” in a different way” (p. 151).

### **7.3.3 Ontology**

In the context of this study, ontological change refers to changes in the way a person emotionally reacts to experiences (Hoggan, 2016). Yorks and Kasl (2006) wrote of transformative learning outcomes affecting emotions, feelings, the quality of life, and learning to

live with joy. They specifically defined transformative learning outcomes as including the way a person affectively experiences the world.

Ontological changes had the least number of codes but was an important outcome of the R2R program. Although not coded, the mothers would all nod their heads in agreement when the other mothers spoke about changes to their well-being and happiness. Through observation and dialogue, I believe the mothers' changes in their feelings about their lives had a significant outcome on their overall happiness. As stated by Susan (April 3, field notes): "I spent seven months alone. I now so happy." I noted in my field notes (verbatim, March 13) that "there was a different feeling by the end of the 3 hours than when the women first walked into the program. The hugs the women exchanged between each other and the facilitators was always genuine and warm."

The changes to the mothers' states of being seemed to originate in the program and then follow them out into their lives. As Jozi explained in the final focus group (June 5):

Since I started this program, my life has changed from worse to better. I was depressed. I am the happiest I've been since starting the R2R program. I am happy learning to read and write. Happy to meet you all. Happy my daughter is socializing. I am VERY happy! The way you are with me and Sari is so special, I can't thank you enough - if you could open my heart, you would see the joy and the gratefulness inside me - if you could open my heart, you will find the joy and happiness.

Also, from the final focus group, Luisa added: "I was crying in my house before. My life in Vancouver before was difficult. I have many new experiences and for my children now... I feel happy now... the moms helped me." And four months after the R2R program when I met

with Eliza (third home visit, October 25), she shared: “I don’t take the time to straighten my hair anymore. I feel good about myself now. I tried to feel good with how I looked. Now I just feel good.” The changes in how Eliza felt were still evolving months after the completion of the program.

In addition to feelings of joy and happiness, the mothers expressed feeling being wanted. Each week, Lara sent out a class reminder as well as a request to RSVP on our group WhatsApp chat, so she knew how much food to buy and could anticipate supplies and staffing. Many times, the women would not respond, and Lara would follow up with text messages asking if they were coming, if they were okay, and so forth. Until our final focus group, Lara had no idea how far-reaching her text messages were until Mosa said, “I feel wanted here. Lara sends a reminder to come because she wants us here.” Eliza followed up by adding: “When I get the text that says ‘are you coming?’ I feel so happy. Lara, God bless you for what you do.”

#### **7.3.4 Behaviour**

Changes to the mothers’ behaviour was the most commonly recurring theme in the data, representing 54% of the coded excerpts (specific to transformative learning outcomes). This theme incorporates three sub-themes: (i) changes to the mothers’ reading, (ii) speaking English, and (iii) acquiring new facts and skills (outside of reading and speaking). The development of new skills consistent with skills necessary in order to engage in behaviours with one’s new perspective are a key indicator that a transformation has taken place (Hoggan, 2016).

##### **7.3.4.1 Reading**

In this section, I address the changes to the women’s reading that took place as they relate to behavioural changes. The mothers had opportunities to practice their reading each week, both during the parent-child reading time and in the direct adult time where they would take turns

reading the handouts out loud. The mothers were aware of their increased time spent on reading as well as the improvements they were making. When I asked the mothers in the final focus group (June 5) “What was the best part of the R2R program for you?” most of the mothers included a reference to reading. Jozi said:

Before I started, I couldn’t read at all and now my reading is so much better. I am now reading English books like Dora with Sari. When I am in a group of people with books, I don’t feel ashamed no more, I can read.

Followed by Ingrid:

I forgot about reading and started reading again - when you brought the book about your mom, my grandma was important to me and I started reading to my kids and the time you brought the books to take home cuz I didn’t have any at home helped me to read more.

It seems important to note that while the mothers were building community and a sisterhood, they were equally invested in English language learning.

The R2R program was a resource for not only community events, but also practical items such as books. The program attempted to remove as many of the barriers to reading as was possible. Luisa said:

Since I started the program, I am reading more with my kids. I also reading books in English and is helping learn more words. First, I have to look up many words. Now, I can read much longer and understand more. I want to help my kids and am trying to learn so I can help them. I feel too embarrassed when my daughter read better than me.

And as a last example, Liz remarked:

The program helped me reinforce the importance of reading. I am going to the library more. The program did help a lot to remind me to read more. Before I did not read to Maya in English. She would say ‘Español.’ Now that I read more in English, she stopped saying that to me and doesn’t mind English or Spanish.

In a conversation with Jozi (field notes, April 10), after I showed her a section of books from which to choose to take home, she indicated that she recognized that investing in reading was the key to the type of imagined future she sees for herself and Sari: “Thank you for showing me this. I really need to learn to read more. If I read, I can drive, I can get a job and give Sari a better life than I can give to her now.”

#### ***7.3.4.2 Speaking English***

Speaking English accounted for 16% of the codes found in the data, second only to reading. The women entered the program with varying levels of English proficiency; as examples, Susan and Luisa used Google Translate, having very low levels of proficiency, and Jozi and Eliza were more proficient speakers. At the start, out of those four mothers, only Jozi spoke English in her home as well as to her daughter at the program. Initially the mothers would default to speaking in their home languages throughout the program, either with the other mothers or with their children. As there were eight Spanish speakers, they were often speaking Spanish to each other even though we encouraged the mothers to try to speak English during the program.

I noticed that as the program progressed, there appeared to be a natural tendency for the mothers to speak more English, even when having one-to-one conversations with each other. They seemed aware of the hegemony of English and the reality that speaking English was essential for gaining employment, accessing services, and participating in their new

communities (Hope, 2011). Anderson (2017) noted a palpable desire on the part of families to acquire English as quickly as possible during the iPALS program. In response to the encouragement given to Luisa one day, she responded by saying: “If you don’t speak English, you feel like nothing. People treat you like you’re stupid, so you don’t speak. I not used to speak English. I want practice my English and talk more with you.” Susan followed by saying: “When I no speak English difficult here.”

The following excerpt is verbatim from my field notes (May 15) from the direct adult conversation:

Peta read and did SUCH a great job. She clearly felt good about herself and noted improvement in her reading. I complimented her reading and spoken English. She said, ‘I feel good speak English in here and try at work only speak English now. I learning quickly’. She used to work with a Mexican chef and now works with a woman from India who doesn’t speak Spanish so is forced to speak English at work. She further said, ‘Thanks to the moms here I can speak English at work.’

The direct adult space afforded the mothers many opportunities to speak English in a supportive environment, giving them the confidence to exert the effort required to speak a new language. The mothers spoke more each week and were met with praise from the group. There was so much pride in the faces of the women who knew they were making progress throughout the program. By the end of the program, the mothers not only spoke English in the group, but also to their children. Luisa said she is more welcoming of English in her home and more comfortable as a result of the R2R program. She sees the other mothers speaking English to their children and sees that it does not take away from maintaining Spanish in her own home. She sees



other mothers raising bilingual children who speak both their mother tongue(s) and English. In the final session (June 5, audiotaped, transcribed verbatim) the mothers said:

Susan: Me before nothing English. Nothing understand. Difficult. My life difficult before. More happy now. Me happy. More understand. More English. Before... how are you? Nothing. No understand. No speak. Now understand. Now I say I am good, thank you. Thank you for your help.

Luisa: I am very happy to attend this program. Now, English is my new second language!

Liz: I feel more confident to speak English with Lea.

The above quotes speak to how the program provided something greater than English language learning as it helped the mothers build community through communication.

#### ***7.3.4.3 Acquiring New Facts and Skills***

The development of new skills is necessary in order to engage in behaviours consistent with one's new perspective and therefore form an integral part of transformative learning outcomes (Hoggan, 2016).

One of the topics covered in the direct adult program was "healthy eating for children." The mothers all agreed that it was hard for them to find the time to cook healthy meals while keeping the costs down, that frozen food and junk food stretched further than healthy food in terms of dollars spent. During the week, Lara sent a message on the WhatsApp group telling the mothers about a free upcoming cooking class promoting low-budget, healthy cooking. Five of the mothers went to the class because they wanted to learn how to incorporate healthy ingredients into their cooking. Peta told the group:

I am a pastry chef. If my kids want doughnuts, I make them. Same with cake and cookies. Now I changed. I changed white flour for whole wheat, milk for almond milk. My husband asked, where is the sour cream? I said I changed to Greek yogurt. I want to eat more healthy. Valeria [eight-year-old daughter] had a cavity and I need to change. This country is amazing. You learn about healthy eating for free. Great opportunity.

Susan also went to the class and told us: “I want learn to cook better for my family. Now I can understand English, I can go to class for cooking. I love it. My kids love it. Happy. We try and eat better now.” This cooking class is an example of the resources made available to the participants that were transformative.

The conversations were generative, and the mothers extended them to other ways of learning and knowing. Eliza told the group to watch Food Inc to get an idea as to how to make better food choices. She said she watched the documentary in response to the conversations that we had been having in the R2R program (May 29, direct adult): “It is very eye opening. It explains many of the important ideas we speak about in here.”

The program always ended with lunch and Lara encouraged the mothers to offer their children vegetables every time; she would say that it can take 30 tries for a child to acquire a taste for certain foods. At the start of the program, the mothers would refuse the lettuce or carrots on their children’s plates. By the middle of the program, all of the parents were agreeing to the vegetables, and by the end, all of the children were eating at least one. All of the women emphatically agreed when Eliza said (final focus group, June 5): “We learn from Lara how to feed healthy food to our kids. We change what we put on their plates and they learn to eat. Thank you, Lara.” The above examples are illustrative of how the mothers adopted behaviors that supported their new perspectives. These changes are a direct result of the R2R program and

show how overt instruction, situated practice and critical reflection led to transformed behaviours.

