Examining Teacher - Parent Relationships in High and Low Socioeconomic communities: Teacher and Parent Reports of Communication, Mutual Support and Satisfaction

by

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Abstract

My study examined whether and how the relationship between parent and teacher corresponds to the socioeconomic status (SES) of the family or to the achievement level of their child in reading and writing. Relationship was defined in terms of communication, perceptions of mutual support and reported levels of satisfaction. The constructs were assessed through questionnaires and interviews with seven parent-teacher dyads. Each dyad represented a unique profile of student achievement (high or low), SES of the family (high or low), and parental involvement (high or minimal). Successful relationships were characterized as having clear communication, perceptions of helpful mutual support, and high levels of success. No clear patterns in the success of the relationships emerged from examination of the SES or achievement of the children; however, successful relationships were aligned with the teachers' ratings of parental involvement. Teachers included newsletters and log book messages in their methods of communicating with parents, while parents considered only two-way interactions as communicating with their child’s teacher. Teachers in higher SES schools reported giving suggestions to parents to assist their children but the parents did not report hearing the suggestions; however, teachers in lower SES schools did not report giving suggestions to parents but parents reported hearing the suggestions. Home literacy activities varied across families in high versus low SES schools. Parents in higher SES schools reported a broader range of activities in their home that supported their children’s literacy acquisition than their lower SES counterparts. Activities reported by low SES families were more task oriented while activities reported by higher SES families were more entertainment oriented and corresponded better with school activities.
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Dedication

Great gifts mean great responsibilities; greater gifts, greater responsibilities!

_Luke 12:48_

To

My parents, Elaine and Fred, who have shown me what this means from the time I was a little girl.

My siblings, Kirsten, Erik and Anita, who take this seriously every day in their own work.

Diane Assinger and Piet Langstraat, who showed me what this looks like in the hallways and classrooms of our schools.
Chapter I. Introduction

Statement of Question

Success in reading and writing has been correlated with success in school and beyond (Perrin, 1998; Statistics Canada, April 17, 1997; Keating & Hertzman, 1999). Unfortunately, children do not always succeed at learning to read and write. Research into why this is the case is extensive and indicates that reading ability and disability are complex and multifaceted in nature (see, for example, Baker, Scher & Mackler, 1997; Stanovich, 1986, 1988; Neuman, 1999; Neuman, Copple & Bredekamp, 2001; Phelps, 1995; Torgeson, 1995). Of particular interest to me is why children from low socioeconomic status (SES) communities are at greater risk for failure in reading and writing and, subsequently, for lower achievement in school than students from middle and high SES communities. Particularly, I am interested in examining whether and how the relationship between parent and teacher, in terms of the communication, perceptions of mutual support, and level of satisfaction, corresponds to the SES of the family or to the achievement level of their child in reading and writing.

Defining Relationship

An important term to define early in my study is relationship. What is a positive or helpful relationship between parents and teachers when children are learning to read and write? This term relationship is usually used in the statistical sense, but in this study the term is used in reference to the personal relationship that exists between parent and teacher. Educational research examining this sense of relationship is thorough, particularly between
parents and teachers, but also between teachers and students (e.g., Graue, Kroeger & Prager, 2001; Krogmann & Van Sant, 2000; Martin, 1994; Neuman, 1995; Pianta, 1999). Most research is based upon the convictions that children learn best when the relationship between parent and teacher is positive, and that risk of academic failure is reduced as conflict within this relationship is reduced (Martin, 1994; McCarthey, 2000; Pianta & Walsh, 1996).

In order to determine what is involved in a parent-teacher relationship it is helpful to look at the goals of programs designed to improve relationships between parents and teachers (see Krogman & Van Sant, 2000; Lincoln, 1997; Morrow, 1995a; Quigley, 2000). Two aspects of relationship are generally targeted: communication between home and school and support through parental involvement in the school. Improving communication has been attempted through strategies including home-school journals, student-led conferences (Cleland, 1999; Nichols & Read, 2002; Shannon, 1997), newsletters and other messaging formats (Quigley, 2000). Improving support to both teachers and parents, particularly those with children at risk, is generally done through a variety of innovative family literacy projects that provide parents with resources to support their child's reading development at home (e.g., Morrow, Scoblinko & Shafer, 1995; Neuman, 1995; Neuman & Roskos, 1993) or programs designed to increase parental involvement in the school, generally in the traditional sense of volunteering in the classroom (Graue, Kroeger & Prager, 2001).

A shortcoming of these initiatives, in my opinion, is that they are designed and supported primarily to address concerns of teachers rather than addressing concerns of the parents. These initiatives encourage actions that teachers see as helpful in reading and writing acquisition, rather than considering any constraints these parents may face. My goal was to describe more clearly what teachers and parents see as helpful in terms of communication...
and support. My intent was to determine if the teachers’ and parents’ expectations of one another differ at varying levels of SES, or if the gap between what is desired and what is truly happening is narrower or wider at varying levels of SES. Because success in school is associated with early reading and writing success, my study was done in the context of reading and writing achievement for young children.

As in others studies (McCarthey, 2000; Nichols & Read, 2002), I examined the relationship between parent and teacher by examining the communication and the support both parties perceived being offered by the other. In examining communication, I looked at the frequency of discussion between parent and teacher, the manner or context of the discussion, and the content of the discussion. In examining support, I examined the mutual support each party perceived being offered by the other. This included the support teachers perceived being offered by parents in supporting reading and writing expectations. This also included the support parents perceived the teacher offering them in carrying out what they perceived were the expectations of the school. Finally, I investigated the level of satisfaction both parties had with the communication and the mutual support within the relationship.

Defining Socioeconomic Status

Before investigating the people identified as belonging to a low SES group, it is important to understand how the term has been defined in previous investigations, and in our culture, and to identify some of the problems associated with the definition. For research purposes, assignment to an SES group is determined primarily by household income. Education of parents, quality of housing, degree of participation in social programs, and the nature of the family configuration also are considered to varying degrees when establishing
SES levels because these variables are correlated with income (see White, 1982 for a helpful summary). In general, the term low SES is used to refer to a group of individuals who are relatively poor, have low levels of education, work at low paying jobs or receive social assistance, and live in inexpensive or subsidized housing. Immigrants, minority families, and single parents (most often mothers) are over-represented in this population.

A danger, in my opinion, is in assuming that the low SES population is a homogeneous group, that all members of this group hold the same values about education, particularly about reading and writing, and that this group values education less than other groups (Lott, 2001). For example, it is assumed, particularly by teachers, that parents in low SES communities do less to support their children’s literacy development (Baker, Serpell & Sonnenschein, 1995; Edwards & Pleasants, 1998). This assumption can be challenged on two fronts. Firstly, it has been found that the value low SES parents place on literacy is often misconstrued because their home literacy practices are different than those found in middle class homes and schools (Auerbach, 1989, 1997; Heath, 1983). Secondly, many families with one or more parent completing some sort of job training or university program may be living below the poverty line. Members of the clergy, people working on humanitarian projects, or public service employees such as librarians or early childhood teachers, often are not highly paid (Human Resources Development Canada, 1996), but do value literacy. New immigrants to Canada are often professionals in their own country, but live below the poverty line for some time before establishing themselves in a business or profession. These families, despite a lower income level, hold high regard for literacy and schooling for their children.

A second assumption is that lower SES families are less involved in the schooling of their children (Lott, 2001). Lareau (1989) found the amount of involvement of low SES
parents seemed less because they were not present in the school as often; however, when talking with the lower SES parents she found they believed their role was to support the teacher from the home by making sure the children were attending school, were behaving at school, and were doing homework. Their involvement looked different than that of the higher SES families who believed they should be present at the school.

A third assumption, and one I was particularly interested in challenging, is that lower SES parents are not as interested in communicating with the teacher and are not as supportive of the teacher as higher SES parents seem to be (Lareau, 1989, 1996; Lott, 2001; VanGalen, 1987). Perhaps this is also an incorrect perception on the part of teachers.

Lower SES is undoubtedly a risk factor in achievement in reading and writing, but it becomes necessary to pinpoint the specific factors subsumed by the term low SES that contribute to lower achievement levels in reading and writing (Bernstein, 1972; Cazden, 1988; Heath, 1983; Keating & Hertzman, 1999; Neuman, 1999; Wells, 1986). Significant research has been done in this direction, particularly looking at connections between home and school (Baker, Scher & Mackler, 1997; Edwards, 1995; Leichter, 1984; Lott, 2001; Serpell, 1997), but there is a gap in the research looking for risk factors within the relationship between parent and teacher. I see this relationship as particularly vulnerable because the SES level of most teachers is typically above that of lower SES families. If the relationship between a parent and a teacher is a factor in the achievement level of the child then probing this relationship is the only realistic approach if some sort of meaningful intervention is to take place.
What Does it Mean to be Literate?

Finding a single operational definition for literacy is not possible, as it ‘looks different’ among different groups of people (Paris & Wixson, 1987). Answers to the question “what is literacy?” vary substantially, and are usually influenced by a particular perspective on the issue (Cook-Gumperz, 1986a). For example, a psychological perspective will focus on the cognitive processes that operate in reading and writing, whereas a sociological perspective will incorporate the influences of the environment of the reader or writer. Fluency or expertise in a particular domain is often referred to as ‘literacy’ in that domain. For example, ‘cultural literacy’ involves the ability to understand and participate successfully in the activities associated with a particular culture (Bhola, 1994). My study focuses on young children’s development of literacy in printed language. The ultimate goal is for individuals to read and understand what is being read, to write in a way that others can understand, and to communicate through spoken language, all at a level acceptable in community, family and work environments (adapted from the International Adult Literacy Survey definition; Darcovich, 1997). My study focuses on factors that influence children’s development toward this definition of literacy.

Skilled Readers and Writers: What Do They Know and Do?

Questions about the relationship between home and school stem from growing evidence that both of these contexts contribute to literacy development. A description of current beliefs about literacy development will be helpful in illuminating what led me to look at the relationship that exists between these two contexts.

According to the above definition of literacy, skilled readers and writers will not only be competent at classroom tasks, but will use that knowledge in a wide range of real-world
tasks as well. Word identification, fluency, comprehension, spelling, grammar and composition are all components of reading and writing, but it is the integration of these skills and the application of them in day to day activities that is the goal (Lipson & Wixson, 1997).

Using these components of reading and writing successfully is part of skilled performance, but there are learner factors that also need to be considered. Skilled readers and writers are motivated to read and write and are free of disabilities that affect reading and writing success. Skilled readers and writers have significant and helpful prior knowledge to help make sense of content and they have metacognitive knowledge about reading and writing that enables them to regulate their reading and writing processes and products (Lipson & Wixson, 1997).

There is growing evidence that skilled readers and writers are aware of the phonemic principals of language (Neuman, Copple & Bredekamp, 2001; Stanovich, 1988; Torgeson, Wagner & Rashotte, 1994; Velluntino et al, 1988). The ability to hear and manipulate sounds in oral language and written language, the ability to remember the sounds they hear and produce, and the ability to use these skills to predict and construct new words are skills that have been associated with successful reading and writing (IRA & NAEYC, 1998).

Reading and Writing Development

Skilled reading and writing begins long before children enter school (Teale & Sulzby, 1986) and, contrary to a readiness perspective, the ability to read and write is affected by early childhood experiences with literacy (IRA & NAEYC, 1998). Emergent Literacy has been described as comprising “all of the behaviors and concepts about reading and writing that precede and develop into conventional literacy” (Sulzby, Branz & Buhle, 1993); conventional literacy is reading and writing as taught in school. Key events that have been
examined in discussing emergent literacy are the *storybook reading experiences* and interactions children have with storybooks before coming to school (Sulzby, 1985; Wells, 1986). Although this has remained central to early literacy development, other literate events have also been established as important for later reading achievement such as word games, chalkboard activities, literacy artifacts, and children's solitary book activities (Gunn, Simmons & Kameenui, 1995). Sulzby (1992) indicates that there is also a clear developmental progression toward conventional writing. Just as in reading, they begin to 'write' long before they understand the patterns and regularities of conventional writing.

Upon entry to school, children develop reading and writing ability through the interaction of timely guidance and instruction with an active and motivated learner. In terms of a progression of skills leading to reading and writing competency, the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) have identified five phases in the development of independent and productive reading and writing (1998). During the preschool years, children listen to storybooks and discuss them, participate in rhyming activities, understand that print carries a message, and make some attempts at reading and writing. They are beginning to understand the alphabetic principle. Children in kindergarten continue to enjoy reading books, understand the typical orientation of books, match spoken letters and words to print, retell simple narrative stories, and use descriptive language. They also start to write some high frequency words. Children in grade one should begin to read and retell familiar stories, use comprehension strategies, use reading and writing for their own purposes, identify an increasing number of sight words, and write about topics that are personally meaningful using some conventions of writing. Children in grade two and three increase fluency and
comprehension in both reading and writing, understand and make connections between different elements of text, write in a variety of forms using complex vocabulary and expression, and understand and use revision and editing processes in their writing (IRA & NAEYC, 1998).

The great variety in the preschool experiences of children who enter school demands that the reading teacher be knowledgeable and adept at using a variety of teaching methods, materials, texts, and assessments (Neuman & Roskos, 2000). A thorough discussion of effective teaching practices follows in chapter 2 (p. 32) but, in summary, effective teachers have a clear understanding of the development of reading and writing in young children and the prerequisite skills needed to derive meaning from printed text. Effective teachers are also able to determine the individual needs of children and meet their needs through appropriate instructional methods (IRA, 2000; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998).

Lipson and Wixson’s (1997) description of the interactive nature of the factors contributing to reading and writing acquisition for young children helps to clarify the prerequisites for development. The model they describe considers contextual factors, learner attributes as described above, as well as instructional factors that lead to skilled reading and writing. Two of the contextual factors affecting reading development that are particularly relevant to this study are the setting and the instructional resources. The setting, including both the community and the culture where children are learning to read, is a critical element of the acquisition process; the family - school relationship, in terms of communication and support, affects the community of the child. The instructional resources available for the children also play a role in literacy development and limited financial resources may mean limited instructional resources in the early years.
The development of skilled reading and writing is difficult to characterize due to this complex interaction of factors (Lipson & Wixson, 1997); however, all descriptions of normal development include interaction between home and school. Probing the relationship between teachers and lower SES families may provide further insight into why these children are at risk for reading and writing failure.

**Review of Factors in the Home Contributing to Literacy Development**

Studies that ask why children do not succeed at learning to read and write are usually separated into two groups: those looking for internal explanations or, as some say, the *nature* of the child, and those looking at the external environmental explanations, or the *nurture* of the child. Internal characteristics of the learner, such as attitudes and motivation, physiological or neurological factors, and cognitive skill (Stanovich, 1986; Torgeson, Wagner & Rashotte, 1994; Vellutino et al, 1996; etc.) have led to some alternative programs in schools to deal with the special education needs of the child. Factors external to the child, such as the curriculum, school environment or approaches to instruction have been questioned and investigated (e.g. Clay, 1998; Entwisle, Alexander & Olson, 1997; Rhodes, 1995; Serpell, 1997) leading to program and instructional reforms. These two approaches have explained many, but not all of the difficulties children have. The family and the home environment have become more prominent factors when investigating questions about children who continue to struggle, (e.g. Auerbach, 1989; Baker, Serpell & Sonnenschein, 1995; Bernstein, 1972; Heath, 1983; Lareau, 1989; Morrow, 1995; Neuman, 1996, 1999). Leichter (1984) mentions that in order to understand the education or learning that happens within the family unit, it is important to investigate that unique environment on its own terms, rather than looking only for contexts and tasks that replicate the context of the
classroom. The physical environment, the interpersonal interactions and the emotional and motivational climates warrant investigation. This project seeks to do this, particularly to characterize the relationship the family has with the school and determine if there are any patterns in the relationship that correspond to success in reading and writing in the early years of schooling or to the SES of the family. Including the point of view of the family in this characterization is a priority. Wells (1986) contends that the differences between children from lower SES homes before entering school are minor compared to the differences that emerge after entry to school. In an effort to understand why these differences are exacerbated and not ameliorated by schooling, several suggestions have already been investigated and have provided some explanation.