### **7.3.5 Capacity**

Changes in capacity reflect changes made outside of the mothers' homes and the R2R program, whereby participation in education, work, and/or spirituality contributed to personal growth allowing for greater complexity in the ways in which they "saw, interpreted and functioned in the world" (Hoare, 2006, p. 8). Many immigrants and refugees end up working in low skilled, casual work unrelated to their past experience or qualifications (Houghton & Morrice, 2008; Jonker, 2004). Such was the case with three of the four focal mothers. Eliza was a general surgeon in Mexico and both Susan and Luisa worked outside of their homes in offices before moving to Canada, contributing to their household incomes. Accustomed to earning a living to support themselves and family members, being unemployed, accessing food banks, and living with other people was a source of embarrassment for some mothers in the study. The loss of professional identity and the social status, respect, and financial independence that accompanied it was acutely felt. Taken verbatim from my field notes from my first home visit with Susan on February 12:

Susan's husband worked a day or two per week. He would show up on the corner of Main Street and 3rd Avenue where he would wait on the corner for a 23-hour job that would pay him cash. There were times in their early days when they didn't have enough money for food. One week, they had no income, and no food. Susan cried when she recalled having to go begging for money on the streets because her kids went 3 days without anything to eat and they were begging her for food. Her husband put his face in his hands and wept at the memory. She shared with me a message on Google translate

that reads exactly as follows from google translate (transcribed verbatim from screenshot of our conversation): ‘My son when he sees a person in the street he tells me mama gives him money he is like us when we arrive he does not have to eat.’

All of the focal mothers in the study joined the R2R program to increase their English language proficiency, with the goal of not only helping their children with homework, but also to gain employment. Eliza shared her school concerns with the other mothers, who offered her advice. She reported back to the mothers (June 5, final focus group): “I have courage and confidence to get a job and to talk to Maya’s teacher now.”

#### ***7.3.5.1 Furthering Education***

By early February, roughly one month after the start of the program, four of the mothers enrolled in an additional adult-only English class at Belmont School (run by VFEC) on Fridays from 10:00-2:00. This program was available one day per week, with an all-welcome policy regardless of participants’ immigration status. Child minding and lunch at no charge are always provided through programs run by VFEC. The mothers credited the R2R program with inspiring them to further their English education. Verbatim from my field notes (February 13):

Jozi took her time in signing up for the additional English program. After months, she signed up and shared: I go for English class now because I am no longer embarrassed. Peta agreed with Jozi that she got the confidence in the R2R program to sign up for the additional class: The R2R program gives me confidence and opportunity for English classes.

Luisa was unaware of the free English program and signed up when Jane invited all the mothers who were interested in joining. She was grateful for the opportunity and said: “Thanks to this [R2R] program, I attend English class.” Like Luisa, when Susan learned of the program, she

immediately signed up: “I learn about the English class from Michelle and Lara. More help is good. Then I can find a job.”

As discussed above, five of the mothers attended a cooking class to learn how to provide healthier, low-cost food for their families. Eliza shared that she felt sad because she wanted to be more than “just Maya’s mom,” which inspired her to further her education with the goal of employment. She signed up at St. John’s Ambulance and got her First Aid and CPR certification, as these are the basis for any medical-related job.

#### ***7.3.5.2 Employment***

The codes that contribute to employment refer to jobs obtained by the mothers during and after the program and the jobs the mothers aspire to have one day. Both Luisa and Eliza credited the R2R program for the jobs they acquired while the program was running. Luisa’s family needed money to retain a lawyer for their permanent residence application. She initially took a job cleaning homes, with the hopes of becoming more proficient in English to be able to do some child minding for her neighbours’ children. In early June, Luisa told the group:

Now my English is much better. I don’t just clean houses. Now I watch two kids and make more money and watch Lea. Thank you for your help. My English is good now so I can have better job. Thank you for your help. I shy to speak before. Thank you, Lara and Michelle for your love.

Eliza had aspirations to return to work in the medical field but felt frustrated by the length of time and number of hours she would have to spend going to school in order to achieve her Canadian accreditation. Rather than wait until she had the time to pursue her medical goal, she decided to teach Spanish to adults three days per week. She excitedly told the group:

I found a job teaching Spanish! I love to work. I was home in my house before alone with Maya. All of you helped me. This program taught me I need to have more time without Maya. I don't feel sad anymore.

Caretaking responsibilities curtailed many of the women's ability to return to work, as well as feeling like they needed to be home with their children. The R2R program provided the mothers not only with the tools (language), but also the confidence to pursue employment opportunities.

#### ***7.3.5.3 Spirituality***

One of the mothers went to church as a result of the R2R program. Jozi mentioned during the program that she missed going to church. I reminded the mothers that they can use Google to find any information they might be looking for. I found a church two blocks away from Jozi's house and offered to accompany her and Sari to church that Sunday. On our way to the service, Jozi told me, "I used to pray in Nigeria. But when I came here, my spirit went down." After the service, Jozi sat in the pew with tears in her eyes and said, "I love it here. I be going here a long time. I feel my spirit again."

Jozi and Sari continue to regularly attend Sunday church services on their own. Not only does the church provide Jozi with another social and supportive network, but she also feels invested in her reading, as she wants to be able to read from the Bible she brought with her from Nigeria. The first time we went to church together (February 10), I asked her about the Bible she took out of her purse (verbatim response from field notes). She responded, "I brought it from Nigeria and never thought I would be able to read it. Now I have more reason to read. I want to read my Bible that belonged to my mother."

### **7.3.6 Self**

As discussed in section 3.4.6, changes to self refers to a wide variety of ways learners experienced transformative change affecting their sense of self (Hoggan, 2016). Illeris (2014) suggested that the term “self” is too narrow and only accounted for the psychological instances of learning, while the term “identity” accounts for “the combination and interaction between the individual and the social environment and how this influences the development of the individual” (p. 152). As such, he placed “self” above all other outcomes. Following Illeris (2014), as discussed in Section 4.82, when coding my data, I separated “self” from the other five codes and made it a higher-level theme that encompasses all the themes providing tangible codes and themes in an attempt to operationalize changes to identity with respect to worldview, epistemology, ontology, behavior, and capacity.

## **7.4 Analysis and Discussion**

This research examines how a further education space can catalyze positive changes in mothers’ lives, choices, and imagined communities. Within adult education classes, transformative learning is usually not intended – these are mainly about catching up with what was not acquired by earlier school attendance or rather basic practical qualifications (Illeris, 2014). In practice, transformative learning and identity development often take place as a result of the classes. Hoggan (2016) described broadly transformative learning as “processes that result in significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualises, and interacts with the world” (p. 49). As such, changes to one’s identity are central to transformative learning theory. These changes began with the mothers’ questioning their basic beliefs and assumptions about parenting issues (as discussed in Chapter 5) such as problem-solving, communication, and discipline patterns. As they began to question themselves, they started to

develop new ways of thinking about their lives. For some of the women, it appeared to be a first experience of developing some degree of control over their lives. All the mothers talked about how they learned to solve problems in a more proactive way. The mothers who started thinking critically about their situations and attempted new ways of interacting with their children experienced a major shift in worldview from reactive to proactive, powerless to empowered. Some of the mothers also reported being more empathetic towards their children and found this change led to better communication between themselves and their children. They discussed their anger having decreased, with their new parenting styles leading to greater happiness and harmony inside their homes. This came with learning other “ways of knowing” how to deal with parenting issues.

The data suggest that this program model did not follow the often criticized “intervention-prevention” (Auerbach, 1995) style of family literacy program. There was not one strategy given more value over another. In fact, Jane said (first focus group, January 30):

While the program is called R2R, I was never an avid reader and still don’t love to read unless I have to; not all kids will enjoy it. The most important thing is to talk to your kids, listen to them, spend time with them – however that looks.

The evolution of the program and the topics that followed generated more parenting issues and questions that were not specific to traditional school-based literacy practices involving their children. In looking through the data on a month-by-month basis, the themes that emerged in January and February 2019, the first two months of the program, were in worldviews (assumptions, beliefs and attitudes); capacity (furthering education – four of the mothers signed up for an additional English class); epistemology (different ways of knowing: online resources, WhatsApp); and ontology (feelings of being happier because they felt a sense of belonging and



friendship). In March and April, the mothers showed more evidence of speaking and reading in English to their children as they expressed less fear of losing their home language, even if they spoke and read English to their children. They looked to the other mothers with older children whose children were being raised bilingual and took their advice, which was to let their children speak English in the home so that neither language was viewed negatively by the children. As Tati shared:

My boys resisted speaking Spanish at home. They wanted to practice their English.

Once I was receptive to both English and Spanish at home, my boys were much happier. My advice is not to make speaking and learning English seem like it's bad or wrong. That's what they need to be speaking at school.

Ingrid agreed with Tati and contributed: "My son only wants to speak in English. He was angry with me because I could not help him with his homework."

I could see the changes in the mothers after Spring Break when they returned. Many mothers spoke of practicing their English with their families over the break. Susan went as far as to label all her household items with stickers in both Spanish and English. Luisa started reading adult books in English so she could help her daughter with her homework by improving her own English. By May and June, the mothers spoke most about the group becoming a family and the sisterhood that emerged from the social and supportive network they formed, as well as speaking English.

Other than the first topic, Early Literacy, traditional school-based literacy was not taught, rather it was incorporated throughout the program, mainly through dialogue, but also through the handouts and online communication. The topics presented challenged the mothers' attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions about parenting. Throughout the six months, the mothers

spoke about changes to themselves, whether signing up for English classes, cooking classes, going to church, being less judgemental, more calm, assertive, less lonely, and happier.

However, when asked about their favourite part of the R2R program on the final day, the three responses recorded most were: i) speaking more English, ii) the friendships made, and iii) reading more English.

Transformative learning theory states that people learn through frames of reference that may be transformed by critical reflection. If literacy involves meaning-making, then literacy learning is a transformative process and communicative competence is the goal of literacy education (Mezirow, 1996). Papen (2005) highlighted that, as literacy is a social practice, then this commonly implies the cultural identities—that is, the values, ideas, conventions, and worldviews—shape the event of which literacy is a part. Therefore, identity is an integral part of, and an influencing factor upon, the literacy practice itself. As stated by Jozi in our final focus group (June 5): “I celebrate myself now. I don’t have to wait for someone. You all showed me that.” In that remark, her belief in herself, and increased self-esteem and confidence were evident. She went on to say: “I could say many things have changed since I have been here.” Table 7.1 highlights the changes in the four focal mothers presented in this case study.

**Table 7.1**

***Changes to the Focal Mothers 4-6 Months after Program Completion***

<b>MG: What has changed in your home and community as a result of the R2R program?</b>	<b>Verbatim from Transcript</b>	<b>Field Notes from Research Conversation</b>
<p>Jozi: October 16 Third home visit</p>	<p>“I read books from my bookshelf. I have an art table too. We don’t need the phone no more. We sing and dance and play hide and go seek. We watch TV shows and movies. I read my Bible from home [Nigeria] every week when I go to church. I can read and write.”</p>	<p>Jozi has a bookshelf in her home, as well as an arts and crafts table. She told me that she reads more to Sari even if she runs away because she knows she is enjoying the reading. She no longer uses her phone as a crutch inside of her home and uses positive discipline or assertive communication depending on the situation – usually a timeout where she sends Sari to her room. She continues to go to three English classes at Belmont school each week in addition to the R2R program again this year. Jozi no longer fears going to appointments because she feels confident, she will be able to read and fill out the forms, and if she can’t she feels comfortable asking for clarification. “I changed with Sari since the start [of R2R program], I know what to do when I’m angry now. I sleep better, I am stronger, I am more happy... 100% happier than last year.”</p>
<p>Luisa: November 13 Third home visit</p>	<p>“I speak more English in my home. Some nights we speak Spanish and sometimes English. I read books for myself in English so I can learn. I read Spanish and English books to Lea. I email the school in English if I have a problem. Then I go talk to them, so they understand. I am much better reading, writing, and speaking English.”</p>	<p>Luisa speaks more English in her house and reads in both Spanish and English to her children. She is taking the Friday English class (the only one she can take without her permanent residence papers), as well as the R2R program again this year. When I met with Luisa in November 2019, she told me: “I can help [older daughter’s name] with her reading now. I can read to Lea. I can speak to the teachers now. I feel really good now. Thanks to the programs. Thanks to you.”</p>

<p>Eliza: October 25 Third home visit</p>	<p>“We read every night bed stories, sometimes in English, sometimes in French and sometimes in Spanish as well. Maya chooses. We sometimes cook together but mostly in Spanish. We sing English, French, and Spanish children songs. I read all of the signs outside and translate them to Spanish. We play guitar and piano. And a lot of arts and crafts. I share more time with people who speak English.”</p>	<p>Eliza no longer attends the R2R program. She has a job teaching Spanish and still sees the mothers from the program. She is equally as comfortable reading to Maya in English and in Spanish. She plays more board games at home, in addition to the reading and crafts she previously did in Spanish. Eliza told me when we met in October 2019 that: “I dress more now. I feel better. I have friends now. I have a job and am happy now I learned good advice from the other moms in any situation. Before I was isolated and disappointed with no friends. Now I am happier.”</p>
<p>Susan: December 5 Third home visit</p>	<p>“We do prayers, we read and speak English more in the house. My kids they like to colour and watch TV. More English at home. More better. Now I cook with recipes from my class. English.”</p>	<p>Susan began the program with only Spanish spoken and read in her home. She has now extended her repertoire of literacy practices to include English. Susan is back taking the R2R program this year, as well as the Friday English class at Belmont. When I met Susan in her home in December 2019, she said: “Wow. I can’t believe my English. I speak now. I am so happy now. Go out. Have friends. My kids is happy I can speak more English.”</p>

I noticed changes in the way the mothers spoke from the beginning of the program to the end. They began the program apologizing for their mistakes and their limited English. It was remarkable to listen to their language and how they were able to express these positive changes to themselves. For example, at the beginning of the program, I noted phrases including “I sorry I no talk so good,” “No speak English, sorry,” and “too many mistakes.” And by the end of the program, the tone and language were more positive and complimentary of themselves. As an example, Luisa said: “I reading and speaking more and my shyness is less with the girls when it

is time to talk I am not afraid to read no more thanks to all of you! I am better speak and read English.”

The following was taken verbatim from field notes the following week (May 15, direct adult time): “Jozi read the first page of the packet. When she was done, I complimented her reading and she seemed so proud. Big smile. She replied and said, ‘I KNOW!! Thanks to my family! Thank you!’” And, in the final focus group (June 5), the notion of family came up as the mothers discussed their favourite parts of the program. Jozi said:

I’ve changed somehow, I can’t explain it. I appreciate the other mom’s advice. Since I started, I learned how to calm down and talk to Sari. This class motivates me to read and write more. Last year, I was depressed. Now I have a family. I go to church. I’m reminded by the support. Takes my mind off the negative and it helps me. Once again, thank you all... I never feel alone anymore. I know I have a family now.

## **7.5 Chapter Summary**

This chapter addressed the third research question: To what extent were the mothers’ identities transformed by the practices of the program? In addition to feeling comfortable with their literacy skills, the women shared ideas, hopes, dreams, and advice during the direct adult time of the R2R program. While we followed a curriculum, the group tended to deviate and move the discussion to address their experiences and learn from each other in a space where their opinions were heard and valued. Motherhood unified this diverse group, and the centrality of motherhood drew the women to the R2R program in order to become adult learners. The program enabled the mothers to discover and recreate their identities as educated people. As

Peta said: “I want to be somebody in the future.” Jozi followed up with: “I’m learning who I am and what I can have for the first time in my life.”

Norton (2013) cogently explained that a language learner’s identity is constantly changing in response to daily social interactions. Extending these ideas to the R2R program, every time the mothers spoke English, they were reorganizing their sense of self. Given how significant the English-speaking gains were to the mothers in the R2R program, one could infer that the increased use of spoken English in the program would in and of itself be indicative of changes to the mothers’ identities. As Jane aptly told me one day: “I give women the opportunity to change their lives.”

The direct adult space offered mothers many opportunities to develop new knowledge and new identities. At the end of the program, Peta (June 5, final focus group) said, “The R2R program gave me confidence to speak English and take more classes. Like more English and cooking class. It is because of all of you. Thank you.” Each week the mothers were presented with new material and assumed agency in their literacy learning. The R2R program invited “becoming” in multiple ways, where opportunities were provided for new identities, new ways of being, and new ways of knowing to emerge and develop (Honeyford, 2019). The mothers expressed a sense of being comfortable, feeling welcomed and belonging in the family literacy program. The educational space here was transformative in the way it sought to connect the mothers’ current lives with their imagined identities and communities.

## **Chapter 8: Discussion: Towards a Three-Way Model of Family Literacy**

### **8.1 Introduction**

This study seeks to explain the effects of a family literacy program on the identities of immigrant and refugee background mothers by investigating three questions: i) How were the mothers' investments integrated into the practices of the R2R program? ii) How was the identity "mother" co-constructed within the practices of the R2R program? and iii) To what extent were the mothers' identities transformed by the practices of the program? While most studies have focused mainly on the literacy outcomes to the children, this research focuses on the impact of such a program on the mothers. The central findings of the study can be broken down by Chapters 5, 6, and 7 as follows.

The findings from the first research question, discussed in Chapter 5, indicate that the mothers were invested in the practices of the program, which I have identified as building community through communication, sisterhood, and enhancing mothering skills in Canada. The mothers viewed investment in these practices as a way forward to realize their imagined identities as "better" mothers who spoke English, helped their children with schoolwork, sought employment opportunities, and developed social networks to alleviate the loneliness and boredom from being home alone with young child(ren).

The findings from the second research question, discussed in Chapter 6, suggest that the mothers' identities were co-constructed by the practices of the program and changed how they felt about themselves as mothers. Through the co-constructed practices of the program, the mothers came to understand that their thoughts, attitudes, and behaviours did not make them "bad" mothers; rather, they realized they wanted to learn local parenting norms to add to their

existing repertoires. As a group, the mothers validated their feelings and offered cultural explanations and alternative ways of dealing with specific situations that contributed to their English language learning as well as new parenting approaches. The foundation of the program was built on a social network that became a sisterhood and was integral to the success and likely retention of the program.

The findings from the third research question, discussed in Chapter 7, demonstrate the importance and type of pedagogy, including dialogue and critical reflection, that facilitated transformative learning. Changes to identity included changes to worldviews, epistemology, ontology, behaviour, and capacity, as defined by Hoggan (2016).

More broadly, an important outcome of the findings is the need to rethink the ways in which family literacy programs are conceptualized. In this chapter, I review two models of family literacy programs from the literature, and propose a third model, which reflects the most important contributions made by the mothers in the study. I explain how this model was fostered in the R2R program, focusing on importance of the acquisition of social capital and the formation of social and supportive networks. I conclude by examining how findings from the study give rise to rethinking what constitutes the “family” in family literacy programs.

## **8.2 Models for Family Literacy Programs**

The concept of family literacy was introduced to show how “literacy is part of the very fabric of family life” (Taylor, 1983, p. 87). The meaning shifted from a description of a social phenomenon in the 1960s to an educational intervention involving parents and children in the 1990s.