*Language and literacy activity.* A key area of interest for researchers has been the language used in middle and upper class homes, looking particularly at the similarity between language use in these homes and language use in school. Wells (1986) discusses how children from different home backgrounds fare when they enter school. He points out that the content of what children from all backgrounds communicate in oral language is comparable when they enter school, but the style or dialect may differ. It is those children who have had the experience of language that is comparable to school language who will be more successful in school, particularly in reading and writing (Bernstein, 1972; Gumperz, 1986; Michaels, 1986; Wells, 1986). Wells (1986) explains the transfer of this schoolhouse language from one generation to another is an understandable reality when one generation is successful in school; passing along to the children the skills that are necessary to be successful will become a priority for that generation.
Parental literacy level. Closely tied to the language use in the home is the literacy level of the parent or parents. Higher parental literacy is an advantage for a child’s reading and writing acquisition (Hertzman, 1999; Pena, 2000). In countries where there is greater disparity between levels of SES, the literacy level of the parent plays a significant role in the literacy of the child (Darcovich, 1997; Hertzman, 1999). The advantage of having an educated and literate parent in Canada has been associated with higher levels of literacy for the children, and in the health and well being of the children (Keating & Hertzman, 1999; Lipps, personal communication, Jan. 2000). Edwards (1995) tells of one parent of lower SES reporting:

I'm embarrassed, scared, angry, and feel completely helpless because I can’t read. I do care 'bout my children and I want them to do well in school. Why don’t them teachers believe me when I say I want the best for my children?” (p. 54)

Having parents with higher levels of literacy will likely lead to what Wells (1986) calls the transmission effect: parents will pass along what they value and what they believe they are successful at doing. Although it is not correct to say that parents who were not successful themselves at reading and writing do not value the skill for their children, it is likely that they had difficulties in school, and may not know the best way to pass along the necessary skills to be successful in reading and writing.

Beliefs about literacy. For many children, a different first language than English is used in the home, but the children are still successful at reading and writing in English. The question of the priority the family places on schooling and education is raised as a possible explanation for the success of these children despite the apparent disadvantage of a second language.
Anderson (1995) has investigated the beliefs about how children come to be literate within various cultural groups in Canada, and found some differences that may lead to alternative explanations for success or failure. Chinese-Canadian parents in his study tended to encourage literacy learning by emphasizing particular component skills involved in reading (e.g. ‘teaching the child to print and write properly’ or ‘teaching the child how to spell correctly’) while Euro-Canadian parents chose activities that showed the value of literacy by encouraging the children to read, or by modeling reading themselves (Anderson, 1995). It is important to not over-generalize these results, but the reality that particular cultures define and value literacy differently explains some differences in literacy achievement for these cultural groups. These results also need to be interpreted with the acknowledgment that the school system, which determines the standards of achievement, is still largely managed by middle class Euro-Canadian people.

Edwards and Pleasants (1998) challenge the assumption that higher SES families place a higher priority on literacy. They indicate that this is not true, and that parents across all levels of SES desire their children to learn to read and write. Studies in the USA that have examined children and families from a variety of SES levels and cultural backgrounds have found that parents’ reasons for promoting literacy may differ by demographics, but all parents desire that their children learn to read and write (Auerbach, 1989; Epstein, 1987; Neuman, 1999; Serpell, 1997). Parents of higher SES tend to value literacy as a form of entertainment, while parents of lower SES tend to look at it as a skill or set of skills to be practiced and mastered (Serpell, 1997; Baker, Serpell, & Sonnenschein, 1995). This difference may have implications for motivation to read and write (Baker, Scher, & Mackler,
The view of reading and writing as entertainment is more in line with the views found in the school, and is an advantage for the children when they enter school.

**Economic resources.** Another advantage of middle or upper class homes seems to be the practical implications of having more money or resources in the home. More books can be purchased, tutors and special lessons are arranged more frequently, more experience with preschool programs is likely as they often cost money, and volunteering at the school may be more possible if one parent or caregiver can afford to be at home. High quality and stable care for the children when one or both parents are working is more likely with more resources available to pay for such care. Having stable and regular care for the children has secondary benefits such as regular eating and sleeping patterns that can help the children stay healthy and alert at school (Keating & Hertzman, 1999; Lipps & Yiptong-Avila, 1999). Neuman (1999), noting that lower income child-care programs have significantly fewer literacy resources in their facilities, examined the effects of increased “volume of children’s playful, stimulating experiences with good books” (p. 289) and higher quality literacy instruction among preschool care facilities in low income areas. She found that the limited resources in the facility contributed to the children’s difficulties with early literacy, and by increasing the access to books, improvements in literacy were made.

**Parental involvement.** Parental involvement in the school is also positively correlated with success in school (Henderson, 1988; Neuman, 1993, 1995). This is certainly a factor for lower SES families. There are practical and understandable reasons a lower SES parent may not be as involved as a parent who is financially able to be at home or available to be at school. Lower paying jobs often involve shift work or irregular hours, and many lower SES parents have more than one job. Lareau (1989) has found that lower SES parents generally
have different beliefs about their role in the education of their children. They tend to see the
teacher as chiefly responsible for their child's literacy education and the school as separate
from the home (Lareau, 1989). They see their role more as providing behavioral support for
the children and ensuring the children do the work assigned from school.

Each of these factors described is linked to reading and writing acquisition, and there
are good reasons why children from middle and upper SES families have greater access to
the advantages. The demands of the school are more easily met by these higher SES families
with language similar to the language of school, where the prevalent view of literacy is more
in line with the school personnel, where there are more resources in the home, and where
there are higher levels of parental involvement and parental literacy. The increased risk of
disparity between home and school puts the lower SES population at risk for a more difficult
or distant relationship with the school personnel. I was interested in how these parents and
their child's teacher interacted with one another, in terms of how they communicated and
how they supported one another and the satisfaction they had with one another learning.
Particularly I was interested to see if a lack of access to these advantages played a role in this
parent-teacher relationship.

Summary

Children of lower SES families are at a greater risk for reading and writing
difficulties. Investigation into inherent aspects of the learner and the aspects of the school
context have not answered all questions about the difficulties the lower SES population faces
in school and has led to questions about the home and family context. Challenging the
assumption that lower SES parents value schooling and literacy less highly than their middle
and upper SES counterparts led me to look for another explanation for the higher risk these
children face in literacy acquisition. Is there another factor that contributes to failure in reading and writing, particularly after the child enters school, when the differences in performance begin to emerge between levels of SES? There is no doubt that there is potential for discrepancies between the environment at the school and the environment in the homes of some lower SES families that could lead to lower achievement. Do these discrepancies between home and school lead to a less helpful relationship between home and school? Are lower SES parents less interested in forming a successful relationship with their child's teacher?

To refine the question even more, and to add to questions that have already been answered, this study looked carefully at the connection the parents of both lower and higher SES homes had with the school, particularly the relationship they had with their child's teacher. Some specific questions included the following: What type of communication occurs between teachers and parents? What is the nature of the support offered by both teachers and parents for the child's reading and writing development? What is the level of satisfaction with the communication and the support between parents and teachers across diverse economic backgrounds and achievement levels? These questions needed to be examined in order to properly characterize the relationship between parent and teacher as a possible risk factor associated with lower SES children's poor performance in school.

The following chapters include a literature review, a description of the methods and results for each of the three phases of the project, and a discussion of my findings. In the literature review I begin by defining some terms and defending the importance of working toward skilled reading and writing for all children from culturally and economically diverse backgrounds. I also review the factors that have been found to relate to achievement for
lower SES children, and point to the gap in the research of parent-teacher relationships as a possible factor in achievement.
My decision to investigate the relationship between parent and teacher as a possible influence on reading and writing achievement, particularly for children from lower SES families, is a result of my own observations of the difficulties these families face in meeting the expectations of the teachers when the children come to school. Teachers acknowledge and accommodate many of the factors researchers have found to influence reading and writing acquisition for these children, but the factor of parents' relationships with teachers warrants further investigation. There is a noticeable gap in the literature in looking at the relationship between parent and teacher.

The goal of literacy instruction used for this study was outlined in the introduction: the ability for individuals to read and understand what is being read, the ability to write in a way that others can understand, and the ability to communicate through spoken language, all at a level acceptable in community, family and work environments (Darcovich, 1997). As mentioned before, this definition is not without controversy. Few would argue about the importance of acquiring the skills and abilities required to access and produce printed information in modern Western culture; but questions remain about promoting views of literacy emanating from majority culture (i.e., white, middle-class, Euro-Canadian) to all children.

Defending the Promotion of Literacy for All Children

This study is designed to further clarify why some children are less advantaged and do not have equal access to acquiring reading and writing skills in the school system. This
assumes that giving all children equal access to a system of reading and writing moderated by the predominant social class is a defensible goal. A question arises about the possibility of perpetuating social inequality by attempting to provide and encourage mainstream reading and writing skills for all children.

This is not a new debate (Cook-Gumperz & Keller-Cohen, 1993), and the central controversy arises from the fact that language, particularly oral language, is vulnerable and highly likely to be changed and adapted for different groups of people. Evaluating success in language does not always reflect these adaptations. Significant work has been done characterizing how individuals from different backgrounds use language and how it compares to the language used and taught in classrooms. Studies in preschool oral language have all come to the same conclusion: children are using many variations of language when they enter school, but all children except those with severe disabilities are able to communicate effectively in the oral language of their community (Heath, 1983; Wells, 1986).

In the early 1980s, Shirley Brice Heath (1983) completed her study of language acquisition in three communities in the Southern United States and found some differences at the 'macro' level of language acquisition, or the sociocultural level. She found the children spoke very differently in each of the three communities, but difficulties associated with the differences did not emerge until the children entered school. Gordon Wells (1986) investigated the acquisition of oral language within a sample of English speaking preschool children in Bristol, England, who came from backgrounds representative of the variety in SES in the community. His analysis was done both at a micro level of how language looks and sounds in the early years, and at a macro level that included social and environmental factors. His conclusion supported Heath's: all children followed a similar sequence in
learning to communicate, regardless of the background of the family; the influences of
differences in environment did not begin to pose a problem until they entered school.

Cazden (1988) studied classroom discourse and its role in early schooling. Because
the classroom is one of the most social experiences of a child's life, involving interaction
with many other children and teachers, the acquisition of new cognitive skills happens
through the interactions between people, curricula and programs. Much of this interaction,
particularly at the early ages, is based in oral language and much of it is through adults
speaking to children (Cazden, 1988). Difficulties arose when the form and style of language
the children already knew, or had been exposed to prior to schooling, was different than the
language used in school. The description of the communities of Roadville, Trackton (Heath,
1983) and Bristol (Wells, 1986) support this finding. Bernstein (1972) found children needed
to learn the appropriate language for schooling in order to be successful. This is where the
inequality for some students begins.

Michaels (1986) and Cazden (1988) each described examples of differences in
narrative presentations of young children during ‘Sharing Time’ in grade one classrooms.
This particular event, similar to most ‘show and tell’ times, had some unique characteristics
from other narrative discourse patterns. For example, the children were not expected to tie
what they said to the topic of the last speaker, and the teacher interrupted frequently to ask
questions for clarity and held the floor for the child by ensuring other children were listening.
Michaels (1986) recorded two very obvious differences in the style of their narrative between
the African-American and European-American children: the intonation patterns were
different between the two groups, and the African-American children tended to list a set of
successively related events, each one being related to the previous idea, but not to one
underlying idea. The differences in intonation did not bring any correction from the teacher, but the seemingly ‘rambling’ list of events that had no overall relation definitely were corrected by the teacher. In an interview with one student and her older sister who remember this early ‘sharing time’ experience, both interpreted the teacher’s corrections as frustrating interruptions that were a sign that she was not interested in what they said. The older student gave her impressions of what constitutes ‘good-sharing’ by giving an example of topic centered discourse using the words “blah, blah, blah,” but with the correct intonation, and then explaining what they were not supposed to do: “she meant tell about one thing, not 35,000 other things...” (p.110). This is one example of the different experiences children have in the classroom, in part because of their different cultural background.

This early oral language that children come to school with, extends to all literacy activities and learning in the classroom:

Language is the center of children’s experience in school ...influencing the form and quality of the educational experience and the judgments made about children as learners. ... Those who talk easily make their understandings and questions clear to the teacher, get more attention and are able to influence the curriculum in the directions of their particular needs. Children who are less articulate or who speak a language or dialect that differs substantially from that normally used in the classroom often are misunderstood or overlooked in discussions. (King, 1984, p.175)

Heath (1983) describes how the experience of the school was so foreign to the children reared in Trackton, a working class African-American community. The expectations for behavior, the types of structure and activities, the materials, and the dialectical patterns were different than what was expected by the teachers in the middle-class school the children attended. This created difficulties for the children in learning to read and write, in their behavior, and the interactions these children had with the teachers. The central questions are
evident: does the dominant middle class, of which teachers generally are members, have the right to insist that students learn and adhere to the language and conventions of this social class? And does the goal of promoting mainstream literacy instruction bring with it a likelihood of miscommunication between home and school?

**Position**

Language is different in different settings. Children come to school with a wide variety of experiences with language and differences in the way they use language. The importance of diversity of language can be defended on cultural grounds and simply because it provides variety and interest in communication. Noam Chomsky, when asked what should happen in teaching children from minority language backgrounds (Putnam, 1994), cautions against thinking that any language is better than another. Rather, one needs to acknowledge that there is usually a language of power in a particular society that is used in decision making; to avoid teaching a child to use this language denies him or her access to participation in the decision making process at the level of power in that society. My position is that failing to give children the skills to participate in the language of the dominant and powerful groups in society leaves them without a chance of participating in the activities and decisions of these groups and perpetuates inequality. I believe it is possible and necessary to teach children that there are contextually appropriate ways of speaking. Labeling children who are literate in the dominant language as intelligent or, conversely, children who are illiterate in the language of the dominant culture as unintelligent is wrong. But delivering the skills of participating in the language of power and influence is a conscientious and defensible decision.
Serpell (1997), while acknowledging the changing nature of literacy within any context, described literacy as two sided: a familiarity with the symbol system used by a particular community, and meaningful interactions within the community using this system to understand and construct meaning through literate practices. He argues that many parents enter and fully support an unwritten contract with the school system to bring this construct of literacy to their children and to provide their socialization into a literate community. However, this contract between home and school has potential for problems, which can lead to disagreement or miscommunication, particularly for some families. Serpell found the greatest congruence between home and school among middle class families in Western societies. I am investigating whether a lack of congruence or lack of relationship between families and school personnel is more prevalent for lower class children and whether this discontinuity places them at risk for failing to acquire the literacy of the dominant class.

Advantages of Early Success In Reading and Writing

In later schooling

Children who succeed in reading and writing by the end of grade three have a significantly greater chance at success in later schooling (NAEYC & IRA, 1998). The time from birth until age eight years has been found to be the most critical for literacy development. The reading and writing demands after age eight increase with the assumption that meaning can be accessed and constructed more easily. If there are difficulties with reading and writing at this point, the effects are compounded and lead to academic problems for the child and young adult in school (NAEYC & IRA, 1998)
In Adult Life

Work. The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) has investigated the adult literacy rates of several countries around the world, including Canada, and has compared them to factors such as employment, income and level of education. The report argues that while those with more education are more likely to be ‘literate’, educational attainment is not synonymous with literacy, and many are able to achieve high levels of literacy without high levels of education (IALS, 1995). Literacy is a fluency in the discourse necessary to function within one’s community and employment whereas levels of education are simply the amount of academic instruction one has received (IALS, 1995). The survey has found the literacy of an individual, even when considered separately from education level, to be influential in income level; higher the levels of literacy, lead to higher earning potential and the larger contributions to the nation’s wealth. People with high levels of literacy are less likely to be unemployed, and for shorter periods of time, putting less strain on the social systems in the countries. More literate people are more likely to have more influential jobs in society.

Health. Higher levels of literacy are correlated with better health in Canada (Abbott & Perrin, 1989; Perrin, 1998), and around the world (Keating & Hertzman, 1999). Self-rated health is highest among the highest educated individuals in Canada, and the lowest among those with less than a high school education. Lower levels of literacy are associated with greater use of health care services and higher rates of mortality, morbidity, accidents, and a range of diseases such as diabetes or cardiovascular disease (Keating & Hertzman, 1999).