### 8.2.1 One-Way Model

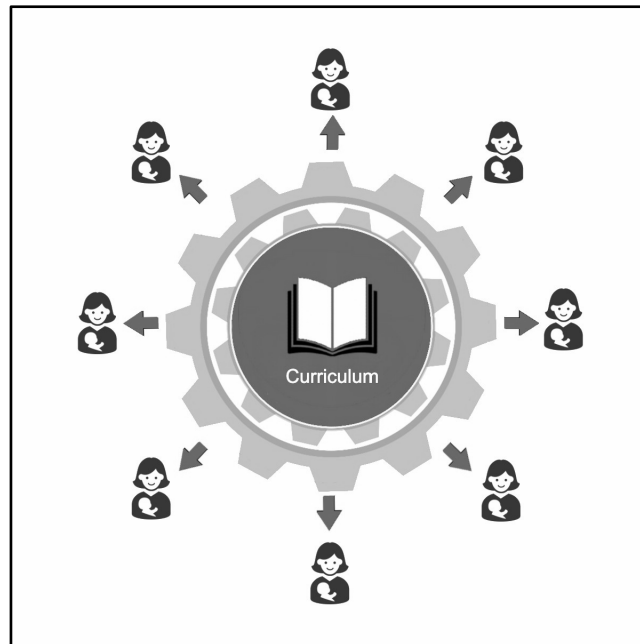
As explained in Chapter 2, the first generation of family literacy programs were prescriptive in nature and designed to transmit school-like literacy into the homes of low socioeconomic and language minority families (Auerbach, 1991; Reyes & Torres, 2007). The view was that the values and practices of the school should be transmitted to the home through the parents, and as such, Auerbach (1989) termed the model the “transmission of school practices” (p. 168). This one-way model from program to home (see Figure 8.1) blamed marginalized people for having inadequate literacy practices (Auerbach, 1995, 2001; Neuman et al., 1996; Reyes & Torres, 2007). Parents were taught about mainstream ways of relating to print and about specific school literacy tasks that they could engage in with their children. The model starts with the needs, problems, and practices that educators identify, and then seeks to transfer skills or practices to parents in order to inform their interactions with children; its direction moves solely from the program to the parents. These types of programs fall under the “transmission of school practices model” and focus on “improving” parents’ literacy practices with the ultimate goal of supporting school readiness in young children and promoting mainstream literacy practices (Auerbach, 2001). Reyes and Torres (2007) claimed that most family literacy programs are motivated by wanting to “fix” the child, family, and community rather than collaboratively identifying and removing barriers to literacy development.

While these programs may take on many forms, what they have in common is their shared goal of building a bridge between home and school by transmitting school-based literacies to the home. The model starts with the needs, problems and practices that educators identify, then transfers skills or practices to parents in order to modify their interactions with

their children (Auerbach, 1989, 2001; Rolander, 2018); its direction moves from the school/educator to the parents (and, ultimately, to the children).

**Figure 8.1**

***One-Way Model of Family Literacy, from Program to Parent***



This model (see Figure 8.1) is based on the assumption that the home literacy environments of English language learners were inadequate and that those families do not engage in the necessary school-based tasks such as shared parent/child home reading; it was also based on the assumption that certain ways of using literacy in the home may better prepare students for school (Anderson et al., 2016; Auerbach, 1989, 2001). The greatest problem with this model is the focus on parents' deficits. The social context of families is often ignored and viewed as negative. This model would support the notion of mothers feeling like "bad" parents if they are unable to transmit school-based literacies to their homes. Returning to Rosa's vignette

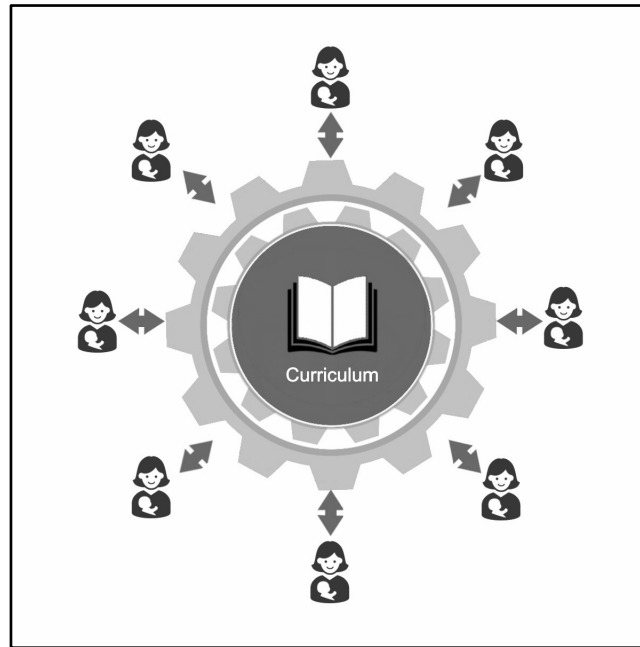
from Chapter 2, my experience with the mothers was the same as what Auerbach (1989) depicted in the tensions Rosa faced. The mothers in the R2R program struggled with housing, heating bills, accessing food from food banks, communicating with landlords, lawyers, and permanent residence applications. The lists are endless in what families are dealing with in their homes, and it is inappropriate for educators to blame parents for a “lack of literacy.” Studies continue to show that immigrant and refugee background families see literacy as the key to upward mobility and is the very reason many parents uproot their families from their home countries in an attempt to provide better lives for their children (Matthiesen, 2016; Strang & Quinn, 2014).

### **8.2.2 Two-Way Model**

Critiques of the one-way model (Auerbach, 2001) gave rise to the second generation of family literacy programs based on the “family strengths model,” whereby programs were built upon diverse cultural practices within families (Auerbach, 1995). In this model (see Figure 8.2), parents’ needs and their social contexts are taken into consideration and may include external factors such as housing, healthcare, legal aid, and so forth. Programs based on a strengths model were created in the hopes of identifying parents as resources and valuing their experiences within the program. This served to lay the foundation for a two-way model of family literacy whereby there was a transfer of information from the programs to the homes, as well as from the homes to the programs. These programs were intended to draw on parents’ knowledge and experiences to inform instruction, rather than solely transferring school practices to the homes. Many of these programs are however critiqued as being “intervention-prevention” (Auerbach, 1995) models, whereby experts have identified “good” literacy and parenting practices that educators believed needed to be transmitted to the homes.

**Figure 8.2**

***Two-Way Model of Family Literacy, from Program to Parent and Parent to Program***



**8.2.3 Three-Way Model**

Auerbach (1995) claimed that the greatest problem with the intervention prevention model was that it justified putting the responsibility for societal problems on families, implying that social change must be rooted in family change. She argued that the focus on the unit of the family as the locus of change does not account for social, economic, or institutional forces which may constrain family life and impede literacy development. As such, she proposed a social change perspective that encompasses valuing parents' strengths, and attributing the issues faced by marginalized people as being rooted in society, not deficits to the parents. Such a model argues for social change and changing the institutions that marginalize the people. This approach is informed by the work of Paulo Freire (1970) and others who argue that literacy in and of itself does not lead to empowerment or solve economic problems; "rather it must be linked to a critical

understanding of the social context and action to change oppressive conditions” (Auerbach, 1995, p. 655).

According to Auerbach (2001), this model relies on participants’ involvement in all of the decision-making throughout the program including curriculum, staffing, and administrative decisions. Another important feature is its call for action for social change. The downside is that a social practice model may serve to reinforce the participants’ existing literacies without providing access to the literacy of power in a target community as such a model affirms without necessarily expanding the repertoire of cultural and linguistic resources. Additionally, programs may not be able to meet the needs of every participant given that it is not realistic for the facilitators to be ethnographers, able to account for the myriad of cultures and languages in a given program. In order to effect change at an institutional level, the participants must be willing to step up and speak up on behalf of the needed change, which in light of the low literacy rates and confidence brought in by the mothers in the R2R program, may not seem attainable in a six-month program. Furthermore, this type of change was not mentioned by the mothers as a goal of theirs. In other words, the data suggests that short term (six-months in this case) family literacy program can be vehicles for individual change and align with the goals of the mothers.

The R2R program was initially based on the Kenan model of family literacy as an intergenerational program with the four programming components of adult literacy, child literacy, parent and child together and parent education. By definition, the R2R program would seemingly fall into this two-way model that Auerbach (2001) suggests is “a form of internal colonization” (p. 103), as it teaches “specific middle-class ways of disciplining, talking to and playing with them [children].” The data suggests that while topics of literacy and parenting were included in the program, they were generated by the parents and were not viewed as negatively

sharing information, rather providing a platform for the mothers to discuss their concerns, needs, and wants as a way of inclusion and empowerment (Rocha-Schmid, 2010; Swain et al., 2014). The research suggests that the R2R program incorporated the four tenets of the Kenan model, but also included the social network with dialogue and critical reflection at the heart of the program giving rise to a new paradigm, a three-way model of family literacy programs.

Dialogue is a core element of transformative learning - dialogue both with the self and with others (Taylor, 2009). Even though the transformations ultimately are individual, it is crucial to recognize that they are not possible without some kind of interaction. It is in the dialogue and the common transformative journey that the experience and the critical reflection take place, and it is also here that the boundaries of the individual are discovered, challenged, and exceeded. The dialogue must therefore go far beyond the curriculum and involve direct attention to the attitudes, emotions, personalities, and values of the participants.

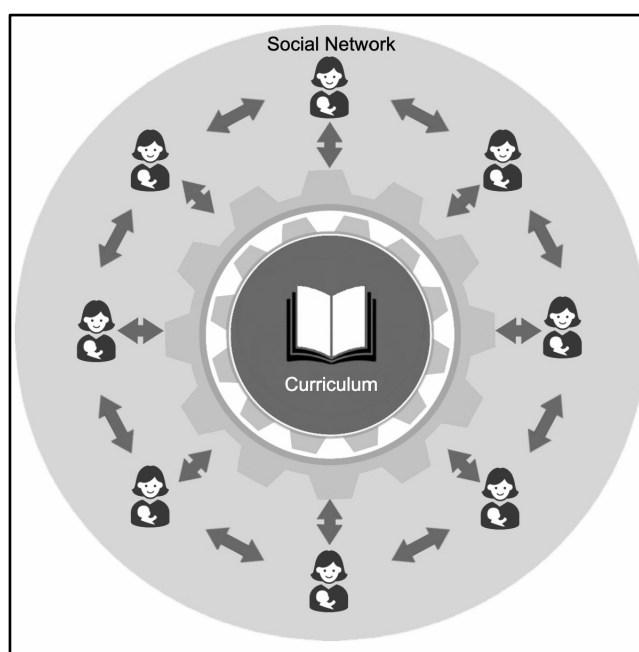
Auerbach's social change theory (1995) of family literacy suggests that "dialogue is a key pedagogical process" (p. 656). In place of skills training or the transfer of information from experts to learners, this model stresses an exchange among peers; participants share their experiences to gain a critical understanding of their social nature. Dialogue becomes a vehicle for making sense of one's reality which, in turn, is the basis for transforming it. Delgado-Gaitain (1991) characterized this critical reflection as "a process that engages people in careful examination of the assumptions that guide self, family and institutional norms, values, and practices. As a consequence, the group's awareness of their shared experience (past and present) becomes the basis for collective action" (p. 34).

In the R2R program, the direct adult space and the ensuing conversations within that space over time allowed the mothers to critically reflect on what was meaningful in their lives.

They were able to do so because of the transfer of information from mother to mother within a trusting and supportive environment. The mothers learned from each other as much, if not more than from the facilitators. They developed trust and friendships along the way that proved to be invaluable and guided the dialogue and critical reflection. This research study suggests that the previous models have not accounted for the powerful interactions between the mothers, and I therefore suggest that family literacy programs should be premised on a three-way model from program to parent, parent to program, AND parent to parent, based on a supportive social network that gives way to critical reflection and dialogue, which leads to transformative pedagogy (see Figure 8.3). Table 8.1 summarizes the different models of family literacy programs.

**Figure 8.3**

***Three-Way Model of Family Literacy, from Program to Parent, Parent to Program, AND Parent to Parent***



**Table 8.1**

*Overview of Family Literacy Programs (adapted from Auerbach, 2001)*

	<b>Skills-Based View (1-way flow of information)</b>	<b>Intervention-Prevention Model (2-way flow of information)</b>	<b>Social Change Perspective (3-way flow of information)</b>	<b>Expanded Social Change Perspective (3-way flow of information)</b>
<b>What</b>	Focuses on basic skills that society requires	Builds on family's strengths and cultural diversity	Focuses on multiple literacies and literacy practices that vary according to culture	Begins with social problems in the learners' lives
<b>Why</b>	Dominant literacy assimilation	Integration into dominant literacy and cultural practices	Literacy for social empowerment to enable learners to take action and change their lives	Aims to diversify literacy practices
<b>How</b>	Transmission of skills and meeting language benchmarks	Utilizes both teaching of literacy and parenting practices	Integrates culturally familiar literacy practices to make new meaning; dialogue is a key pedagogical practice	Promotes dialogue, critical thinking; reflection-action-reflection cycle
<b>Critique</b>	One-way transfer of information from programs to home, deficit view of families, insensitive to cultural differences, does not account for culture-specific literacy practices	Deficit view of families; suggests that undereducated families perpetuate a cycle of illiteracy; often focuses on one type of literacy event: home reading	Does not teach the language of power; can be complicated to implement in practice	Promotes the language and behaviours of power



### 8.3 Social Networks and Family Literacy Programs

Foundational to the three-way-model of family literacy is the establishment of social and supportive networks. While family literacy initiatives improve literacy skills for both parents and children, St. Clair (2008) argued that it is also important to see beyond competencies and skills and to look at the social impact of family literacy on participants' lives, and to see how programs can create and develop social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital is a metaphor for assets, or resources, that promote social mobility and allow people to gain greater status and power within society. Social capital can refer to the bonds created between parents and children, including the time and attention parents spend in interaction with their children during their learning activities (Parcel, Dufur, & Zito, 2010). It is also developed through changing attitudes towards literacy and school, gains in confidence, changing aspirations, and by modelling behaviours and practices in class and in the home literacy or learning environment (Burgess, Hecht, & Lonigan, 2002; Van Steensel, 2006; Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2010). Developing social capital can also refer to group membership and the creation of relationships with teachers, and the development of parental networks within a school community (Beck & Purcell, 2010), including a family literacy program.

Social capital is valuable in education as strong relationships between educators and learners contribute to a network of support that inspires all involved to achieve common goals (Balatti, Black, & Falk, 2007). Both facilitators and mothers noted that the women in the R2R program enjoyed meeting new people, making friends, and socializing in the family literacy program. Swain and Cara (2017) suggested that one effect of social capital acquired in programs is increased retention. Retention is largely about factors such as friendliness, approachability, and whether the participants feel like part of a group. This implies that the relationship between

the participant and the instructor and the relationships between participants are essential components, and that time spent in social activities is not time lost to learning but provides informal and powerful support to lessons. This issue of retention can be seen as an application of social capital concepts such as the individual's desire to protect their capital. If the program is a tight social network, people leaving it will lose social capital. By remaining in the program, they can avoid that loss, which provides investment to remain involved. This is consistent with Norton's argument that when learners invest in a language, they do so in the hopes of acquiring a greater range of symbolic and material resources, which will then increase the value of their social power (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

As mentioned, lunch was a special time during the program. Sharing food is not only an important benefit for low-income families; it is also a highly social activity. These straightforward aspects of program design can make it easier for adults to attend, thereby contributing to social capital and providing them with reasons for investing. For many, the R2R program was the only structured program to which they had access and looked forward to seeing the other mothers and facilitators each week. As Jane said (informal conversation, verbatim from field notes, April 3): "The formation of strong, supportive relationships helps women stay in the program because they develop 'a sense of community' and 'belong to something.'"

The social aspects of the R2R program, such as meeting other parents, making friends, and forming networks, were extremely important to the mothers, and the sisterhood they created was the second highest theme recorded, which enabled them to acquire social capital. There are three types of networks that the mothers became members of by virtue of joining the class. The first network was the formal network between the teachers and students that operated in the classroom at designated times over a period of weeks. The second type of network the mothers

entered was the teacher-based network that may operate both inside and outside the formal course time. The third set of networks are the informal networks the mothers made with other students that operated outside formal class time (discussed next).

Research suggests that new relationships counteract the negative effect of isolation; much research has documented the beneficial effects of friendship for physical and psychological well-being (Putnam, 2000), presumably because of the potential social support that such relationships provide (e.g., Tip, Morrice, Collyer, & Easterbrook, 2019). Putnam (2000) referred to contact between groups as “bridging social capital” and pointed out a host of benefits; for example, intergroup contact allows for sharing of information, knowledge, and ideas and can generate broader identities. That is, in addition to the psychological benefits, new acquaintances could provide immigrant and refugee background mothers with access to vital cultural knowledge and resources (Strang & Quinn, 2014; Tip et al., 2019), which can assist their socioeconomic advancement (Suter & Magnusson, 2015).

### **8.3.1 Network with Teachers and Students**

The relationships between the facilitators and mothers were integral to the social and supportive network created in the R2R program and the three-way model of family literacy. Supportive social relationships are an important dimension of marginalized women’s participation in community-based family literacy programs; however, policy makers and researchers often consider these social dimensions to be secondary to seemingly more necessary outcomes such as obtaining employment or increasing test scores (Prins et al., 2009; Swain et al., 2014). A growing body of evidence reveals that these women value and benefit from social interaction with peers and teachers in educational and community programs such as adult and family literacy programs (Boshier et al., 2006; Horsman, 1990; Prins, 2006). I look to Stromquist

(1997) in viewing family literacy as a potential “site for social distraction,” a “self-help group,” and an “informal social club” (p. 94). Such interactions are crucial because, as prior research has shown, having friends, confidants, and access to emotional support mitigates stress, anxiety, and depression for women in poverty (Lever, Pinol & Uralde, 2005). Lara established trust early on between the mothers when she explained in the first week of the program: “This is our community. What we discuss here is never allowed to leave the room” (field notes, direct adult). The trust built early enabled the building of community through communication, the creation of a sense of sisterhood, and the enhancement of mothering skills in Canada, which were the central practices of the program. It was the dialogue between and among the mothers and the facilitators that was the foundation of the program, and hence, explains the need for a three-way model that accounts for and values these relationships.

The R2R program provided many opportunities for the facilitators and mothers to create a network. This network was possibly the most visible, and certainly most formal, new network to which the mothers belonged. At the start of each day, the mothers, children, and facilitators had time for greetings and unstructured, informal conversations. According to the mothers, the hour of direct adult time, away from their children, provided them with their strongest network within the program and the time to which they most looked forward. The conversations and bonding carried over through lunch, which provided more opportunities for informal conversations. One day over lunch (April 10, field notes), Tati brought in books from her home that her family no longer reads. She offered them to the other mothers who were eager to take them home. Luisa and I encouraged Mosa to take some books home with her to read. She resisted taking the books but with a fair bit of encouragement, approached the table and chose a few; the act of deciding to take the books seemed empowering to Mosa. The relationship

between the three of us led to the compelling conversation about her insecurities in reading to her four-year-old daughter, as well as the trust to take the books home and try reading to her again.

Through family literacy, as women share ideas for solving personal problems and establishing friendships outside their usual networks, they access and exchange new forms of social support, including emotional and material resources. As the facilitators and mothers talked about daily life and personal problems, they provided each other with encouragement and emotional support.

Being an active member of this network was critical as it fostered a social-emotional environment where all the mothers felt welcome and safe; everyone took risks and shared; everyone showed respect to all while listening; and being non-judgemental was paramount. Given that all the mothers valued the aforementioned norms of the network, they were welcomed as full members of the group (Balatti et al., 2007). The mothers were invited to generate topics of interest from their life worlds, their interests, and their aspirations. The mothers had some control over what transpired in their time together as a group and had complete control over the pace at which they wished to progress through the topics. In this network, the mothers had full membership by simply being themselves. As reported by the mothers, the time spent with the other mothers and facilitators provided them with increased self-confidence and the ability to connect with wider and new social networks.