Literacy has both direct and indirect effects on health (Abbott & Perrin, 1989). It is difficult for people who cannot read to understand medical instructions, prescription information or medical procedures. There are safety directions in using equipment that
cannot be understood or followed if they cannot be read. Healthy and correct food preparation, particularly for children, cannot be followed if recipes and labels cannot be read. There are several related factors that affect health. For example, people with lower levels of literacy are more likely to have jobs with greater occupational risk and are less likely to have the advocacy skills to ensure safety. People with lower levels of literacy are also less likely to get jobs with salaries high enough to provide for a healthy family.

Keating and Hertzman (1999), in a study of population health in several countries describe the gradient model of population health. Echoing the IALS study indicating that higher overall literacy rates provide a protective factor for children against the effects of parent income and education, the gradient theory outlines that populations with less spread between the high and low ends of the spectrum in socioeconomic factors have better overall health. Children raised in a society with a similar mean, but narrower range in levels of literacy and education are likely to be physically, socially, and psychologically healthier than children raised in societies and nations with large gradients between the highest and lowest ends of the spectrum. Adults in societies with less steep gradients in social and economic factors are also more likely to be healthy in all measures including mental health, freedom from disease and longer life-span.

Lower SES At Higher Risk For Failure

"[In the USA] children from poor families, children of African-American and Hispanic descent, and children attending urban schools are at much greater risk of poor reading outcomes than are middle class, European-American and suburban children" (p.27, Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). A study by Alexander and Entwisle (1996) found that the children from lower SES are at greater risk as they continue through schooling; the gap
between lower SES and middle SES widens in terms of achievement in school as the children go into middle and high school. This reality for the United States has also recently been documented in Canada. The National Longitudinal study of Children and Youth (NLSCY) has investigated children in Canada from a variety of SES backgrounds. One part of the study looked at the rate of access to special education programs in schools. The backgrounds of the students in the study were characterized by combining family income with the occupation and education of the parents. The families were divided into 5 groups, with the lowest 20% being considered ‘low SES’ and the top 20% considered ‘high SES’ (Statistics Canada, 1997). The low SES children were three times as likely as children from the highest SES group to be in some kind of remedial program. Both teacher assessments of the children and mathematics achievement measures also reported a higher proportion of lower SES children struggling to achieve in school.

Landy and Tam (1998) look at the cumulative effect of several risk factors on the likelihood that children will experience a variety of problem outcomes. Low family income and low education of the parents are among the risk factors assumed to have the highest association with problem outcomes for children including emotional disorders, conduct disorders, hyper-activity and repeating a grade. An important aspect of this particular study is that it looks at the cumulative effect of these risk factors. A child who experiences one risk factor may not be at risk for difficulties, but as the number of risk factors an individual child experiences increases, so does the likelihood of that child experiencing problem outcomes. While the two factors most often associated with lower SES, low family income and low education of parents, are not the most critical to a child’s normal development, the most critical factors, namely parental depression and family dysfunction, are correlated with lower
income and education levels. The cumulative effect of a combination of risk factors is more likely for the lower SES families.

In an important meta-analysis of the relationship between SES and academic achievement, White (1982) found that on an individual level, the factor of low SES alone was weakly correlated with low academic achievement. He also found some unsettling evidence: generally the studies that found a stronger correlation between low SES and failure were more likely to be published and those reflecting a weaker correlation were not. He found stronger correlation in studies where the aggregate level of SES was used rather than the individual, suggesting that children who are raised in an area of poverty are also at greater risk despite a higher individual family income. He also found characteristics of the home atmosphere, such as reading and valuing education, were most correlated with higher achievement. This indicates that it “may be how parents rear their children and not the parents’ occupation, income, or education that really makes the difference” (p. 471). Brody, Stoneman and McCoy (1994) also found the amount of co-caregiver support, served as the greatest protective factor for lower SES children against lower achievement. The indication is that lower SES children are at some sort of risk for lower achievement, but the risk factor lies somewhere in the caregiver interactions, rather than in a direct effect from low income. It seems that the relationship between SES and low achievement is a complex and multifaceted one, and deconstructing SES to find the explanation for risk of failure in school is necessary.

It is helpful to review the factors that have already been found to affect reading and writing success, in order to point out a gap in the literature regarding the relationships between parents and teachers in low SES communities.
As I mentioned in my introduction, studies in the area of literacy difficulties have been separated into two groups: those looking at internal or inherent differences among children and those looking at environmental or external differences. The majority of research on external differences has focused on classroom and instructional differences. Recently, researchers have been attending more to home and community influences. For example, Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) divide the risk factors into three categories: child-based risk factors; family-based risk factors; and neighborhood, community and school-based risk factors. I have divided the factors into child-based factors, school-based factors, and home and family-based factors.

**Child-Based Factors**

Risk factors that are inherent to the child tend to be biologically based. Hearing and visual impairments can be a factor in reading and writing difficulties. Intellectual disabilities are those where cognitive functioning is in some way delayed or impaired and reading and writing achievement may be affected. Attention difficulties frequently co-occur with reading and writing difficulties (Riccio & Jemison, 1998). Motivational difficulties, although they are often a result of repeated failure, account for some of the difficulty children have with reading and writing. Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) name “continued interest and motivation to read for a variety of purposes” (p.4) as a requirement for adequate progress in reading and writing.

Learning disabilities are often manifested in reading difficulties and are considered inherent or biologically based. In particular, weakness in phonological awareness and phonological processing are associated with reading difficulties (Stanovich, 1988; Torgeson, Wagner & Raschotte, 1994). Phonological processing “refers to an individual’s mental
operations that make use of the phonological or sound structure of oral language when he or she is learning how to decode written language” (p. 266, Torgeson, Wagner & Raschotte, 1994). Three component abilities of phonological processing have received the most attention: phonological awareness can be described as a general awareness of the way separate sounds, or phonemes, are put together to make meaningful words; phonological memory is the ability to retain and recall phonemes heard orally; and rate of access is tied to retrieving necessary phonological information from long term memory. The ability children show in these component phonological processing skills contribute to the ability a child will show in reading and writing and conversely, difficulties in phonological skills have been found to be a key predictor in reading and writing difficulties (Stanovich, 1986; Torgeson, Wagner, & Raschotte, 1994).

Because reading and writing difficulties are more prominent in children from lower SES homes, it is important to determine if this population is at a higher risk for phonological difficulties. Some work has been done in this direction: Olson et al. (1989) distinguished between phonological coding difficulties and orthographic coding difficulties, or difficulties in word recognition. They found, in a study comparing identical and fraternal twins, that the component skills and deficits were associated with differing influences on the child. Phonological coding deficits seem to follow genetic patterns whereas orthographic deficits seem to be more strongly correlated with environmental influences. Access to print and to print-related activities is suggested as a major contributor to the development of orthographic skills. As is discussed in the introduction (p. 14), less access to books and print experiences is a concern for children of lower SES homes (Neuman, 1999, 1996, 1993); therefore, these children are at risk for an orthographic deficit but not for a phonological deficit. This
The conclusion is debated in practice, and still needs more research to determine why some teachers report higher incidence of phonological deficits in populations characterized as lower SES.

While these inherent or child-based difficulties account for many of the difficulties children have with reading and writing, there are children who struggle without an inherent explanation. The factors that are external to the child that may have an effect on his or her reading and writing development are particularly relevant to this study. Significant work has been done to characterize both school-based factors and home and family-based factors in reading and writing success and failure. A review of the research that has been done is helpful as it clarifies the necessity of this study.

**School-Based Factors**

Even with the plethora of research on reading instruction, controversy abounds about the best way to teach children to read. At this point it is helpful to review the construct of emergent literacy to explain reading and writing development in preschool children. Emergent literacy is now grounded in a substantial body of research that indicates children are learning to read and write long before they enter school (Neuman, Copple & Bredekamp, 2001; Sulzby, 1985; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). This research describes patterns of early reading and writing development and offers an explanation for some difficulties children have with reading and writing that may be related to preschool home experiences.

Emergent Literacy has been described as comprising "all of the behaviors and concepts about reading and writing that precede and develop into conventional literacy" (Sulzby, Branz and Buhle, 1993); conventional literacy is defined as reading and writing as taught in school. Gunn, Simmons and Kameenui (1995), in their review of the literature,
emphasize that emergent literacy begins before formal instruction and includes learning about reading, writing, and print. It is acquired through formal and informal activities in home and programs for children.

Sulzby (1991) outlines four theoretical premises of emergent literacy. Firstly, it assumes children are becoming literate long before they read conventionally from print. Secondly, literacy development depends on social interaction around print. Thirdly, oral and written language develops simultaneously and interrelatedly. Lastly, over time, children recognize the aspects of conventional literacy to help them read print independently. Shared storybook reading has been identified and examined as a primary event in a child's early literacy experiences. Sulzby (1985) outlines the predictable patterns of emergent literacy that are observable in a storybook reading context. There are five major categories of behaviors that lead to conventional reading: (1) attending to individual pictures but not forming stories; (2) attending to pictures and forming oral stories; (3) attending to pictures, reading and using story like speech; (4) attending to pictures and forming written-like stories; and (5) attending to print. There are also a total of 11 subcategories under these five broad categories that can more clearly pinpoint a child's literacy development (Sulzby, Branz & Buhle, 1993). These categories are consecutive, but are not intended to be distinct divisions because there is often overlapping between categories. Sulzby's original studies (1985) suggest that the 'holistic trends' leading to conventional reading can be generalized across SES and education level of parents and across different storybooks the children read. Sulzby, Branz and Buhle (1993) confirmed this generalizability of the developmental patterns. They looked at the behaviors of at-risk kindergarten children in a lower SES environment who were being taught in literacy-rich classrooms. They found that the behavior of these children when interacting
with books also followed these predictable developmental patterns. The only difference was that, because of less experience, the children were somewhat behind the middle SES children of the same age.

Wells (1986), in his longitudinal study of children from birth to 12 years, found that the single most important predictor of a child’s success in reading and writing in school was not the oral language development, but the understanding of literacy and familiarity with storybook reading. The position statement from the IRA and NAEYC (1998) indicates that research supports the notion that reading aloud to children is the single most important activity for building the understanding of both technical skills and practical skills for reading and writing. Other early literate activities such as word games, chalkboard activities and children’s solitary book activities have been found to support later reading achievement of children (Gunn, Simmons & Kameenui, 1995).

*Preschool instruction.* The NAEYC and IRA (1998) position statement on learning to read and write describes the necessary instruction and support needed at home during preschool years. The statement acknowledges the importance of preschool experiences that support literacy, and experiences that build on that knowledge once the child enters school. Early experiences with songs, rhymes, alphabet books and toys support the development of phonological awareness and the alphabetic principle, which are the cornerstones for early reading and writing. A key concept that children need to understand in these early years is the ‘alphabetic principle’, which is the understanding of the relationship between letters and sounds. This is developed through reading to children, and also by giving children the opportunity to write, using invented spelling, in the preschool years. Reading aloud to children provides experience in oral and written language, and provides bridges to both real
life experiences and the experiences in the text. A print-rich environment with easy access to literacy related materials provides additional opportunities to interact with print in a variety of formats. These early experiences with print are key in the preschool years and will provide children with the maximum advantages when entering school, and they will be ready to continue literacy learning through excellent reading instruction.

*School age instruction.* Few topics have been as thoroughly researched as reading instruction. Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) provide a summary, based on a comprehensive review of what research has found to date, of what children need to receive in order to become effective readers and writers. Children must "use reading to obtain meaning from print; have frequent and intensive opportunities to read; be exposed to frequent, regular spelling-sound relationships; learn about the nature of the alphabetic writing system; and understand the structure of spoken words" (p.3). The editors also explain the importance of balance in literacy instruction: "...we take this opportunity to restate with emphasis what we see as the core message concerning reading instruction: that reading instruction integrate attention to the alphabetic principal with attention to the construction of meaning and opportunities to develop fluency" (p. vii, preface, third printing only).

Wharton-MacDonald et al. (1997) studied the practices of highly effective grade one language teachers, and found they provided a careful balance between instruction of explicit skills and authentic reading and writing experiences. Explicit instruction included modeling and short lessons about decoding strategies, comprehension strategies, and the correct use of punctuation. This was balanced and integrated with real reading and writing experiences that were tied to the skills being taught. The materials included excellent children’s literature in a variety of genres and formats that were highly motivating for the children and easily
accessible in the classroom. Writing was explicitly taught and important in the classrooms. Weaker readers were given the same content and topic of instruction as stronger readers, with variation only in the extensiveness and the explicitness. Finally, accountability through assessment and monitoring was prevalent and important.

The IRA (2000) has developed a position statement on excellent reading teachers. The statement gives six distinguishing characteristics of an excellent classroom reading teacher: they understand reading and writing development in young children and believe all children can learn to read; they accurately assess individual progress; they relate reading instruction to children's previous knowledge and experience; they know a variety of ways to teach reading and how and when to use each effectively; they offer a variety of texts for children to read; they use flexible grouping strategies to meet the needs of individual students; and they are good at providing strategic help, which is providing instruction at opportune times when peak understanding is likely. These characteristics are in addition to qualities of good instruction in general such as good management, high expectations, and a solid base in pedagogical knowledge.

Perry (1998) found that the classroom context can support self-regulated learning (SRL), commonly associated with success in school, for very young children. Self-regulated learning is described as meta-cognitive, intrinsically motivated and strategic (Zimmerman, 1990). Generally SRL has been associated with older students, but in this study the classroom context was found to affect grade two and three students' beliefs about their own ability in writing. The classrooms that supported a high level of SRL gave students a choice of topic, materials, and workspace. Students had a level of control in terms of challenge and self-evaluation. Teacher evaluation was non-threatening and oriented toward mastering goals.
Finally, the students were able to get instrumental support to complete tasks from peers as well as the teacher.

Neuman (1998) gives a list of guidelines for best practices in early literacy. The list includes many of the factors listed in the IRA position statement (2000) and by Wharton-McDonald et al (1997). She adds, however, that parental involvement is key in early literacy teaching, as it helps with continuity and consistency: “Early literacy learning is embedded in these relationships [i.e., partnerships between home and school] that shape what children learn and how they come to see the eventual place of literacy in their own lives” (p. 12).

*Home and Family-Based Factors*

I would argue that all the suggestions made by the National Research Council (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998), IRA and NAEYC (1998) and IRA (2000) require a level of support from the home for language in the way it is defined by the school. Children from homes where these types of language activities are promoted and where the families are comfortable with them and recognize their importance are less likely to be at risk and are more likely to benefit from the instruction at school. However, children from homes where there is, for whatever reason, a discomfort, a lack of knowledge, or a lack of the necessary resources to provide these experiences will be at risk when they enter school and throughout their schooling (McCarthey, 2000).

The home and family have become points of interest because children from lower SES communities struggle with achievement. Lareau (1999), in a discussion that extends the construct of ‘social capital’ as put forth by Bourdieu (1977), clearly expresses how advantage and disadvantage are passed through generations. Some individuals are successful at school because they have been taught how to be successful by parents who were successful
themselves. These parents have confidence and awareness in working with the schooling system. The parents who were not successful at school themselves are not able to pass these skills on to their children as easily, and may not encourage their children in schooling because it was not a place of success in their own youth.

*Language and literacy activities.* Children of economic disadvantage participate in school-like activities at home less often than children of middle and upper class homes (Heath, 1983; Lareau, 1984). Even though the absolute number of literacy related activities might not differ between the two social classes, the extent that the activities are similar to those the children will encounter when coming to school may be different (Auerbach, 1989; Baker, Serpell, & Sonnenschein, 1995; Heath, 1983; Wells, 1986).

Auerbach (1989) and Baker, Serpell and Sonnenschein (1995) defend the presence of rich literary activities in all homes in their studies, but show that the type of activities differ. The children were grouped by income level and by cultural background. The lower income children were equally as likely as their higher SES counterparts to use or observe print in daily activities such as reading a menu or sending a note. They participated in singing games more often. Lower income families reported more mealtime conversation, and African-American families reported more oral storytelling than the middle income or European-American families reported. The lower income children had opportunity to hear and enjoy storybooks, but did so less frequently than middle income children. They did not visit the library as often and were not involved in print-related games and activities as often. The authors challenge the notion that ‘literature activities’ are only those similar to what children experience in school, but acknowledge that school-like experiences in the early years benefit children when they enter school.
The NLSCY (Lipps & Yiptong-Avila, 1999) investigated early childhood daycare experiences in Canada and found that children who were cared for in casual settings such as a neighbor’s home or a relative’s home did not succeed in reading and writing achievement in the early years as much as those cared for in more formal settings. Children in lower income homes were more likely to be in these informal settings and therefore were at greater risk for failure. Because of the cost advantages of informal care, it is understandable that lower income homes would choose this option. When the factor of economic status was removed, the children in formal settings still performed better in school, indicating that early exposure to formal learning situations similar to schooling does seem to give these children an advantage.

Heath (1983) also gives account of the differences in activities of the children in the early years. Parents in 'Gateway', a middle class professional group of people, read a variety of stories to their children, enrolled them in a variety of programs, and encouraged imaginative storytelling from an early age. Children in 'Roadville', a primarily white working-class community, were not given as many experiences with fantasy stories and literature, and were not placed in formal care situations; therefore, they struggled more when they came to school. The children of 'Trackton', an African-American working-class area, had the most difficult time coming to school because they had no experience with print and no experience in formal learning situations. Teachers expected them to be familiar with settings they had never encountered before.

*Parental literacy level.* Neuman (1996) acknowledges the strong tendency of children from lower income homes to struggle with reading. She examined the specific interactions between parent and child when reading storybooks. She included parents who were proficient
readers and parents who were less proficient. Her intent was to determine if there were
differences in the interactions when reading storybooks that corresponded to the parents'
reading proficiency. Her study was guided by the belief that access to print is an issue for all
lower SES parents, but particularly for those parents who are not proficient readers
themselves. About half of the parents in her study reported difficulty in reading and most
reported having few literacy resources in their homes. The results of her study indicate that
the type of text and proficiency of the parent influenced the type of interaction that happens
when reading together. Those parents with lower proficiently in reading chose more
predictable texts and used more book-focused strategies of repeating what was read, chiming
and drawing attention to what is in the pictures based on what is in the text. These are all
good reading instructional strategies, but they were different than the strategies used by more
proficient readers. Parents with more reading proficiency used more cognitively demanding
strategies, such as making bridges between what is read and the child’s experience. These
strategies are consistent with contemporary approaches to reading instruction in school.

The outcome of Neuman’s study was that children with less proficient parents,
although they started at a lower performance level on pre-assessments, made greater gains in
the global concepts about print such as directionality, front and back of the book, the story
being told through the print, and the concept of word and letter, during the intervention and
moved slightly past their counterparts from homes with more proficient parents. The
speculation is that the highly predictable nature of the books chosen by the less proficient
parents were accessible to these parents and served as a scaffold for their interactions, and
were an important factor in the gains the children made.
Lareau (1987) and Lareau and Shumar (1996), in a comparison of parental involvement in upper-middle and lower SES schools, found the educational attainment of the parents in the lower income setting played a role in the difficulties they had in supporting their children. Parents had less education and were more anxious about being able to help their children with homework or help in the classroom. Reading correspondence from the school, or discussing matters with the teacher was also intimidating or difficult for parents with lower education levels. Lareau advocates that these traditions of schooling keep the lower education parents on the fringes of their children's education.

**Beliefs about literacy.** Research indicates that homes value literacy for different purposes (Baker, Scher & Mackler, 1997) and these varying perspectives on literacy have been linked to different achievement levels. Baker et al. (1995) discuss the key elements of early literacy development. The elements include the development of knowledge about print, development of the knowledge of narrative structure and function, development of phonological awareness, and development of positive attitudes toward reading. Their study looks for evidence of each of these elements in the homes of African-American and European-American preschool children from lower and middle income settings by gathering information about their activities at home. Parents reported the literacy activities in a journal, and results are based on the frequency at which different activities were reported. Results indicate that the children in both middle and lower income families had regular literacy activities in their homes. The two cultural groups represented also had equally regular activities, but the type of activities varied. The differences in the activities seemed to be a reflection of the parents' beliefs and expectations about learning to read and write. For example, activities such as independent reading or play involving print, linked reading and
writing to entertainment or highlighted the entertainment value of reading and writing. These activities were more prevalent in the middle class European-American homes where reading was a form of entertainment. Activities involving explicit instruction in a set of skills associated with literacy were more prevalent in lower income homes and African-American homes, where learning the skills associated with reading was a priority. Lower SES communities treated literacy activities as work, while higher SES communities associated literacy activities with play. This impacted time spent doing the activity, as those activities associated with play typically extended over a longer period of time. Time spent reading and writing impacts the level of achievement.

Metsala (1996) in a study conducted in the USA, concluded that cultural differences played less of a role than economic differences in the nature of the literature activities in the home. European-American families did not differ from African-American families in the literacy activities as much as the lower income families differed from middle income families. In Canada, however, there are indications of different value placed on various literacy activities by different cultural groups. Anderson (1995) found that the type of activities and the reasons for promoting literacy differed across different cultural groups. He asked Indo-Canadian, Euro-Canadian and Chinese-Canadian parents “what are the five most important things you are doing to help your child learn to read and write?” (p. 399). The responses were then categorized into one of five different types of activities. Participating in literacy activities or events included making trips to the library, reading advertisement flyers, or writing letters to relatives or friends. Teaching literacy skills involved direct instruction about the skills needed for reading such as correct spelling, teaching a child to read faster or using a phonics program. Valuing, demonstrating and encouraging literacy involved
showing the practical uses of reading and writing, having frequent opportunities for the child to see a parent or caregiver reading, and buying books for the children. *Knowledge development* activities build the child’s general knowledge about the world through experiences and outings. The final category was an *Other* category for any additional responses. Forty-five percent of Indo-Canadian parents and 33% of Euro-Canadian parents reported involving their children in both day-to-day and special literary events, while only 6% of Chinese Canadians reported the same. In contrast, 88% of the responses of Chinese-Canadian parents fell in the *teaching literacy skills* category compared to 21% of Indo-Canadian responses and 13% of Euro-Canadian responses. Sixty-two percent of European responses were described as *valuing, demonstrating and encouraging literacy* compared to 3% of Chinese-Canadian and 7% of Indo-Canadian responses.

Baker, Scher, and Mackler (1997) review literature investigating how the socioemotional context for learning relates to the long term attention given to reading and writing. They “consider experiences children have that may set the stage for positive attitudes toward reading, that signal emerging interest in reading and learning to read, and that relate directly to the development of motivation” (p.69). The literature repeatedly indicates that the early home experiences in terms of print-related experiences, story-book interactions, and parental interest in reading, are factors in the development of a long term interest in reading and writing, and this attitude, more than readiness, is an indicator of future reading success.

*Economic resources.* Having fewer resources is the reality for lower SES homes and schools in low SES communities. Neuman (1999) has addressed the issue of children’s access to books as critical in their literacy development. Research shows children from lower income homes have less access to books in their homes (Lareau, 1984; McCormick &
Mason, 1986; Neuman, 1995, 1996; Neuman & Roskos, 1993) and in their child care facilities (Neuman, 1999). Neuman (1999) examined the effects of increased accessibility to books on preschool children’s development of emergent reading and writing. A local library was donating significant numbers of books to child-care facilities in lower income communities. In participating child-care facilities Neuman also provided training for staff in making the books accessible for the children, in effectively using the books in activities, and in effectively reading with the children. Her control group did not receive any additional staff training but did receive the books. The results of her investigations indicated that the training resulted in an increase in the number of literacy interactions in the classrooms, and the children with greater access to books showed greater receptive vocabulary, greater increase in letter-name knowledge, greater understanding in concepts about writing, and greater understanding of narrative structure. These gains were maintained in the child’s first year of school. The study shows the importance of access to reading material and high quality instruction (explicit and extensive) in preschool programs, particularly in those communities where children may not have these opportunities and experiences in their homes.

Parental involvement. Parental involvement in the education of children has proven to be a key factor in improving student achievement, attendance and behavior (McAfee, 1987; Neuman, 1998). Parental involvement in schooling has been positively linked with achievement even when the variable of social class is taken into consideration; parents who support the activities of the school help their children succeed regardless of the level of SES they hold. Looking at the beliefs parents have toward involvement in school may provide further indication as to why children of lower SES may struggle.
According to Lareau (1989), parental involvement includes preparing children for school in the preschool years, attending school events, fulfilling teacher requests, and sometimes monitoring homework. Epstein (1987) categorizes parental involvement into four areas: (1) upholding basic obligations of parents that include providing adequate nutrition and housing, necessary supplies and areas to work; (2) maintaining school - home communications that keep them informed about the activities and achievement of their child; (3) becoming involved in the school, generally assisting with activities or material preparation, fundraising, etc.; and (4) establishing involvement in the learning activities at home such as helping with social skills, basic skills or enrichment.

Although parents at all levels of SES want their children to succeed in school (Neuman, Hagedorn, Celano & Daly, 1995), studies indicate that the amount of parental involvement varies significantly between levels of social class (Epstein, 1987; Lareau, 1989). Lower SES parents did not attend parent-teacher conferences as often or participate in parent-school organizations as often as higher SES parents (VanGalen, 1987). They do not come to the school as often (Lareau, 1989), and they do not call the school with concerns as often (1996) as higher class parents.

Lareau (1999, 1996, 1989) discusses the importance of looking not just at the institutions involved in schooling such as the family or the school, but rather looking at the relationships that exist among the institutions, to explain reasons for the differences in parental involvement. From a sociological perspective, she thoroughly looked at the relationship between social class and the parental involvement in schooling. Why does parental involvement differ across social classes? She challenged the common mistake of teachers in seeking increased parental involvement without first looking at why certain
groups of parents don’t participate. She reviewed three explanations that have been put forward, and suggested an additional explanation for why the difference does occur. The first explanation is that parental values about the importance of education are different in the lower and working class families; perhaps these values are passed on to the children in the family and affect the aspirations of the child. The author indicates from her own study that this was not true, and parents from all social classes ranked education as important. For teachers to deny that most parents value education regardless of their income level creates a reform style strategy to improve involvement. Teachers and administrators begin programs and initiatives to ‘teach’ the parents, particularly in lower SES communities, the importance of involvement for their child’s success. The outcome is likely defensiveness on the part of the parents and the relationship between home and school is damaged. A second explanation for low parental involvement from the working and lower class is that there are features of the institution of schooling that may limit involvement by lower and working class parents. Further investigation into this question (Lareau, 1999, 1996) found some evidence that this may be true. Teachers were not particularly sensitive to racial differences and did not cater to the constraints of working class families who had limited resources to meet the demands of the school (e.g., flexible work schedules, educational skills, economic flexibility). A third explanation Lareau reviews is Bourdieu’s idea of ‘cultural capital’ (1977). She explains his ideas that upper and middle class parents give their children a form of ‘resource’ or ‘capital’ that helps their children adjust to school and academics by giving them many school-like experiences from a young age. These give the children an advantage when they enter school, as they are familiar with the structured activities, the behavioral expectations, and the teacher-student relationship. This advantage is what he terms ‘cultural capital’.
In addition to these explanations, Lareau (1989) found evidence in her case study of another explanation for differences in parental involvement: parents of lower economic status did not get involved in the education of their children because they believed it was not their place or their role. They entrusted the teachers to do their job, and they were less likely than higher income parents to believe they should challenge the teacher or question the decisions the teacher made. These parents saw education as important, and they saw their role as preparing their children to participate by teaching them proper manners or by getting them to school on time. They separated themselves from the teacher and the classroom on academic issues, commenting that the teacher ‘knows best’ about how to teach their children (Lareau, 1987, 1989). Lareau (1996) also points out that working-class and lower-class parents often did see the school as having some power over their family. The definition of acceptable child-rearing practices has changed for the middle and upper class families, but may not have changed in some of the lower and working class homes. Some lower SES families assumed school personnel were ‘keeping an eye’ on their child-rearing practices, and had the power to do something if they saw something was inappropriate. This set the family and school up for a difference in power in the relationship, and parents were threatened by the school personnel.

Middle and upper class parents, on the other hand, tended to believe that they shared the responsibility of teaching with the school and that they had the right and the ability to make suggestions for alternatives to the teacher (Lareau, 1989):

The research suggests that scholars of family-school relationships, in focusing primarily on parents’ roles in preparing children for school and complying with teachers’ requests for help, have cast their net too narrowly. The findings presented here show that upper-middle-class parents also attempt to shape their children’s school site experience. Upper-middle-class parents, particularly those whose offspring are low achievers, try to take a leadership
role in their children’s schooling. They do not depend on the school for authorization, nor do they automatically defer to a teacher’s professional expertise. (p.9)

They believe they are partners with the school in the education of their children. It is this perception of authority in the education of the child that leads middle and higher SES parents to a closer and less defensive relationship with the teacher (Lareau, 1989).

Relationship between teacher and parent. To my knowledge, there are few investigations of how the relationship between a family and a teacher influences a child’s literacy development. This home and family-based factor may provide further insight as to why some children, particularly those of lower SES families, may be at risk for failure in reading and writing. Lott (2002) found evidence of some assumptions, generally held by teachers, about lower SES families and their interactions with the school. The first assumption is that lower SES families and communities do not support literacy or schooling. This assumption was found to be false by researchers in previous studies (Baker, Serpell & Sonnenschein, 1995; Edwards & Pleasants, 1998). The second assumption often held by teachers (Lott, 2002) that has been challenged by researchers is that lower SES parents are less involved in the literacy of their children. Lareau (1989) found the parents were at the school less often, but that they saw their role more as a supporter of the teacher from home, ensuring the children behaved, did their homework, and were at school. The third assumption Lott (2002) found in her research, and one that I was particularly interested in researching in this study, is that lower SES parents have less successful relationships with their child’s teacher. The intent of my study was to determine if this assumption was true and if the relationship a parent has with a teacher can be added to the list of factors that have been found to correspond to the achievement of the child or the SES of the family.
I characterized *relationship* in terms of the communication and mutual support, including the level of satisfaction both parties reported with these aspects. Communication involved information passed between parent and teacher regarding the reading and writing of the child. Mutual support was the level to which both parties perceived they were working toward a common end in a helpful way. This included parental involvement in the school as well as an understanding between parents and the teacher of what was possible and helpful for the other party to do. The third aspect of the relationship was the level of satisfaction both parties reported, in terms of the communication and mutual support.

**Summary and Overview of My Study**

It is helpful to summarize the factors in reading and writing achievement I have reviewed so far, as well as some possible explanations for higher risks facing children of lower SES. Inherently, some children are at risk for failure in reading and writing. Learning disabilities, attention difficulties and sensory impairments hinder reading and writing acquisition, but there are still many children whose difficulties are not explained physiologically. External factors affect reading and writing achievement as well, and significant research has been done into what environmental factors may influence a child, positively or negatively, in reading and writing achievement. School-based or instructional factors may impede literacy learning, but many children succeed despite instructional problems while those of lower SES continue to struggle regardless of instructional techniques. Literacy activities in the home, parental literacy level, beliefs about literacy and how it should be learned, economic resources, and parental involvement in the school all play...
a part in the success a child has at school, and all provide some explanation as to why lower
SES children are at risk.

There is a proliferation of family literacy programs operating from a deficit
perspective based in the conviction that the home, particularly for lower SES populations, is
the risk factor in literacy achievement (Epstein, 1996). Lichter (1996) argues that these
programs prey disproportionately on at-risk families, and may actually exacerbate their
difficulties because of their limited economic and intellectual resources. Although I do not
agree with his implied conclusion that we should lower academic expectations for this
population, perhaps a move toward a comfortable and helpful relationship between principle
stake holders (i.e., parents and teachers) would be beneficial. Auerbach (1997) argues that
family literacy programs do not take into account the cultural and contextual variability of
literacy practices that have been found in recent ethnographic studies (e.g., Cairney & Ruge,
1997; Heath, 1983), and instead pay lip-service to diversity while continuing with the agenda
of the dominant view of what literacy looks like, often for political and economic reasons.
She argues “at a minimum, we need to proceed with caution and humility” (p.77). Van Galen
(1987) suggests that teachers need to give up some of the control and autonomy they hold if
they truly want to involve parents in the education of the child. Neuman (1993) studied the
effects of involving lower SES parents in the literacy activities in the classroom of their
children. She provided literate play settings where children were free to participate, each with
a differing level of parental involvement. The children who participated in the setting with
active parental participation continued to choose the setting more often and chose more
literate activities. Her conclusion supports the notion that involvement by parents from
similar cultural backgrounds to the children in the classroom is a benefit in the literacy
development of the child. Involving the parents in the education of their child is a worthwhile goal. However, Lareau (1989) found there were no differences in the definition of parental involvement or the expectations that teachers held for parents of differing levels of social class. Neuman (1998) suggests that programs need to be diverse and need to address the needs and interests of the unique participants. Such programs will necessarily involve a helpful relationship between home and school with a clear understanding of the constraints some populations, particularly lower SES families, face as they support their children in literacy acquisition.