Motherhood unified this diverse group and seems to have acted as a catalyst for the women to access education after which they were able to harness that experience to a future trajectory in life and work, and in helping their children to succeed. Membership in this network appeared to be generative and produced a chain of events from facilitator to mother to mother to facilitator, and to outside networks showing the acquisition of social capital.

When the mothers were positioned as valued and needed, they were able to develop new literacies and contribute to their literacy progress (Duckworth & Smith, 2018). Transformative learning does not happen in a silo based on the insights of an autonomous learner, rather it is socially influenced, shaped, and accountable to others (Chin, 2006; Jokikokko, 2009; Nohl, 2009). The norms established the nature of the membership and resulted in the mothers reporting that they felt safe amongst the facilitators and other mothers in the class. As previously stated, throughout the program, the mothers echoed: “I feel welcome and safe here... I feel safe to make mistakes... I know I am safe now.” This allowed the mothers to be open about who they were, including being open about their language and literacy skills. In this way, teacher and student are both seen as essential parts of the education process, an essential component to the co-constructed practices of the program.

### **8.3.2 Network with Teachers**

According to Duckworth and Smith (2016), teachers play a vital role in creating the social conditions and establishing the strong relational ties through which transformative learning takes place. These teachers understand that, in some cases, it has taken enormous courage on the part of the adult learners to enter into an educational space. An initial focus of their work is to create a safe learning environment, establish trust and build confidence by forming caring relationships with the participants.

In light of the mothers’ limited opportunities for socializing and recreation (including financial barriers), family literacy programs provide low-income women an affordable, meaningful way to spend time with other women and children, offering a safe space to interact with empathetic and supportive peers (Prins et al., 2009). The educational space is one in which new identities are formed through and by the relationships of affirmation and care established by

the facilitators and the other mothers in the program (see section 5.61 for a thorough description of the relationship between the mothers and facilitators). Taylor (1997) contended that the role of the adult facilitator in building trust and facilitating the development of sensitive relationships amongst students is fundamental to the fostering of transformative learning. As a member of the learning community, the teacher sets the stage for transformative learning by serving as a role model, demonstrating a willingness to learn and in turn be influenced.

### **8.3.3 Network with Students**

The R2R program provided the mothers with opportunities to meet new people and make new friends. This network was not independent of any teacher intervention, but rather occurred through the interactions within the class and trust built within the group, that were in large measure due to the teachers and the type of curriculum and instruction. The network between the mothers began inside the program and extended beyond the program hours, which was an identified positive outcome expressed by all the mothers.

Some parents took pride in their studying and in identifying themselves as students. The identity of being a student and a teacher are both important, and as Rogers (2003) wrote, how the adult positions themselves in the teacher–student relationship will have a fundamental effect on their learning. Part of identity formation comes from people telling each other who they are claiming to be (Gee, 2001). As detailed in Section 5.3, Carly explained that she likes to watch the other mothers develop and help them because she was a newcomer to Canada as well. And her experience, in turn, helps the other mothers imagine themselves also being able to become competent speakers of English. This teacher-student interaction took place in all the modeling the parents did, in particular shared reading time and arts and crafts. A few of the mothers shared concerns about speaking to their children’s teachers at school. The mothers with older children

helped the newer mothers navigate the complexities of different social groups allowing the mothers to move between different contexts (home, school) with a sense of agency. Eliza shared her school concerns with the other mothers, who offered her advice. She reported back to the mothers in the final focus group on June 5 that she has more courage and confidence to get a job and speak to her daughter's teacher should a problem arise.

Immediately following the program end time, weather permitting, the mothers would let their children play on the playground while they watched and talked. They exchanged phone numbers and connected on social media. This led to socializing in their free time, including visiting one another's homes and inviting the other mothers and children to birthday parties, picnics in the park, and other social organizations and classes.

#### **8.4 The "Family" in Family Literacy Programs**

The notion of family was a regular category that contributed to the theme of sisterhood, which emerged largely through the direct adult time. One might think of the parent-child dyad as constituting the family dynamic in family literacy programs; that the composition of the "family" resides in the parent/child dyad. However, the depth of the social and supportive network and the resulting bonds that were formed between and amongst the mothers led them to refer to themselves as a "family." There were many comments from the mothers that proclaimed that the program felt like a family to them. These family metaphors were reiterated by several women in the program.

On May 8, we had a guest join our class. During the direct adult time I asked the mothers to introduce themselves and share something they like about the R2R program. As a follow-up to Mosa's feelings about Lara making her feel welcome and special (Section 5.61), she further



added: “Thanks so much for this program. You are my family now. You encourage me. I finally have a family.” This was followed by Jozi, who shared: “When I am coming here, I feel I am coming to see my family.” The mothers all echoed the same sentiments. Eliza said, “Feeling like a family helps me to be a better mom.” Peta concluded the class by saying, “I learned from my family [gestures to our group] that I am strong.”

Immigrant and refugee background mothers can access social support through family literacy programs, whether celebrating birthdays, forgetting their problems, or sharing the burden of personal struggles, all practices that can make these programs feel like a family. As the program progressed, the mothers began inviting the other mothers and children to their children’s birthday parties. They included me in these social gatherings, and I noted such events were only attended by the mothers from the program, not friends from outside the program, as many had shared that they had no other friends outside of the mothers from the R2R program. In speaking to the mothers three months after the program completion, they indicated that the friends that are in their lives post-program were made in the R2R program and continuing beyond the program end date. They continued to keep in touch on the WhatsApp group they created in the program. It was through the sharing of personal struggles, encouraging one another or celebrating life events that contribute to these programs feeling like a “family.”

In a meeting with Jean after the program ended, I asked her what she thought the best part of the program was (June 13, verbatim from my field notes):

It’s intentional that we create family and belonging because the people who live in isolation, they feel like they belong to something greater than themselves. Kids don’t live in isolation – we need to support the parents who support the kids. Parents are the foundation.

## 8.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter summarizes the major findings from the study and proposes a three-way model of family literacy programs. This study revealed that mothers did much more in the R2R program than learn academic skills. The program offered the mothers a space to network with facilitators and other mothers, creating a “family” outside of their traditional families. This was accomplished through a three-way model of family literacy, whereby the program was generated by the mothers and their lived experiences and needs (home to program), elements of the curriculum were enhanced, and material selected from the program (program to home), and the interactions between the mothers based on dialogue in a safe and caring space (mother to mother). During the final focus group on June 5, the overriding sentiment echoed by all the mothers was that the mothers, children and facilitators all felt like a “family.”

The three-way model is rooted in the practices of the program that were co-constructed by the mothers and the program. The R2R program was as meaningful and transformative as described by the women because of the supportive dialogue pertaining to their own lived experiences as mothers. The direct adult space provided opportunities for reflection, which ultimately led to the transformations as described by the mothers. The mothers gained a wider range of identities not only because of changing experiences, but through exchanging experiences with each other through dialogue and friendship.

## Chapter 9: Conclusion

This dissertation sought to investigate the impact of a family literacy program on 12 mothers from immigrant and refugee backgrounds by exploring how learner investment was integrated into the program, how the identity “mother” was socially constructed in the program, and the extent to which the program was transformative for the mothers. The discussion of these issues was situated in three frameworks: identity and investment, transformative learning theory, and multiliteracies. These theories provided the lenses through which I analyzed the data. Central findings from the study supported the need for a three-way model of family literacy, whereby the dialogue and interactions that took place between and among the mothers, both within and beyond the program, was critical to the success of the program as defined by the mothers’ goals and outcomes.

Although many parents initially signed up for the R2R program to improve their own literacy skills or to expand their social networks, most were seeking broader changes in their lives. Literacy learning was considered part of this change process, which they viewed as an opportunity to grow in new directions moving closer to their imagined communities as speakers of English, women with friends, and ultimately “better” mothers. Family literacy was not viewed by the mothers as a narrowly defined concept of acquiring print-based literacy skills; rather they joined in order to respond to their needs as women and mothers – of becoming more social, more culturally settled in their English-speaking communities, and of becoming “better” mothers as an ultimate change to their sense of self. They achieved this through a three-way model of family literacy whereby their investment in and co-construction of the practices of the program enhanced their imagined range of possibilities as mothers and women.

Although a primary goal of family literacy programs is to engage parents in interactive literacy activities with their children, the mothers in this case study appreciated the direct adult time that provided time apart from their children - something they considered important “for sanity.” The mothers commented that they had a much-needed break for themselves, providing them with some time away from their children while still being with them. In short, adult education classes afforded a quiet space in which women could pursue their goals and focus on themselves, while in the company of others.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the literature on family literacy programs has brought into focus the notion that, by definition, deficit views on programming are still pervasive, as programming and policy begin with the idea that there is a particular set of practices that parents should adopt in order to support their children in school. These practices are rooted in a school-based, autonomous view of literacy (Street, 2017); for example, school-centered notions of kindergarten readiness and parent involvement appear regularly in texts and conversations in the field. Further, to the extent that family literacy discourse is oriented to local school-based understandings of literacy, the discourse may be exclusive of the practices immigrant and refugee background families are already practicing in their homes and countries of origin. In theory and practice, family literacy programs have been repeatedly constructed as an entry point to schooling for children and families, and the role of family literacy work has been understood as one of bringing families into local communities by supporting them in adopting dominant literacy practices. Research suggests that such family literacy discourse often works to make invisible and ultimately devalue the literacy practices of non-English speaking/newcomer families (Reyes & Torres, 2007). However, in reviewing the literature, and participating in the R2R program, my data suggests that if participants are asking for an orientation to Canadian

social and literacy practices, then it is a process of valuing their needs and wishes. Consistent with the research, my findings support that programming be based on the needs and lived experiences of the parents.