An intent of my study was to characterize the relationships that exist between parents and teachers, in terms of the perceptions of communication, the perceived level of mutual support, and the level of satisfaction both parties report based on these perceptions. Secondly, I examined how my characterization of the relationships corresponded to the literacy achievement of the child and to the SES of the family. My study was conducted in three phases. Briefly, the goal of the first two phases was to select participants and the goal of the last phase was to address my research questions. In Phase 1, I selected four teachers to participate. In Phase 2, I selected seven families to participate. In the final phase, Phase 3, I addressed my research questions by administering two questionnaires to the teachers and one questionnaire to the parents. Also, to ensure I had an accurate understanding of the responses on the questionnaires, I completed my data collection with an informal discussion with each parent and each teacher. I used a multiple and embedded case study design, as I was investigating how the attributes the parent - teacher relationship, namely the communication, the mutual support and the satisfaction, within each dyad of parent and teacher, contributed to the relationship that existed between that parent and teacher. At the same time, I was also
comparing these same three attributes of the parent-teacher relationship at high and low levels of family SES and again at high and low levels of literacy achievement of the children. Specifically, I included seven dyads of parent and teacher from a small city in Western Canada, each with a unique profile of family SES, literacy achievement of the child, and parental involvement in the literacy achievement of the child.

Research Questions

General Question

How does the relationship between parent and teacher, in terms of the perceptions of communication, the perceived level of mutual support, and the level of satisfaction both parties report based on these perceptions, correspond to the literacy achievement of the child and to the SES of the family?

Specific Questions

Communication. How do the frequency, manner and content of the communication between parents and teachers regarding the reading and writing acquisition of the child correspond to the literacy achievement of the child? How do the frequency, manner and content of the communication between parents and teachers regarding the reading and writing acquisition of the child correspond to the SES level of the family?

Mutual Support. How does the support that each party perceives the other offering in achieving the literacy goals for the child correspond to the achievement of the child? How does the support that each party perceives the other offering in achieving the literacy goals for the child correspond to the SES level of the family?
Satisfaction. How does the level of satisfaction reported by parents and teachers, concerning communication and the mutual support they receive from the other party, correspond to the achievement level of the child? How does the level of satisfaction reported by parents and teachers, concerning communication and the mutual support they receive from the other party, correspond to the SES of the family?
I will describe the method, results and summary of each phase separately beginning, in this chapter, with Phase 1.

Method and Results

The goal of this first phase of my research project was to select four teachers, with similar approaches to language arts instruction, to participate in my study. Two teachers teaching in higher SES communities within the city were selected, and two teachers teaching in lower SES communities within the city were selected. Table 1 outlines the activities and instruments involved in Phase 1.

Table 1
Overview of Phase 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Appendix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selection of schools</td>
<td>Information letter to school district</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inform principals</td>
<td>Principal information letter</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inform teachers and get consent</td>
<td>Teacher information and consent letter</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of classrooms</td>
<td>Classroom observation instrument</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General questions to teachers</td>
<td>General teacher questionnaire</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selection of Schools

The schools were selected in cooperation with administrators in the public school district in the city. The city itself serves as a center for a large surrounding rural community, but the children in the school district all live within the city limits. Initially, an informational letter (see Appendix A) was sent to district level administrators, describing my project and
requesting that it be carried out in schools in their district. Once permission had been granted, I met with the superintendent of the school district, and asked him to nominate schools that served the highest and lowest SES communities in the district. When nominating schools, he was asked to consider housing costs, typical occupation and education of parents, number of single parent families, and reliance on community support programs such as free lunches or breakfast programs. Of the twelve elementary schools in the district, I asked him to nominate two schools serving the highest SES communities and two schools serving the lowest SES communities. I then contacted the principals of these schools and provided them with an informational letter and a request to carry out the study in their school (see Appendix B).

While all four schools agreed to participate in the study, there were no teachers willing to be involved in one of the schools nominated at the higher SES level. As a result, a total of three schools were involved.

Grant Elementary School (all names of schools and individuals are pseudonyms) is located in a well established area of the city. Most homes in the area are single family dwellings, and real estate prices indicate it is one of the most expensive areas of the city to buy a home (Multiple Listing Service, 2003). Also within the enrollment area of the school are several new and rapidly growing subdivisions of single family dwellings and, because of the small lake and nearby recreation facilities in the new communities, property prices are among the highest in the city. The school has 347 students in kindergarten through grade five.

All programs at Grant Elementary targeting the needs of students at risk are academic programs, and are standard programs offered in all the schools in the district. The Early Literacy Program, a district wide program funded by a provincial grant, operates in the
school for part of the year, and is for young children showing early signs of difficulty in reading and writing. There is a Resource Room program that targets the needs of older children (grades three through five) who have difficulties, primarily in language arts.

Two elementary schools (kindergarten through grade five) from lower SES communities of the city participated in the study: Allen Elementary School (347 students) and Frank Elementary School (220 students). Both these schools are located in an area of the city with the largest proportion of lower income housing and rental options (Multiple Listing Service, 2003). There is a significantly higher transience rate in both these schools than the district average. Most of the students in both schools live in the communities around the school, with the exception of some students bussed to Frank Elementary School to attend a special education program housed in the school.

As in all schools in the district, both schools offer Early Literacy and Resource Room assistance to children with difficulty in language arts or math. They also both receive counselling assistance for three half days each week. In addition to these programs, both schools have extensive programs operating out of their schools and/or utilize a large share of district wide programs targeting at-risk families. Both schools receive High Needs Funding (district initiative), Enhanced Opportunity Funding (provincial grant) and Early Literacy Initiative funding (provincial grant that supplements the standard Early Literacy program offered in all schools). Both schools have higher than average numbers of kindergarten children who receive Program Unit Funding (provincial grant), a program from the provincial government that provides funding for special needs children younger than six years of age. Frank Elementary School also houses a day care and preschool program funded through community programs. Both of the programs target children and families at risk.
Frank Elementary School also receives money for the city's ESL program that largely services new immigrants from European countries, often from refugee situations. These families are not necessarily from a lower social background in their own country, but are in a lower economic position when they first come to Canada. There is a Comprehensive School Health Program that is being piloted at Allen Elementary School (Health Region initiative) to look at health concerns of children and families at risk. Both of these schools receive a disproportionately large amount of assistance from two other district programs targeting the health of children: the Student Health Initiative is a collaborative program that involves members from several school jurisdictions, Alberta Mental Health and the district health authority, and the Family School Wellness Program is a provincial program (D. Falk, personal communication, January, 2001).

Selection of Teachers

Initially, I met with the principals to discuss my study and the reasons their school was selected at the district level. I then asked them to nominate primary teachers in their school who may be interested in participating in the study. In meetings with the individual principals I reviewed the characteristics of effective language arts instruction supported by current research. Specifically, I asked them to consider teachers whom they believed had created classroom contexts where students frequently had meaningful interactions with print, where the instruction was varied and appropriate to the abilities of each student, where tasks and materials were organized to support learning, and where children were encouraged and supported in becoming metacognitive, intrinsically motivated, and strategic learners (IRA & NAEYC, 2000; Perry, 1998; Snow, Burns and Griffin, 1998; Wharton-MacDonald et al., 1997). I gave the principals a list of these criteria to consider, but emphasized to them that
my primary interest was to include teachers who were interested in participating. I also emphasized that the observation I would be conducting in the classrooms would help me find four similar language arts programs, and that I would not be making judgments about the quality of the teachers' instruction as a part of that observation.

A letter was sent to the nominated teachers to request their participation in the study and to request their consent to be involved (see Appendix C).

I then observed, in each of the five classrooms of the teachers who agreed to participate, to find classrooms with comparable instructional approaches to language instruction. I observed in these classes during regularly occurring language arts lessons, typically lasting for 1-1.5 hours.

*Classroom observation instrument.* I used a three part observation instrument (see Appendix D) that was adapted from Perry (1998). Part A of the instrument provided space to record who was being observed, when the observation was taking place (date and time), the length of the observation, and a phrase to describe the general type of activity (e.g., writing poems, doing research). This was completed upon arrival in the classroom.

Part B of the instrument provided space to keep a running record of the activities, including verbatim speech of the teachers and students. As much as possible, I recorded information about the nature of the teachers' instruction, interactions between teachers and students, and between students and students, and student "work time" activity, on and off task. I kept a record of the time, especially at transition points to provide some indication of the "flow" of the lesson and time spent on particular aspects of instruction or activities. Immediately following the observation, I reread my running record, adding detail that was missed and elaborating any descriptions that were not clear to provide as complete and
accurate a picture of the classroom activity as possible. I also provided a copy of the running record to the classroom teachers if they desired.

Part C of the observation instrument was a checklist of attributes of literacy environments, compiled from previous investigations, that are considered to be effective at promoting success in literacy (IRA, 2000; Perry, 1998; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; Wharton-MacDonald et al., 1997). The list included four categories of attributes to help with observation: literacy activities; instruction; organization and materials; and attributes contributing to the development of metacognition, intrinsic motivation, and strategic action. The first section, literacy activities, described classroom activities that promote reading and writing: frequent use of reading and writing for a variety of authentic purposes; frequent exposure to sound-spelling relationships through such things as displays in the classroom (e.g., letter-sound charts on the wall); targeted mini-lessons embedded in daily activities (e.g., introducing word families for a poetry task); and the integration of reading and writing activities. The second section of the checklist described instruction. I looked for an indication that the teacher knew there are a variety of ways to teach reading and knew when to use each method, and how to combine the methods into an effective program (IRA, 2000). I watched specifically for explicit teaching of skills through whole class, smaller group, and individual instruction as well as indirect teaching of skills through modeling or structured peer interactions. I looked for exposure to the alphabetic principal both directly and indirectly. I looked for explicit teaching of a variety of types of writing. When instructing children of diverse abilities, I watched for variation in the levels of support rather than easier or reduced content. Finally, I looked for attention given to activities that promote phonemic awareness. The third category of the checklist described effective classroom organization and materials.
I looked for opportunities for extensive interaction with print, a variety of reading materials (i.e., different genres, different levels of difficulty), tools to help with writing, and flexible grouping strategies to provide for the best utilization of time for all children. The last category of the checklist described attributes of self-regulated learning. I looked for an indication of activities that promoted metacognition, intrinsic motivation, and strategic action. I looked for evidence of student choice about tasks, materials and work space. I looked for opportunities for students to control the level of challenge and to evaluate their own work. I looked for non-threatening evaluation practices (e.g., ongoing, non-competitive, embedded in daily activities) oriented toward preset and mutually agreed upon goals. Finally, I looked for instrumental support for completing assignments available from peers as well as the teacher (i.e., support aimed at helping students solve problems vs. giving them answers).

I completed the checklist soon after leaving the classroom, using the completed running record for reference.

After the observation, I also left the first of my four instruments, a general teacher questionnaire, with the teachers and asked them to mail it back to me when it was completed. This general teacher questionnaire (see Appendix E) was designed to answer my research questions, and the data collected from the teacher was used in Phase 3 only if that teacher was selected to be part of the study. The questionnaire is described in detail in Chapter V (p. 78).

After receiving the nomination of the school principal, and observing one language arts lesson in each of the volunteering classrooms, I was comfortable that I had enough information to select two classrooms at each level of SES (four classrooms in total) where tasks and practices were consistent with my definition of effective instruction. Four
classrooms that incorporated the most similar attributes of effective instruction, where the teacher was committed to effective instruction, and where the demographics of the school community agreed with the profile needed, were selected to take part in the study.

The following is a detailed description of the activities I noted during my observation in the four selected classrooms. Table 2 provides an overview of the characteristics of effective instruction I observed in each of the four classrooms.

**High SES classroom: Ms O.** Ms O. is a grade three teacher at Grant Elementary School. I observed in her classroom for the first part of the morning on May 3, 2002. I noted the schedule for the day was on the whiteboard. There were lists of phonetic patterns on a bulletin board titled “Sound City” as well as lists of sight words listed alphabetically around the room, providing evidence of exposure to the nature of the alphabetic writing system as well as the provision of tools to assist with writing and reading. Student desks were arranged in clusters of four or five. There was a small area where the children could gather together on the rug for group instruction.

The morning started with students settling in the desks and immediately copying the notes about upcoming events from the board into their student agendas. After the entry had been copied, Ms O. checked each agenda for accuracy and for notes from parents. She made comments about student neatness or work habits as she saw each agenda. The second activity was to update the calendar. One student organized several cards to display the date correctly. He then recited the day and date and the class repeated after him. The students had been in school for 152 days, and Ms O. used that number for several math questions such as “How many days of school in 30 more days?” The students then read a “poem of the week” relating to Mother’s Day. They took turns reading parts in small groups and together as a whole
Table 2
Characteristics of Effective Language Arts Instruction\(^a\) Observed during Four Classroom Visits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ms O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent use of reading for enjoyment and to obtain</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meaning from print</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent opportunity to write for real purposes</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to spelling-sound relationships</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of reading and writing activities</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instruction</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit teaching of literacy skills through modeling, mini-lessons, and whole-class and individual instruction</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect instruction of literacy skills and appreciation through modeling and supportive groupings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to the nature of the alphabetic writing system</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit teaching of various types of writing</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicitness and extensiveness of instruction varying with reader ability (i.e., more scaffolding for weaker readers, but no difference in content)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific attention to understanding the structure of spoken words (e.g., through rhyming or patterning activities)</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization and Materials</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of extensive opportunity for interaction with print</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety in genre of reading materials</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools to help with reading and writing activities readily available (e.g., dictionaries, word wall, paper, etc.)</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible grouping strategies to target the students who need some direct instruction while allowing other students to work on other helpful activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Regulated Learning</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students have a level of control in terms of choice of topic, materials, work space, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students have a level of control in terms of challenge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students have a level of control in terms of self-evaluation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher evaluation is non-threatening and oriented toward mastering goals</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental support in strategies for self-regulated learning is available from peers as well as the teacher</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* “\(\checkmark\)” indicates the characteristic was observed during the classroom visit

\(^a\) (IRA & NAEYC, 2000; Perry, 1998; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; Wharton-MacDonald et al., 1997)
group allowing for variation in the extensiveness of instruction based on student ability. The final activity before returning to their desks was to hear from two students who had taken a class toy animal home for the week. The students had written a note to the toy animal about their week together, and then read it aloud to the class that day. This was an example of the extensive opportunities for interaction with print. Ms O. and the class asked questions after the two students had read.

The students returned to their desk for a spelling test. Ms O. reviewed the four suffixes that were on the test that week before giving the test. After the test, the students did a cloze activity of the “Poem of the Week”. Both of these activities provided evidence of attention given to the spoken structure of words. Ms O. gave reminders of some strategies for students if they could not remember a word. When they were finished they were to draw a picture on the back for their mother.

Throughout my time in the classroom the children were quiet and on task. There were only a couple of times when Ms O. had to remind a child to get back to work. Based on my short observation, I saw evidence of ten of the nineteen characteristics of effective language arts instruction on the Classroom Observation Instrument (see Table 2).

**High SES classroom: Ms J.** Ms J. taught grade one at Grant Elementary School. I observed in her classroom during a language arts lesson on the morning of May 3, 2002. The students were sitting together on the rug for the lesson, but had desks arranged in small clusters of four students. On the wall there was an alphabet, a list of phonetic words, a calendar area with the months and the days. There were also posters and displays for consonants, vowels and “chunks” of blends and digraphs. These all provided evidence of tools available for reading and writing activities.
Ms J. started the lesson by reviewing a poem about pancakes, and talking about difficult words in the poem. She then handed out the student books and asked them to find the word "pancake" in the table of contents. They discussed the page number and found the play called "The Big Pancake". The teacher read the play, adding expression for each character. After reading the play once they discussed how the different colored words were character names they and looked at the particular structure of a play. The class reread the play a few more times, taking turns reading the parts of different characters individually and in small groups. They also discussed the similarity of the play to the story "The Gingerbread Man". The children were given extensive opportunities to interact with the print, as well as exposure to a variety of types of writing.

Ms J. used a program that associated each letter or group of letters with an action to remind the students of the correct phoneme. When the students returned to their desks, they reviewed several of the actions for the sounds of consonants, vowels and digraphs (e.g., a chopping action for the /ch/ chunk) providing evidence of attention given to the spelling-sound relationship. They then completed a worksheet reviewing several of the chunks they had learned. Ms J. gave the students several strategies for completing the worksheet such as crossing out words after they had used them, rereading their work to make sure it made sense, or looking for capital letters for the words that would go at the beginning of a sentence.

The students worked quietly and carefully for several minutes before recess. The children had the opportunity to choose if they would work independently or with the help of a peer. Ms J. also watched for students who needed extra assistance with the concept. In my
time in the classroom, I saw evidence of thirteen of the possible nineteen characteristics of
effective instruction on the Classroom Observation Instrument (see Table 2).

Low SES classroom: Ms D. I observed in Ms D's grade one class at Frank Elementary
School on the morning of April 30, 2002. I observed the opening exercises, calendar
activities as well as a "Guided Reading" activity (Fountas, Pinnell & Giacobbe, 1996) in
small groups. There was one child in the class with special needs who had an assistant with
him. The classroom was large and contained several displays. There were sight words, an
alphabet chart, shape words, phonetic words and number words displayed. Tools needed for
reading and writing activities were readily available.

The morning started with the children handing in their log books and home reading
envelopes. They sang a welcome song together and Ms D. reminded them to get fresh water
in their water bottles. The first activity was group "sharing" and started while children were
still getting themselves settled and organized for the day. As they came to the rug, the
children told about their activities the night before. Ms D. responded with a question back to
each student. The children then sang a "Welcome Song" to me in both French and English.
The next activity was to read the "morning message" on the board. One child read the
message, with Ms D.'s help when needed. For example, when the student read the word
'flying', Ms D. asked him how he knew it was 'flying' and not 'flies'. A movement song to
get the children up and moving around followed. They sat down again, this time at the
calendar wall and did several activities with the day and date. They also looked outside and
reported weather. In this morning welcome activity the children had explicit and indirect
teaching of literacy skills, were given exposure to the nature of the alphabetic principle and
to a variety of genres of print, and were given specific instruction in understanding the structure of spoken words.

The next activity was a small group reading activity. Ms D. worked with one group reading a new story. The teacher assistant monitored the other two groups, one rereading a story from the day before, and another group of ESL students listening to the story on the tape. Use of flexible grouping strategies was evident, as the children knew the expectations of working in the different groups.

Ms D. started the activity with her group by looking at the title of the story and the two characters in the story. She asked the students to find the two characters' names in the text of the story. She reviewed some new vocabulary, asking the students to find the "tricky words" in the story. They also reviewed quotation marks. They read the story together, stopping several times to sort out which character was speaking, reinforcing the concept of quotation marks. They ended by practicing reading the story with expression, modeling after Ms D. They returned to their desks to work on an activity that matched the characters with what they said in the story, reinforcing the concept of quotation marks. The other two groups were working on a sequencing activity for the story they were reading. Just before recess Ms D. reviewed each child's work with the child providing non-threatening evaluation oriented toward mastery.

The students in Ms D. class were on task for the majority of the morning. There was a reminder to "treat each other with dignity and respect", as well as a short discussion about washroom behavior. Of the nineteen possible characteristics of effective language arts instruction on the Classroom Observation Instrument, I noticed thirteen (see Table 2).
Low SES classroom: Ms F. I observed in Ms F.’s grade two class on the morning of May 7, 2002. I watched the opening exercises, calendar activities and a Mother’s Day writing activity. Ms F. had a small room in comparison to the other classes I had seen. She had an alphabet strip on the wall as well as a display of word families and vowels. She also had several reading books and magazines in the room, providing the children with opportunities for interacting with a variety of genres.

The morning started with some quiet reading at the desks. Attendance was done with a song. A student and the teacher handed out individual water bottles to the children. Ms F. then gathered the students on the rug to do the calendar activities as well as to review the schedule for the day. They did a tally of the days they had spent in school and reviewed the 1s, 10s, and 100s concepts using the tally. They had a short time of sharing experiences from the night before and then began reading a story together. The book was a pattern book about Mother’s Day. Ms F. read the whole book asking questions and responding to children’s comments on each page. They then went back and looked for the pattern on each page and Ms F. gave some explicit instruction about pattern books. The class brainstormed some other ideas that would fit into the pattern that would also make sense. They also discussed the end of the book, and how the last sentence did not follow the pattern.

The task for the morning was for the children to write a story for their mothers following the same pattern. The children wrote energetically for 45 minutes, several of them completing eight to ten pages for their book. The teacher and a teacher assistant helped the children with ideas and with spelling, although the children were familiar with using their own spelling dictionary to find words as well. Of the nineteen possible attributes of quality
instruction listed on the Classroom Observation Instrument, I found evidence of sixteen of the attributes (see Table 2).

Summary

The goal in this phase of my study was to select four classrooms where reading instruction was comparable. Differences in reading instruction could be seen as a confounding variable later in the study when I looked at literacy achievement. In order to most clearly see differences in reading and writing achievement that could not be explained by differences in reading instruction, I observed in classrooms using a checklist that outlined features of effective reading and writing instruction as a basis for comparison.

Reading instruction has been thoroughly researched as a factor in literacy achievement. The consensus among researchers and practitioners is that there needs to be a balance of explicit instruction and authentic reading and writing experiences (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; Wharton-MacDonald et al, 1997). The International Reading Association has issued a statement about excellent reading instruction. Understanding reading and writing development in young children, accurate assessment of individual needs and progress, knowledge of a variety of teaching methods to meet individual needs, availability of a wide variety of resources, and providing instruction at opportune times are qualities of effective reading instructors (IRA, 2000). Providing opportunities for children to be meta-cognitive, intrinsically motivated and strategic learners is key in literacy development for young children (Perry, 1998).

When looking at the four classrooms described above, I found indications of effective instruction in each, as well as comparability to one another (see Table 2). When looking at
the attributes on the observation instrument, all classrooms included literacy activities that promoted meaningful interactions with print. In two out of the four classrooms, I did not observe writing activities for real purposes on the particular day I was there, but all of the other three activities were observed in all four classrooms. When looking at instruction, I observed all teachers using explicit instruction and modeling of literacy concepts to the whole class and to small groups, all teachers provided exposure to the alphabetic principle, and attention was given to the structure of the spoken word through rhyming activities or comments about word families in all the classes. When looking at the organization of the classroom and materials, I noticed that all classes provided evidence of extensive interaction with print, as well as ready access to tools to help with writing, such as word walls and high frequency words posted. In the final category of attributes I was looking for opportunities to develop and engage in self-regulated learning. Here there was the least amount of comparability. In two of the classrooms I observed only one of the five attributes and in two of the classrooms I observed three of the five attributes. Because of the similarities in the other categories, and because of the limited observation time I had in each of the classrooms, I selected these four classrooms acknowledging this one area of difference among them.
Chapter IV. Phase Two: Selection of Families

The goal of the second phase of the study was to select two families from each of the four classrooms to participate. Table 3 gives an overview of activities and instruments in this phase. To summarize briefly, a meeting was held with each teacher to describe the profiles of the families needed for the study. Families were nominated by the teacher and consent letters were sent home to the selected families.

Table 3
Overview of Phase 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Appendix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase Two</td>
<td>Nomination of students</td>
<td>F</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student nomination form</td>
<td>G</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gather consent from parents</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent information and consent letter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Methods and Results

Selection of Families

The selection of families was done during an informal discussion between each teacher and me, using the nomination form as a guideline for our discussion (see Appendix F). The SES level of the children was the first consideration. I explained to the teachers that one variable in the study was the SES level of the schools and communities they serve. I explained the SES level of their school that was provided to me by the district superintendent ('high' or 'low') and asked them to consider only students they believed were typical of that SES level when making their selections. The second consideration was the achievement of the child. Teachers were asked to select two students they rated as high achieving and two they rated as low achieving in reading and writing. Teacher judgments about student achievement have been found to be comparable to standardized achievement tests with
regard to accuracy and reliability (Perry & Meisels, 1996). I asked the teachers to nominate
two students at each achievement level, one who had parents 'highly involved' and one who
had parents 'minimally involved' in the child’s schooling. This last consideration was done
to control for the likelihood that teachers would nominate only families who were highly
involved in the child’s schooling because these families would be the most likely to agree to
participate. The parents who were involved at the school would also likely have a positive
relationship with the teacher. Because of the research indicating that many parents have
constraints that prevent them from being involved at the school (Lareau, 1989), I wanted to
ensure I included the perspective of families who were thought to be minimally involved by
the classroom teacher. To compare the teachers’ perceptions of involvement, I included a
question on the General Teacher Questionnaire, asking each teacher to describe a “highly
involved parent.” Before finishing our discussion, and in order to fully understand the
achievement level of each child, I asked the teachers to list the characteristics of the children
they nominated in terms of the strengths and weaknesses in their language arts achievement.

After this discussion, four students from each classroom were selected for the study:
one high achieving student with highly involved parents, one low achieving student with
highly involved parents, one high achieving student with minimally involved parents, and
one low achieving student with minimally involved parents.

This same process was completed in each of the four classrooms (two high SES and
two low SES) giving a total of 16 families (two with each of the possible profiles). Of these,
eight were selected to participate in the remainder of the study, and received an informational
and consent letter (see Appendix G). The names of the other eight students were kept on a
reserve list in case one of the families chose to not be involved. Table 4 summarizes the
profiles of the eight families selected according to achievement level of the child, the SES level of the school community, and the involvement of the parents according to the teachers’ judgments.

Table 4
Profiles of Selected Participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High SES Dyads</th>
<th></th>
<th>Low SES Dyads</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parental Involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>JACK’S</td>
<td>LUKE’S</td>
<td>SARAH’S</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>withdrrew a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms O</td>
<td>Ms J</td>
<td>Ms D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>BEN’S</td>
<td>ANN’S</td>
<td>MARY’S</td>
<td>JANE’S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms O</td>
<td>Ms J</td>
<td>Ms F</td>
<td>Ms D</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>N = 4 teachers, 7 families</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The original family in this cell did not agree to participate, and the alternate family withdrew during the study too late to be replaced.

Teachers were asked to nominate families who they believed were representative of the SES of the school community. I did not collect any data that would confirm these nominations, but for the sake of economy of words I do refer to the families as *high SES* and *low SES*, acknowledging that this characterization is a perception held by the teacher of the child.

Residents of the community were primarily of Caucasian descent, and all families who participated were of Caucasian descent. However, I did not ever meet Ann’s family so I cannot be certain of her background. The following is a short description of each of the families involved.

*Jack.* Jack was a high achieving student in grade three at Grant Elementary School, a school described as ‘high SES’. He was in Ms O.’s class. SD is his mother. SD has a four
year university degree, and is a teacher. She had been employed in a short term position at Grant Elementary for the past few months. SD is not representative of the other parents because she was a colleague of Ms O. She was able to communicate with Ms O. as a parent, but also able to communicate teacher-to-teacher about her son. When asked to describe parents who are highly involved in the education of their child, Ms O said the families work with their child at home, they ask their child about school, they read and return the log book each day, they check over homework for accuracy, they attend parent conferences at the school and they volunteer at the school. She also mentioned that they provide interesting experiences outside of the classroom for the children, and they encourage excellence for their children. Ms O. described SD and her husband as highly involved in their son’s education. SD and her husband have one other child who was in grade one. Her husband was a business owner in the city.

**Ben.** Ben was also a grade three student in Ms O.’s class at Grant Elementary. NL is Ben’s mom. She was a stay-at-home mother and her husband worked in the oilfield and was regularly out of town for several days at a time. She has one year of college, and her husband has *trade or vocational training*. They have one other child who was 14 years old at the time of the study. Both NL and Ms O. described Ben as having difficulty in reading and writing. Ms O. describes NL as a highly involved parent in her son’s schooling. The L family hired a tutor for Ben two or three afternoons per week.

**Luke.** Luke was in grade one at Grant Elementary School, and was in Ms J.’s class. DH is Luke’s mother. Luke has siblings that are considerably older than he, one of whom was still living at home. Ms J. described Luke as a high achiever in reading and writing, while DH described him as an average achiever compared to her older children. When asked
to describe a highly involved parent, Ms J. mentioned reading with the child, helping with homework, asking questions of the teacher if there are concerns, asking the child about school, attending parent conferences and returning the log book and any other forms to the school each day. Ms J. described DH as a minimally involved parent, and DH said she had been less able to be involved in the school because she had not felt well for the past few months. Both DH and Luke’s father have a high school diploma and Mr. H. is self-employed. DH helps him with the office work for the business. She was also able to stay at home with Luke part time.

Ann. Ann was a grade one student in Ms J.’s class at Grant Elementary. Ms J. described her as a low achiever in reading and writing. She had received Early Literacy assistance for two six-week sessions in order to help her catch up to her classmates. Ms J. described Ann as having a fair grasp of the phonetic sounds and being able to comprehend most of what she read. However, her reading level was below grade level, she had a minimal store of sight words, she did not seem to enjoy reading and writing, and she had difficulty writing complete sentences independently. Ms J. describes Ann’s mom, LF, as minimally involved in her daughter’s schooling. LF did not return any of the questionnaires in this study, or agree to an interview, so there is no information from her perspective included in the study.

Sarah. Sarah was a student in Ms D.’s grade one class at Frank Elementary School, a school described as ‘low SES’. Ms D. described Sarah as high achieving in reading and writing. She said, “[Sarah] has good sight words. Comprehension [is] average, but her writing is really good. She uses functional spelling. She [uses] fingers spacing, she is really attentive. She writes about her experiences, but it is her thought content, she has got
Ms. D. describes parents who are highly involved in their child's schooling as providing experiences for the child outside of school, attending the public library with their child, reading to the child, celebrating the child's successes with the child, and interacting positively with the child. She described Sarah's parents, NS and her husband, as highly involved in their daughter's schooling. Sarah is an only child. NS worked full time outside the home, and Sarah was in daycare for a short time before and after school. NS and her husband did not provide information about their levels of education or their occupations.

*Jane.* Jane was in Ms D.'s grade one class at Frank Elementary School. She was described by Ms D. as a struggling reader who had made gains through the year: “Her strength is in her ability to sound out, she remembers the sounds and gestures based on the program we use, her sight words are not strong, and her ability to read by sight is not strong. She is relying a lot on phonetics. [Her] comprehension [is] not bad at all. She has really blossomed in the last two months. Her writing, again relying on familiar things, 'my friend', that kind of thing” (Ms D., Teacher Interview, June 2002). She took part in the Early Literacy program at the school. JK stayed at home part time and also worked outside the home part time ticketing in parking lots. She has four children and Jane was the youngest.

*Mary.* Mary was a student in Ms F.'s grade two class at Allen Elementary School, a school described as 'low SES'. Ms F. described Mary as a student who struggled with reading and writing, but her mother TS as highly involved in her schooling. Ms F. describes a highly involved parent as one who does homework with the child three or four times each
week, practices spelling and sight words with the child, and volunteers at the school. TS had worked as a lunchroom supervisor in the school the year prior to my study, and now cared for young children in her home during the day. Mary has one older sister and one younger brother.

One other participant agreed to be part of the study but withdrew from the study. The second family in the high achieving, low SES, minimal involvement cell had already refused to participate. There was not time in the school year to find another student and begin the data collection. As a result, there are only seven participating families.