The data promotes the notion that family literacy educators should begin with a mindset of openness to ensure we meet the needs of the families. Extending the mindset to action is actively showing respect to the parents and inviting them to participate in program planning that supports family-to-family, and parent-to-parent interaction. In family literacy discourse, respect for families is often referenced as an underlying value of the field, particularly in community-based programs that explicitly identify as strengths-based (e.g., Anderson, Horton, Kendrick, & McTavish, 2017; Compton-Lilly, 2009; Menard-Warwick, 2006; Wilson, 2009). For example, Mary Gordon, the founder of the Toronto District School Board's Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, said:

We always saw the family as the answer to problems rather than their cause, and the overriding value of the centres was one of respect for all families [emphasis added], who were seen as possessing significant strengths and the ability to find answers and solutions to their difficulties. (Gordon, 2000, p. 45)

It may be that this valuing of respect in the field offers a place/space to begin: a new orientation that might move us in the direction of a more transformative practice.

## **9.1 Implications for Research**

This research contributes to growing evidence that women establish important, yet often discounted, social purposes in nonformal education such as family literacy programs (Horsman, 1990; Prins et al., 2009; Stromquist, 1997; Swain et al., 2014). Although parent education and

family literacy programs have been criticized for regulating women's lives and promoting dominant ideologies of mothering (Smythe & Isserlis, 2004), they also afford a social space that women can use for their own purposes, ones which may not match those intended by policy makers or educators. The study suggests that future research needs to place greater emphasis on parent-to-parent interactions in family literacy programs, both within and beyond the program.

The findings from this study challenge the idea that the focus of family literacy programs should be centered around outcomes of increasing children's school readiness and adult education as a means to improve adult literacy, which often overlook the equally important social dimension. The proposed three-way model depends on this social dimension as being foundational to family literacy programs and supports earlier research that suggests mothers who form strong, supportive relationships are more likely to stay in family literacy programs because they develop a sense of community while offering each other encouragement and support through conversations about daily life and personal problems.

## **9.2 Implications for Practice**

Transformative learning is about changes in learner behaviour and experience whereby Kegan (2009) offered a lens through which to view it in the context of epistemological change. The data supports that family literacy programs need to understand the epistemological complexities or barriers to learning in order to overcome them. Belenkey, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarul (1997) described epistemological perspectives of how women view the world in five broad categories:

- i) silence – women feel voiceless and powerless
- ii) received knowledge – women receive knowledge from all knowing authorities

- iii) subjective knowledge – a perspective whereby truth and knowledge are conceived of as personal, private and subjectively known
- iv) procedural knowledge – women are invested in learning and applying objective procedures for communicating knowledge
- v) constructed knowledge – a position where women view all knowledge as contextual, experience themselves as creators of knowledge and value both subjective and objective ways of knowing. (p. 15)

These ways of knowing are valuable, as they can explain women's identities and their co-constructed sense of self. The study found that powerlessness in attempts to overcome adversity in diverse forms (poverty, language, housing, health), all have the effect of "silencing" women. This silencing of mothers in schools (as felt by Luisa) has been achieved by the deficit model of literacy. Women are silenced when they are blamed (real or perceived) for their inability to participate.

Adapting parenting practices and transcending marginalization should not equate to parenting in the exact way as middle-class Canadian parents. Many family literacy programs, including many that arose from the Kenan Model, have been identified as having origins rooted in a deficit model stemming from trying to change fundamental parenting. This only serves to further marginalize women with its narrow perspective on "good" parenting (Crozier & Davies, 2007). As Packer and Gonicea (2000) pointed out, the difference between acculturation and learning is that learning is not merely a question of passively adopting norms without critically reflecting. Rather, it is about changing one's way of being in the world in a way that one ascribes meaning relating to changes in possible identities. The challenge for a transformative learning curriculum/environment is how to facilitate the recognition of nondominant capital which many

learners possess. A transformative learning environment must actively and empathetically encourage learners to build new capital and take into account their ultimate goals, recognizing and valuing the capital they already bring with them.

The importance of relationships to the transformative learning experiences of mothers cannot be underestimated. The mothers in the R2R program shared their experiences in a collective and collaborative learning experience that supported the development of friendships, trust, and transformative learning (English & Irving, 2012). Knowledge of epistemological perspectives can strengthen the family literacy teacher's knowledge and understanding of mothers' lived realities. This allows women to move from a place of silence to a place where they are rooted in hopefulness (Hooks, 2003). Education for women is hopeful, especially when women become role models for other women in their communities.

Rather than trying to change mothers' knowledge by teaching them new parenting practices that are considered "better" or "good," my research suggests that educators need to consider the complexity of the particular problems' mothers are dealing with. In this way, mothers can be supported in finding ways of doing motherhood in a new context that is considered meaningful to them. This requires considering the question of what mothers have access to and their individual experiences, as well as the structures surrounding them, paying attention to the situation that specifically makes their parenting difficult. Also, it is important to maintain a range of possibilities of parenting in order to value the practices that each mother believes to be important to them. The mothers gained positive identities not only because of changing experiences, but also because of the dialogue that took place around those experiences in ways that promoted social awareness (Duckworth & Tett, 2019).



The idea that family literacy programs have the potential to facilitate the development of new ways of thinking, as well as enhance parenting skills, has implications for practice. In addition to the focus on skill acquisition that has long dominated program planning, program developers may consider adopting models designed to promote critical reflection and transformative learning to create more meaningful learning experiences. It is important to acknowledge that the R2R program and the focus of this study looked specifically at the needs of mothers. It remains imperative then, as Smythe and Isserlis (2004) suggested:

to look at how literacy programs are influenced by longstanding ‘mothering discourses’ that represent culturally bound beliefs and value surrounding who and what constitutes a good mother, a normal family, and by extension, appropriate literacy and pedagogical practices in the home. (p. 2)

There are two main factors that contributed to the mothers’ transformations. First, the mothers were central to the process of transformation and had to assume agency over their learning, as well as their relationship to other mothers. Second, the foundation for transformation was not built entirely on the curriculum. While curriculum connected to the goals of the learners is instrumental to achieving learning outcomes, so is the space, the environment, care, and empathy of facilitators, which can in turn lead to mastery of the curricular goals.

Summarized below in Table 9.1 include practices of the R2R program that promoted learner investment and provided a context for transformations.

**Table 9.1**

***Successful Features of the R2R Program***

<b>Successful Features of the R2R Program</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Included strong participant involvement in curriculum planning</li><li>- Emphasized retention through social networks</li><li>- Provided lunch for all, and transportation for those who needed it</li><li>- Created a supportive parent-only environment</li><li>- Used dialogue to facilitate instruction</li><li>- Provided opportunities for family and social networks to be formed</li><li>- Encouraged English only between the mothers to promote an inclusive environment</li><li>- Promoted the community and its resources</li><li>- Used WhatsApp to communicate including follow up</li><li>- Facilitated next steps for learning</li></ul>

The research suggests that family literacy programs should include supportive conditions in which women’s transformations might occur, both within and beyond the program. There is a requirement to examine what the less formal aspects of the program have contributed to the lives of participants. An evaluative approach that takes into account the social capital of learners is the best hope of most fully supporting family literacy education. As stated by Magro (2019b), “positive relationship building in combination with a curriculum that is authentic and meaningful are catalysts to learning” (p. 241).

### **9.3 Implications for Policy**

This study asserts that family literacy programs must account for the social dimension as being instrumental to planning and programming, as explained in the three-way model for family literacy, and not seen as tangential to academic goals. The social aspect accounts for one of the reasons the mothers signed up or a reason they remained in the program. The structure of the

Kenan model provides opportunities for both the academic and social goals of the participants. Multiliteracies offers a lens into an instructional model that is based on the lived experiences of the mothers, and provides direct instruction, situated practice, and critical thinking which leads to the eventual goal of transformed practice. The study affirms that adult literacy programs be open to participants' concerns by letting them know that the program is intended to meet their overall needs such that they generate their own topics for discussion. This pedagogy does not preclude direct instruction, as some skills and concepts ought to be taught in systematic and explicit ways. The multiliteracies framework provides a lens for lifelong learning by consciously and explicitly engaging with cultural diversity, technology, and multimodality. It views literacy as always socially situated and resonates with the work of adult literacy educators who believe in "starting from the local, everyday experience of literacy in particular communities of practice" (Hamilton & Barton, 2000, p. 379). A multiliteracies framework validates that the way that people learn has to be tailored to their own prior knowledge and previous life experiences (Brookfield, 2012); learning starts with educators finding out what their adult learners already know. Educators can create opportunities for bridging onto those experiences while challenging learners to critically reflect on their existing assumptions and frameworks of knowledge (Dirkx, 1998).

Insights from the research suggest we redefine the "family" in family literacy programs. These programs ought to focus as much on the "family" created amongst the adults as they do on the traditional "family" of parent-child dyads. Practitioners and policymakers should strive to create family literacy programs where the definition of the "family" is expanded to all members of the group, especially between the mothers.

Evaluation of family literacy program needs should not only be guided by literacy benchmarks; they should include the social aspects of the programs that have enriched the lives

of the participants. Parents are key players in family literacy programs and research based upon insider insight and situated knowledge has the potential to produce bottom-up evidence (Appleby, 2004). As insiders and consumers of the programs, parents make vital contributions to policy and practice through their evaluations of programs and through their insights on issues such as curriculum and pedagogy. The research suggests that parents' perspectives are key to designing future successful family programs (Hannon, Morgan, & Nutbrown, 2006), and studying such views adds to understandings that will be useful to policymakers, local authority managers, NGOs, adult literacy teachers, early years teachers, parents, and researchers.

Creating an inclusive, caring, and respectful learning environment is crucial for mothers. A sense of community is what binds mothers together and, in turn, generates its own value system. The learning environment (in terms of inclusiveness) will depend on the facilitator, the educational context and the participants. Most importantly these programs must do no harm—a basic level of cross-cultural respect and understanding must be a prerequisite for all encounters between teachers and learners.