Summary

Several factors, external to a child, have been associated with lower achievement in literacy. Unfortunately these factors are found disproportionately more often among lower SES children. Language and literacy activities in lower SES homes are different from what the children will encounter at school and serve as a disadvantage upon entrance to school (Heath, 1983; Wells, 1986). Parental literacy level is often lower in lower SES homes, and is also a risk factor for the children (Keating & Hertzman, 1999). Beliefs about literacy tend to be more task-oriented than "play"-oriented among lower SES families (Baker, Scher & Mackler, 1997). This can be a disadvantage for the children because "play" is a highly motivated activity (Serpell, 1997). There are fewer economic resources in lower SES homes. Purchasing books and educational toys, taking part in organized activities, and paying for high quality childcare are difficult when economic resources are low (Neuman, 1999). Finally lower SES parents are maybe less available to be involved in the school in traditional ways such as volunteering at the school or helping with homework at night because often
their jobs have less flexibility and irregular hours, and do not allow parents to be available (Lareau, 1989). The goal of my study was to see if the relationship a parent and teacher have with one another, in terms of the communication, mutual support and satisfaction, is another factor that can be associated with lower achievement levels or with lower SES families. It is certainly understandable, with all these other differences between home and school for lower SES populations, that the relationship between parent and teacher would be at risk. It is also understandable that the relationship is vulnerable to discontent when the child is not achieving. My selection of dyads of parent and teacher was done in order to characterize the relationship between parent and teacher at each level of SES and achievement, in order to pinpoint where the risk factors lie.
The goal of Phase 3 was to begin to answer my research questions (p. 50). Specifically I sought to understand clearly and to describe accurately the relationship that existed between each parent and teacher, in terms of the perceptions of communication, the perceptions of mutual support from both parties, and the reports of satisfaction based on these perceptions from both parties. I also assessed the correspondence of these attributes of the relationship between parent and teacher to the literacy achievement of the child and to the SES of the family, looking particularly for patterns across the dyads. Table 5 gives an overview of the activities and instruments in this phase.

Table 5  
Overview of Phase 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Appendix</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase Three Specific questions for each</td>
<td>Specific teacher</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>child asked of teacher</td>
<td>questionnaire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarification of response from teachers</td>
<td>Teacher interview</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions sent home to parents</td>
<td>Parent questionnaire</td>
<td>J</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarification of responses from parents</td>
<td>Parent interview</td>
<td>K</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Method

In Phase 3, I administered the remaining four of my five instruments: a specific teacher questionnaire, a semi-structured interview with each teacher, a parent questionnaire and a semi-structured interview with each parent. Also, the General Teacher Questionnaire I had left with the teachers after the classroom observation was collected.
All five instruments asked questions on three topics: communication, mutual support and satisfaction. In the design of the study, I gave each member of the dyad the same set of questions, in part, to allow me to see the level of understanding between parent and teacher within each dyad. The intent was to see if the responses to the same question were similar between these two members, indicating shared understanding or consensus between parent and teacher. Teachers began by completing a specific questionnaire for each of the selected students, particularly the perceptions the teacher had about the relationship he or she had with the family. These questionnaires were followed by an informal interview with the teachers, giving them opportunity for additional comments and clarification. Finally, parents completed a questionnaire, which asked about their perceptions of the relationship they had with their child's teacher. I conducted follow-up interviews to provide participating parents with an opportunity to clarify any of their remarks as well as provide an opportunity for me to ask any additional questions that may have arisen.

*Instruments and Instrument Coding*

The overall question of this research project was “how does the relationship between parent and teacher, in terms of the perceptions of communication, the perceived level of mutual support, and the level of satisfaction both parties report based on these perceptions, correspond to the literacy achievement of the child and to the SES of the family?”

Questions regarding communication focused on the frequency and the manner of communication, and on the content of the communication, particularly the information that was generally passed between teacher and parent regarding the reading and writing of the child. Questions about mutual support focused on the roles each party believed to be important in the development of reading and writing, as well as their beliefs about the roles
of the other party in this development. Finally, questions about the level of satisfaction of each party were divided between the two previous sections: questions regarding satisfaction with the communication followed other communication questions, and questions regarding satisfaction with mutual support followed other mutual support questions.

Because most of the questions were repeated in each of the instruments, I have described the coding in detail for the first instrument and, for the following instruments, I have described coding for each new or unique question. In general, on all five instruments, there are three types of questions: rating questions that provide a 4-point Likert scale (e.g., very satisfied to very unsatisfied), selection questions where respondents choose from a list of applicable responses, and open-ended questions. In the case of the open-ended questions, categories were created to reflect all responses. For example, question 3 on the General Teacher Questionnaire (see Appendix D) asks “What information about how children learn to read and write do you like to communicate to parents during the meetings or conversations you have?” A similar question is asked of the parents on the Parent Questionnaire (see Appendix J): “During your conversations, what does your child’s teacher tell you about reading and writing in general?” Parents and teachers responses were captured by the following categories: suggestions, progress or concerns, motivation or affect, introduction of language programs, or teacher’s approach to language instruction. This was important for later comparison of the individuals within the dyads and between dyads.

*General teacher questionnaire.* The intent of this first instrument was to gather information about teachers’ beliefs and practices concerning communication with parents, mutual support between teachers and families, and satisfaction with the relationship. Although this instrument was left with each teacher observed during Phase 2 of the study, the
data was not used for the selection of the teachers, but rather for the goal of this phase, to characterize the parent-teacher relationship within each dyad. The organization of this instrument is consistent with the organization of the four other instruments administered in Phase 3.

This questionnaire asked nine general questions about communication, mutual support and satisfaction with parents. Question 1 asks "On average, how often do you communicate with parents?" and gives four possible responses: *daily*, *weekly*, *monthly*, and *at conference time only*. Question 2 asked "How do you communicate with parents?" and asked the teachers to select all the responses that applied. The six responses were given a letter code (*casual visits* = CV, *log books* = LB, *phone calls* = PH, *class newsletters* = NL, *conferences* = PT). The follow-up question asked "Which of the above do you find most fruitful or helpful when discussing issues of achievement?" The responses given by the four teachers were given the same codes as above.

Questions 3 and 4 were open-ended questions and were reciprocal: "What information about how children learn to read and write do you like to communicate to parents during the meetings or conversations you have?" and "What information, about their child's reading and writing, do you like to receive from the parents during the meetings and conversations you have?" After I received the questionnaires, I generated a list of categories that reflected all responses to these questions on all instruments. A description of the categories created for question 3 follows: *suggestions* included mainly suggestions for work at home, *progress or concerns* were comments about the child's achievement in language arts or any concerns associated with the progress, *motivation or affect* included comments about the child's attitude toward reading or writing, *introduction of language programs*
included comments about home reading programs, and teacher's approach to language instruction included comments about how reading and writing were taught and current beliefs about how children learn to read and write. A description of the categories created for question 4 follows: work done at home included information about home literacy practices, materials at home included information about the reading and writing materials available to the children at home, parent strategies at home included the procedures the parents were using to assist the children with reading and writing at home, progress or concerns included the perceptions or concerns the parents had particular to the achievement of their child, child's motivation or affect included comments about the perceptions the parents had about their child's attitude toward reading and writing, comments explaining satisfaction included any comments parents had about their satisfaction with the language arts program, suggestions included suggestions the parents had for the teacher about working with the child, and other factors included such things as medical concerns that the teacher may need to know.

Questions 5 was the first of the satisfaction questions (How satisfied are you with the communication you have with parents, in general?) All questions regarding satisfaction provided the respondents with the same choices of response: very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat unsatisfied and very unsatisfied. As with most of the satisfaction questions on these instruments, opportunity was given to explain the response. Throughout, explanations were used as descriptive data.

Because parental involvement was a factor in selecting participants, and parental involvement is known to look different at differing levels of SES (Lareau, 1996), question 6 was designed to account for the likelihood there would be variation in the definition of
parental involvement within my study ("How would you describe a parent who is ‘highly involved’ in their child’s schooling? What kinds of things do they do?"). The question was used to explain variations in the activities of parents described as *highly involved* or *minimally involved* and to see if the activities of the parents were playing a role in the relationship the teacher and the parent had.

Question 7 asked about parental roles in learning to read and write, and was coded as the other open ended questions described above. The categories created were as follows: *read/write with the child* included any activities intended to practice reading or practice writing, *provide exposure to print* included mention of activities designed to increase the child’s awareness of print, *provide life experiences* included mention of any activities that exposed the child to new experiences, *model reading/writing* included parents or older siblings reading, *provide educational toys* included the providing literacy materials for the children to use in the home, *encourage reading/writing* included overt messages from the parents on the importance or benefits of reading or writing, *enrich child’s vocabulary* included giving the child opportunities to hear and use new vocabulary, *storytelling activities* included any activity where the child was creating or recording a story, *provide a tutor*, and *assist with homework* are self-explanatory.

Question 8 asked "What do you believe is your role in supporting families as they work with their child at home?" and was coded as an open-ended question. The categories created were as follows: *provide materials* included the teacher providing home reading books, flash cards or other materials for home use, *communicate progress* included keeping parents informed about the progress of the child, *offer suggestions* included providing suggestions to the parents of work they could do at home to assist the child, *provide*
understanding and encouragement included supporting parents emotionally who may be struggling with the difficulties the child is having in reading or writing provide homework and home reading included providing a program to motivate the child in these two areas, provide quality instruction included instruction in both reading or writing, communicate strategies of reading and writing development included providing parents with current beliefs about the best way to help a child learn to read and write, and recommend child for special programs included teacher referrals to available programs to assist the child if necessary. The follow up question asked "Are you able to provide the support you would like?" and gave the opportunity to explain further. The response to this question was used for a discussion question in the Teacher Interview.

Question 9 was a question about the satisfaction the teacher had with the support from families and was coded as the satisfaction question above. There was also an opportunity to explain the response given.

Specific teacher questionnaire. This second questionnaire was a child specific questionnaire that was completed by the teachers about each of the families selected for the study. There were ten questions in total (see Appendix H).

The first six questions ask about the perception the teacher had of the communication with this child's family, including the level of satisfaction with that communication. Questions 1 through 4 were repeated from the general questionnaire asking about the frequency, manner and content of communication, but were asked specifically about each child (e.g., How often do you communicate with the parents of this child? Daily? Weekly? Monthly? At conference time only? What information have you received from these parents about the reading and writing of this child?). Questions 5 asked about the level of satisfaction
the teacher had with this communication. Question 6 was the first question asking a participant to anticipate the responses of another participant to the same question. The question asked the teacher to anticipate the level of satisfaction the parents might report (e.g., How satisfied do you think these parents are with the communication they have with you?). The scale of responses for these and all satisfaction questions was consistent with the General Teacher Questionnaire (i.e., very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat unsatisfied, and very unsatisfied). Both questions also provided a space to explain the responses given.

The next four questions (7 through 10) asked about the mutual support the teacher perceived she was offering to the family, and the satisfaction the teacher had with that level of support. Question 7 asked for the teacher's description of the activities she understood the parents were doing to support their child in learning to read and write, and was coded as an open-ended question with the same categories described for this question on the General Teacher Questionnaire. Question 8 asked how satisfied the teachers were with the “home literacy practices”. Question 9 asked the teacher “What do you do to support this family in their home literacy practices?” and was coded as an open-ended question. Question 10 asked for the anticipated level of satisfaction the parents might have with this support.

*Teacher interview.* Following this second teacher questionnaire, I arranged to meet with each teacher individually to conduct a semi-structured interview to discuss the responses on these two instruments (See Appendix I). My first goal was to clarify any responses that were not clear in the two questionnaires. Secondly I wanted to provide the teachers with an opportunity to explain more about their beliefs about relationships with parents. The data collected from this discussion was primarily descriptive, so our conversation was taped and
transcribed. The data was used to add to the responses of questions on the two teacher instruments described above.

I asked two questions consistently in each interview. I opened the discussion with an opportunity to review the instruments themselves: “Do you have any questions or comments about the questionnaires you filled out? Was there anything unclear?” I then asked for any specific or general comments about relationships between parents and teachers. The remaining questions were tailored to each teacher based on responses on the questionnaires. For example, Ms D. had taught in many schools in the city. She had indicated she was somewhat satisfied with the communication with parents in her classroom. During the interview I asked “Do you find anything unique about this particular setting, this type of school... typically thought of as a higher needs area?” (Teacher interview, June 2002) There was also time to discuss any topics that came up in the interview that may not have been anticipated, but were of interest to the study. I ended the interview with another opportunity for the teachers to add any comments they may have: "Do you have any further comments about anything we have discussed so far?"

**Parent questionnaire.** The questions to the parents were asked on one of two instruments: a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire followed the format and coding of all previous instruments, but also included a short demographics section (see Appendix J).

There were ten questions on this instrument. Questions 1 and 2 were identical to the first two questions on the teacher instruments, but were reworded to the parents' point of view. The choices for responses and the coding were also identical to the teacher instruments (e.g., How often do you communicate with your child’s teacher? Daily, weekly, monthly and...
Questions 3, 4 and 5 were open-ended, asked about the content of communication and were similar to the questions asked of the teachers (e.g., During your conversations, what does your child's teacher tell you about reading and writing in general? What information about your child's reading and writing do you feel is important to share with the teacher?). Question 6 addressed the parents' satisfaction with the communication (e.g., How satisfied are you with the communication you have had with your child's teacher?), and Question 7 asked the parents to anticipate the satisfaction of the teacher with communication (e.g., How satisfied do you think your child's teacher is with the communication he or she has with you?). Again, these were coded as other satisfaction questions in the study.

Questions 8 through 10 asked about the parents' perceptions of the support they offered to the teacher and the support they received from the teacher. Question 8 asked for a description of the activities at home that support their child's reading and writing development (e.g., What do you do at home to support your child in learning to read?) Question 9 asked what the parents perceived the child's teacher did to support the parents in their work at home (What does your child's teacher do to support you as you work with your child at home in reading and writing?) Question 10 asked the parents to rate and explain the level of satisfaction they had with the literacy instruction the teacher provided. All three questions were coded as their counterparts in other instruments.

The last six questions helped to describe the demographics of the family, (e.g., How many adults are in your home? How many children? Ages? What kind of work do you do now, or most recently? Please check the highest level of education or training you have
completed. This information was simply used for descriptive data, and not to establish a SES level.

_Parent Interview._ The final instrument was the parent interview. This was a semi-structured interview designed to clarify any parts of the questionnaire that may have been unclear, and to provide the parents with an opportunity to discuss their beliefs about parent-teacher relationships in more depth if they chose. There were several questions outlined on the instrument that may have been asked, but I reviewed the responses to the questionnaire before the discussion and selected appropriate questions to ask based on those responses (see Appendix K). I asked the parents for permission to tape the interview; I transcribed the interview shortly afterward.

At the beginning of the interview, I introduced myself and explained the purpose of the study. I also outlined the format of the interview and reiterated that all responses would be kept confidential. I briefly reviewed the questionnaires that were filled out by the parent, starting with the comment, "I brought along the questionnaire you filled out for me a short time ago. It asked questions about the relationship between home and school. Is there anything you want to clarify or explain before we get started?" I also asked if there were any questions or comments about the questionnaire in general, such as the length of time it took, or the clarity of the questions.

There were five possible topics to be addressed: the frequency of communication, the context of communication, the content of communication, the type of work the parents did at home to help their child with reading and writing, and the degree of support received from the school in helping their child with reading and writing. In all of these topics I had identified possible questions that may have helped to clarify the response the parent gave.
For example, on the topic of activities the parents did at home to support their children, I had four possible questions to ask: Can you tell me about the work you do at home with your child to improve his or her reading and writing? Do you think the amount of work you are asked to do is appropriate? What about the type of activities you are asked to do. Are they appropriate? Do you have any frustrations? I chose topics to be addressed based on concerns I saw in the questionnaire or questions that may have been answered vaguely or with strong emotions. Both warranted further description.

I ended the interview by asking the open-ended question "Are there any further comments you would like to make about parent - teacher relationships?" Any data that further clarified responses to the parent questionnaire were added, and if any additional comments or information were given, the responses were used as descriptive data.

This parent interview completed the data collection for this study.

Reliability. A second rater recoded the data collected for three of the seven dyads. Before passing the data to the rater, I discussed the overall intent of the study and the structure of the five instruments including the three types of questions used (selection of responses, a scale of responses, and open-ended questions). I also reviewed the categories of responses developed for each of the open-ended questions as well as the process I had used in developing the categories of responses.