Many family literacy programs for adult English language learners seek to empower adult learners with knowledge about school norms so that they can help their children achieve academically; however, these programs rarely focus on empowering the adults to question the power dynamics that make it difficult for them to become active members of their new society (Giles & Alderson, 2008; Neuman et al., 1996; Reyes & Torres, 2007). Family literacy programs serving this dual purpose could have the potential to simultaneously impact two generations of immigrant and refugee background families while working to alter the power relationships between dominant cultural institutions and marginalized groups (Rolander, 2018).

Rolander's (2018) analysis of diverse program models revealed that family literacy programs committed to and engaged in a problem-posing, dialogic approach to literacy education can serve to achieve what Reyes and Torres (2007) viewed as the ultimate goal: supporting participants through opportunities to confront and overcome the institutions, ideologies, and situations that marginalize them. By focusing on life journeys and personal histories, the R2R family literacy program legitimized the experience and prior knowledge each mother brought with her into the classroom and used these to define the changes they wanted to make outside of the program, for example, reading and speaking English, passing the driving test, getting a job, and helping their children succeed at school.

In family literacy, perhaps even more than other literacy programs, there is a need to promote reading, writing, speaking, and social relationships. The findings suggest that practitioners should recognize participants' multiple social purposes for participation instead of viewing socializing and social activities as a distraction from learning. Family literacy programs are about opportunity, support, and hope. At their best, they have the ability to help transform the lives of the participants, promote substantive changes in literacy uses, enhance parents' abilities to integrate into target communities, and bring greater happiness to diverse families. In sum, the following principles serve to guide the development and implementation of family literacy programs as they pertain to this study: understand parents' literacy strengths and reinforce their knowledge and skills; support the view that literacy is acquired through shared dialogue that is responsive to the needs and interests of participants, examined in a sociocultural context; take action to break down patterns of social isolation; and provide opportunities for participants to connect with one another both within and beyond the program.

## Reflection

My reflections have led me to consider the research experience and the interactions between myself and the mothers who were kind enough to share their time and thoughts with me. Initially I looked to my positionality as a binary: was I an insider or outsider in the group? Being Canadian born, a native English speaker and a researcher all positioned me as an outsider. However, I was also very much an insider as I am a mother, which united us.

It is reasonable to expect that the researcher's beliefs, political stance, cultural background (gender, race, class, socioeconomic status, educational background) are important characteristics that may affect the research process. Just as the participants' experiences are framed in social-cultural contexts, so too are those of the researcher. Through recognition of our researcher positionality, we may gain greater insights into how we might approach a research setting, members of particular groups, and how we might seek to engage with participants.

At some point early in the study, I revised my research questions. I focused more on the program than the mothers to try and understand the intersection between the two – the impact of the program on the mothers themselves rather than on their literacy practices. My study changed from a multiple case study investigating four focal mothers and their literacy practices, to a case study about a program investigating the co-constructed practices of the program. My research questions and unit of analysis shifted, as did my positionality and identity.

Through our shared space, we created a new group that was shaped by the identities of the researcher and participants. This happened organically over time, through enjoying time together and by being open and non-judgemental. This group evolved into the family we created that emerged from the needs, potential, and individual strengths of our group as well as from the

scaffolding provided by the program. In turn, these characteristics promoted the creation of a microcosm of transformational learning.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Initial Questionnaire

#### Personal Information

1. ID# \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your country of origin? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your mother tongue? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Do you speak any other languages? \_\_\_\_\_

a. Yes    No

b. If yes, please indicate which languages you speak:

\_\_\_\_\_

c. What language do you speak most often at home?

- \_\_\_\_\_
5. How many years have you lived in Canada? \_\_\_\_\_
  6. What is your highest education qualification or degree? \_\_\_\_\_
  7. How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_
  8. What are the ages of your children? \_\_\_\_\_

#### Reading Survey

- 1 a. Do you read for pleasure? \_\_\_\_\_
- b. What language do you read in? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you read in English?

Never \_\_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_\_ Most of the time \_\_\_\_ All of the time \_\_\_\_

3. As an adult, what do you read for your own adult enjoyment/interest? Please include books, newspapers, cookbooks, social media, etc.

\_\_\_\_\_

4. How do you rate your own enjoyment of what you read? (please check one)

- One of the most enjoyable things I do \_\_\_\_\_
- Usually enjoyable \_\_\_\_\_
- Sometimes enjoyable \_\_\_\_\_
- Not enjoyable \_\_\_\_\_



5. I read to my child/ren: (please check one)

- Often, every day \_\_\_\_\_
- Usually, a few times a week \_\_\_\_\_
- Sometimes, once in a while \_\_\_\_\_
- Not very often \_\_\_\_\_

6. Overall, how enjoyable is it for you to read to your child? (please check one)

- One of the most enjoyable things I do with my child \_\_\_\_\_
- Usually an enjoyable experience for me \_\_\_\_\_
- Sometimes an enjoyable experience for me \_\_\_\_\_
- Not an enjoyable experience for me \_\_\_\_\_

7. Is reading to your child(ren) important to you? \_\_\_\_\_

8. Do you have access to books in your home language(s)? If yes, where do you get them?

\_\_\_\_\_

9. What do you like best about reading to your child?

\_\_\_\_\_

10. What do you like least about reading to your child?

\_\_\_\_\_

11. I would rate my child(s)' interest in reading:

- Not very interested \_\_\_\_\_
- Occasionally likes to read during free time \_\_\_\_\_
- Chooses to read in free time a few times a week \_\_\_\_\_
- Reads frequently \_\_\_\_\_

12. Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements:

a. Young children get bored if they hear the same story over and over again.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_ Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

b. It is best not to read to children until they know how to sit and listen quietly to a story.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_ Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

c. It is important to talk and read to young children, even babies who don't understand.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_ Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

13. Things that can happen while reading to your child:

	Not at all	Sometimes	Usually	Frequently
a. I talk about the story or discuss the pictures and words.	1	2	3	4
b. My child asks questions or makes comments about the story.	1	2	3	4
c. My child joins in when I am reading rhymes, repeated words, or familiar sentences.	1	2	3	4
d. My child does not pay attention when I read to him/her, so I can't finish the story.	1	2	3	4
e. I tell my child about my own feelings about a story I have read.	1	2	3	4

14. What do you like to read together? What subjects interest your children?

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15. Share something about yourself as a very young child. Do you recall being read to? Was that something you grew up with?

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16. What are the main ways you practice literacy in your home? (for example, reading books or newspapers, writing notes, telling stories, doing art projects, working on the computer, etc.)

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### Technology

1. Do you have a mobile phone? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you have access to WiFi in your home? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

3. Do you have a computer or iPad in your home? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

4. Please circle the ways in which you use your electronics:

Text      Email      Skype      Facetime      Music  
Photographs      Reading books      Internet      Games

Please list other ways you use electronics:

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5. Do you use your phone or computer as an educational resource? If yes, how do you use it? Do you use specific programs? Internet?

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### **Ready to Read Program (R2R)**

1. Why did you enroll in the R2R program? Please list all reasons: learning English, learning new ways to use literacy in your home, meeting new people, etc.

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2. What do you hope to learn in this program?

---

3. Do you have plans to continue your education at the end of this program?

---

4. What do you hope to see happening in your home as a result of the program?

---

5. Are you hoping to meet other parents and make new friends?

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6 a. Do you work outside of your home?      Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

b. If yes, what type of work? Please include the number of hours you work per week.

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7. Do you have any questions or comments?

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## **Appendix B: Guide for Initial Focus Group**

1. Why did you enroll in the R2R program?
2. What does literacy mean to you?
3. What do you feel are the main ways you practice literacy within your home?
4. What do you hope to learn in this program?

### **Appendix C: Guide for Interviews of Focal Mothers**

1. What was the most valuable thing you learned in the program?
2. Did the program change how you engage with your child(ren) in literacy events at home?
3. How did the program change your own literacy practices?
4. Do you feel more confident engaging in literacy practices with your child(ren)?
5. Do you feel more confident engaging in literacy practices on your own?
6. How are you using technology with your child(ren)?
7. Do you hope to continue your English education or any other education?

## **Appendix D: Guide for Final Focus Group**

1. What was your favorite part of the program?
2. Was there something not covered in the program that you wish we had covered?
3. Have your ideas on what literacy is changed have since participating in this program?
4. Have your literacy practices with your children changed since beginning this program?
5. Have your own literacy practices changed since beginning this program?
6. How did you like the Storybooks Canada website and stories?
7. Do you use technology more for educational purposes since being introduced to Storybooks Canada and other sites?
8. Do you spend time together outside of this program?
9. Do you think you'll see any of the women and their children now that the program is done?
10. Are you hoping to go on to an adult literacy program or any other educational program?

## **Appendix E: Final Questionnaire**

### **Reading Survey**

1. Have you read more in English since participating in the R2R program?

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2. Do you think you read more with your children since participating in the R2R program?

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3. Do you feel that your reading experiences have changed over time?

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4. Do you have more access to books in your home language(s)? If yes, where do you get them?

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### **Technology**

1. Did you find Storybooks Canada a useful program?

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2. What did you like most about Storybooks Canada?

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3. What did you like least about Storybooks Canada?

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### **Ready to Read Program**

1. Do you plan to continue your education? For example, enroll in an adult literacy class?

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2. Did your literacy practices change in your home as a result of the program?

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3. What specifically (if anything) did you add to your home literacy practices as a result of the R2R program?

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4. What was the most helpful part of the R2R program? (for example, interacting with your child, the adult only component, the friends you made)

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5. What is the most valuable thing you learned in the R2R program?

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6. Did you make friendships that you hope to continue after the program?

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7. How important has the social aspect of the program been to you?

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8. Please rate the following program elements:

Art Activity	Too long___	Too short ___	Just right _____
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Circle Time	Too long___	Too short ___	Just right _____
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Parent Group	Too long___	Too short ___	Just right _____
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9. Please make any comments:

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