For three of the seven dyads, the rater received the complete portfolios of instruments, with names or identifying information removed, as well as a list of the categories of responses for each question. He recoded the open-ended questions according to my categories. He also read the transcripts of the interviews and highlighted any portions he believed contributed to the responses on any of the three questionnaires. After receiving his
coding of the instruments I compared his categorization of the open-ended questions to my original categorization. On the General Teacher Questionnaire we had 75.44% agreement, on the Specific Teacher Questionnaire we had 62.5% agreement, and on the Parent Questionnaire we had 80.49% agreement. In the instances where I agreed with his interpretation of the responses I corrected the codes. We then had 89.47% agreement on the General Teacher Questionnaire, 82.5% agreement on the Specific Teacher Questionnaire and 92.68% agreement on the Parent Questionnaire. Following my corrections, we had a discussion about the instances where I did not agree with his interpretation. We were able to reach 100% agreement.

As there was no room for interpretation on the questions involving a selection of responses or a scale of responses, no recoding was done for these questions.

Results Within Dyads

The results for this phase are presented in two sections. This first section includes the responses of the participants within each dyad of parent and teacher. Students are grouped by SES in order that students taught by the same teacher are described together and repetition of responses is avoided. A description of the communication, support and satisfaction within the dyad is given, as well as an evaluation of whether or not the relationship is 'successful'. I have rated the relationships as very successful, somewhat successful, somewhat unsuccessful or very unsuccessful. The scale for designations is similar to the scale used to describe the level of satisfaction throughout the study. A relationship characterized as very successful had high levels of satisfaction reported by parents and the teachers, as well as support for such a designation in the responses given by both parents and teachers to the questions concerning
communication and support. Responses that indicated consensus between parents and teachers supported a judgment that the dyad was successful, while responses that indicated a lack of consensus or misunderstanding between parents and teachers resulted in a judgment that the dyad was less successful. A somewhat successful relationship had reports that one or both members were somewhat satisfied, as well as comments to support such a designation. A somewhat unsuccessful relationship had responses indicating parents or teachers were somewhat unsatisfied and had descriptive data to support such a designation. A very unsuccessful relationship had low satisfaction scores reported in the dyad, as well as comments from parents and teachers indicating misunderstandings or frustrations within the relationship. It is important to note that a successful rating refers to the quality of the relationship, but not to the achievement of the child. It is possible to have a successful relationship between parents and teachers of low achieving children. Table 6 gives an overview of the success ratings of the seven dyads in this study. I characterized three of the dyads as very successful, three dyads as somewhat successful, and one dyad as somewhat unsuccessful. Following the table I have provided a detailed description of each of the seven dyads, including the responses on the instruments and a detailed description of my assessment of the relationship between parent and teacher.

High Socioeconomic Dyads

Dyad one: Ms O. & Jack's family (high achievement, high involvement). Ms O. had been teaching at Grant Elementary School for four years. She was teaching grade three, and had a class of 29 students. Prior to teaching at Grant Elementary School, she taught for eight years at Frank Elementary School, another school involved in the study.
Table 6
Success Ratings of the Relationship between Parent and Teacher in Each of the Seven Dyads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High SES Dyads</th>
<th>Low SES Dyads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parental Involvement</td>
<td>Parental Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>JACK'S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family /</td>
<td>Family /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms O</td>
<td>Ms J</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Successful</td>
<td>Somewhat Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Successful</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>BEN'S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family /</td>
<td>Family /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms O</td>
<td>Ms J</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Successful</td>
<td>Somewhat Successful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Generally, Ms O. preferred to communicate with parents daily, usually through the log books that are sent between home and school. “Everyday, that agenda goes home and occasionally you might have someone who forgets it, but they are usually always signed and sent back the next day, and that is a really big part of explaining to them what we are doing on a daily basis” (Teacher Interview, June 2002). While observing in her classroom, I noted that the information going home in the log books was mainly announcements about upcoming events, or notices about materials going back and forth between home and school. Ms O. found the parent-teacher conferences the most helpful when discussing achievement. During the year she generally provided parents with information about their child’s specific reading and writing strengths and weaknesses, as well as some information about the home reading program. She appreciated hearing from the parents how much work was being done at home with the child and what strategies were being used to assist the children at home. Generally, the most common barrier to successful communication for Ms O. was when
parents did not read the correspondence going home. Ms O. was very satisfied with the communication she had with parents, “[When coming from another school] I couldn’t believe how well communication was happening here” (Teacher Interview, June 2002).

Regarding mutual support between home and school, Ms O. believed the role of parents in reading and writing development included “encourag[ing] their child to enjoy reading a variety of material”, listening to them reading, providing them with writing opportunities, practicing spelling words and reinforcing writing skills taught at school (General Teacher Questionnaire, May 2002). She perceived her role in supporting the parents at home was to communicate areas of strength and concern, as well as provide suggestions as to how best to help their child. In general, she believed she was able to provide this kind of support, and she was very satisfied with the support she received from home: “They trust you. ... The main thing is, as long as you are doing your job, they seem really happy” (Teacher Interview, June 2002).

Jack was a high achieving student in Ms O.’s class. SD is his mother. SD and Ms O. communicated daily, mainly with casual visits because they worked together at the same school. Both were very satisfied with this arrangement and when asked what Jack thought of the arrangement, SD indicated that he did not mind it at all: “He wouldn’t! Nope. He is not concerned with what anyone thinks or anything” (Parent Interview, June 2002). SD had a clear idea of Jack’s ability and progress because of the regular communication, but did indicate that she likely got more information than another parent would get because she was working in the school. For example, in a recent psycho-educational assessment of Jack, SD had seen the results and believed she had likely received a more candid review of the scores than another parent may get in a formal conference about the results: “Probably I got more
information just because I was here. They did a Gates-McGinity the other day and they can’t even place him because it only goes up to grade 10 and he is beyond that.... So I get a lot of information, but probably because she sees me in the hallway and says ‘look what he got on this’, you know. Normally, I would not see that if I were not here. I would just see the report card’” (Parent Interview, June 2002). In addition to communicating about Jack’s progress, SD had talked with Ms O. about the stress Jack was experiencing in general about doing his best writing. Although she mentioned in the interview that he was not worried about what others think of him, she also did talk about the stress he experienced, particularly when writing, about being able to think of ideas. Together SD and Ms O. had worked with Jack to help him learn how to reduce the anxiety he experienced. For example, when Ms O. was planning to have the students write a story, she would discuss the topic with SD prior to the assignment. SD and her husband would then help Jack at home to think of ideas to make the writing less stressful for him the next day. They also discussed the possibility of placing Jack in the district ‘gifted’ program, and decided against it because of the possibility of added stress.

In terms of the support parent and teacher perceived offering each other, both SD and Ms O. were very satisfied. Ms O. knew the family read with Jack, provided him with rich life experiences, and worked together to reduce the stress of writing for him. She also said “education appears to be a very important part of the family practices. [His] parents show a keen and positive interest in the things Jack does at school. ... I really respect all they’ve done with Jack to get him to where he is today” (Specific Teacher Questionnaire, May 2002). SD said that she used to work more closely with Jack, but he generally worked independently at home now to get his work finished. For example, he would read for an hour on his own
each morning before school. SD indicated that she was very satisfied with the literacy instruction Ms O. provided for Jack.

Ms O. and SD had a very successful relationship (see Table 6). Each member of the dyad rated satisfaction levels as very satisfied. Both parent and teacher were closely matched in how they preferred to communicate with one another, and both reported being supported by the other. There was no indication of a misunderstanding between the two, and they both mentioned working together to make decisions about Jack and to help Jack succeed. Lareau and Shumar (1996) indicate higher SES parents see themselves as a peer of the teacher, or an equal decision maker with the teacher; this certainly held true for this dyad. Both parent and teacher gave evidence of the high respect they have for the opinion of the other, and both talked of decisions they made together about Jack.

_Dyad two: Ms O. & Ben’s family (low achievement, high involvement)._ Ms O. reported communicating daily to NL through log books, but generally saw her only at conference time. NL would call Ms O. whenever there was a concern, and she was confident that the school would call her when there was a concern about Ben: “Ms O. is a great teacher, so I trust her. When there is a concern she will phone me about that” (Parent Interview, June 2002). In terms of the information exchanged, Ms O. said she provided the parents with information about how Ben was doing, and some suggestions for work at home. NL told Ms O. about Ben’s progress and also about the work they were doing at home and the work the tutor was doing with Ben. Ms O. indicated she was very satisfied with the communication she had with Ben’s family. NL on the other hand indicated that she was somewhat satisfied with the communication she had with the school, and reported that Ms O. was likely only somewhat satisfied with her communication back to the school. She mentioned a situation
that had happened two years prior to my discussion with her, where Ben was assessed at the school: “He had a test in grade one. They didn’t mean anything to me. They were very complicated. It was like five pages of ‘he scores this out of this’ and I don’t know what they mean…” (Parent Interview, June 2002) indicating that she was frustrated with the information at the time. Two years after that meeting, however, she indicated a level of resignation toward his struggles and a withdrawal from the traditional sense of involvement in the school: “When she is concerned about something, she will call, but not that often, because she knows how Ben struggles, and I know how Ben struggles, so I don’t want to stick my face in the school like I did last year and the year before. It was just too much for me and probably too much for Ben. And I got all the wrong answers, so this way Ms O. is a great teacher, so I trust her. When there is concern she will phone me about that” (Parent Interview, June 2002). She did not clarify what “all the wrong answers” meant, but she was certainly indicating that her daily involvement in previous years was met with resistance, and was frustrating.

In terms of the support Ms O. and NL perceived they were providing to each other, Ms. O was very satisfied with the support the family provided to both Ben and to her. This was primarily because of a tutor they had hired for Ben. NL indicated that in previous years she had been more involved in Ben’s schooling, but had chosen to step back this year. Again, frustration was evident in her comments: “I don’t know how he is doing right now. I am oblivious to it, because I just tried to wash my hands of it this year” (Parent Interview, June 2002). But she was emphatic that her dissatisfaction was not with Ms O. For example, NL indicated she was somewhat satisfied with the literacy instruction in the classroom, but when asked to explain her response she said, “Yes, she is a fine teacher. She wants order in the
class, which is what Ben needs... but this is the problem, too many kids in the classroom and then they do not have enough time to spend on, you know, they can’t spend extra time on one certain child and then not on another child, but if they need it everyone has to have a fair shake at it, even if they don’t need it. That’s my problem” (Parent Interview, June 2002). Her dissatisfaction appeared to lie not with the teacher, but rather with the educational system.

Regarding the work they did at home with Ben, NL indicated that the requirements were not too high, but they did watch carefully that Ben was not overloaded: “For Ben, he has been working, because he goes to a tutor either two or three times a week. So that is a lot. Plus we do homework at home and spelling words and reading and all the stuff he misses when he is at the resource room at school. He does a lot. So I can’t ask him to do anymore” (Parent Interview, June 2002).

The dyad of Ms O. and NL was very successful. The communication NL and Ms O. had was minimal in terms of time spent talking with one another, but both reported they could approach one another when there was a concern, and they both expressed an understanding of Ben’s struggles. The support they perceived receiving from one another was not because of face-to-face contact and conversation; NL was not present at the school often and hired a tutor for Ben, but both teacher and parent were satisfied with this arrangement and understood it best suited the unique needs of Ben. NL clarified that any dissatisfaction she reported was not with the teacher but with the large number of children in the class. Her comments such as “I am trying to wash my hands of it”, “I got all the wrong answers”, and “He had a test in grade one. They don’t mean anything to me” indicate frustration and dissatisfaction with earlier experiences, but I sensed that she was resigned to the level of support the school system was offering her and Ben, and that she gave
indications of believing she was powerless to change the way things were. She was not
dissatisfied in any particular way with Ms O. Nichols and Read (2002) report similar
experiences of parents when they communicate with teachers about the difficulties their
children are having. In their study of communication between parents of struggling students
and the stakeholders involved with the child at school, parents reported that information sent
from the school, particularly written reports, were difficult to decipher. Marking systems
were difficult to understand and the supporting comments were bland and unhelpful. Parents
indicated that they had to “read between the lines” when they received a report from school
to comprehend fully what the teacher was saying. NL certainly indicated she had similar
experiences with the information that was given to her from the school.

_Dyad three: Ms J. & Luke’s family (high achievement, minimal involvement)._ Ms J.
had been teaching grade one at Grant Elementary School for three years. Prior to teaching at
Grant Elementary School she taught in another school described as a middle SES school
community by district personnel.

Ms J. reported communicating daily with the parents in her classroom through log
books, and weekly with a newsletter describing upcoming learning objectives and ideas for
work at home. She reported that casual visits, phone calls and parent conferences were the
most helpful when discussing achievement. When communicating with parents she reported
that she provided them with suggestions for work at home, an outline of her approach to
teaching reading and writing, as well as an outline of how her home reading program worked
and the benefits of being involved. When talking with the parents she preferred to receive
information about their child’s attitude toward reading and writing, comments the child made
at home about school, and if the child read and wrote at home. She was generally very
satisfied with the communication she had with parents, and was confident that parents would talk with her if they had a concern: “There are at least two times [at the beginning of the year] where I make it very clear that if you have the smallest or the largest of concerns, by all means come and talk to me” (Teacher Interview, June 2002).

In terms of support Ms J. received from families, she reported it was important that parents read with their child, model an interest in reading to the child, encourage the child to read, and provide the child with print-rich experiences outside of school, both in reading and in writing. She reported that she supported the families by providing materials and practical suggestions for work at home, providing quality instruction in the classroom, providing clear information about the progress of the child and providing positive feedback to parents when she saw progress, and encouraging parents in their efforts at home. In general Ms J. was able to provide this support: “I did not ever feel anyone was criticizing me; they were just generally interested in how they could help me as a teacher, or as their child’s teacher, or how they could help their children” (Teacher Interview, June 2002). However, Ms J. acknowledged that, in some situations when parents did not come to conferences or come to the school, that support was difficult to provide.

Luke was a student in Ms J’s grade one classroom. In addition to sending newsletters and log books home, Ms J. had met Luke’s mother, DH, at parent teacher conferences, although at the last set of conferences DH did not request an appointment. DH reported that she did not see Ms J. casually at the school because she believed it was important that Luke learn how to walk home on his own: “I am not one of these moms who comes to your door and picks him up two metres from your door and take him home. So I let go, I let go, I let go. So that is a reason I do not see the teacher every day” (Parent Interview, June 2002). In terms
of the information sent home to the family, DH reported she did not receive any new information from the school. She had older children and commented that Ms J. would likely pass along more information if she were a less experienced mom. DH was very confident in teaching her own children to read and write and, because the family had moved frequently in the past, she believed it was her role to make sure they knew how to read before coming to kindergarten. She also was comfortable giving the teacher information about areas in which Luke needed some assistance. DH reported that she particularly appreciated the weekly newsletters which offered tips for work at home and information about concepts to be covered the following week. Because she had not been able to be involved this year, she liked the letter so she could keep track of what Luke was learning. The only barrier DH found in communicating with teachers in general was when they did not respect the religious differences of her children, but this had not been an issue with Luke or Ms J. In terms of satisfaction with the communication. Both DH and Ms J. indicated they were somewhat satisfied, but their explanations were interesting to compare. Ms J. said “although there is not a lot of communication between home and school, I feel satisfied enough knowing that I can call home when there are concerns. Perhaps with Luke being successful, the need is not as great [as] if he was struggling, although it’s nice to share the positives with parents about their child”. DH said “it’s very much a one-way dialogue. I initiate more discussions than the teacher. However she takes my input seriously when she receives it” (Parent Interview, June 2002). Both Ms J. and DH reported being the one generally initiating the communication.

In terms of the support the teacher and parent perceived the other offering them, both indicated they were somewhat satisfied. Both indicated that Ms J. supported Luke by sending home reading materials and lists of sight words to read, and by acting on parent concerns. A
discrepancy in understanding arose when each described the work the family did at home to support Luke. Ms J. understood that the family read books at home, but was not sure about his writing at home. She was somewhat satisfied with this support. DH reported that she supported Luke by being the one to teach him to read “phonetically” before coming to school: “I take the responsibility, and anything the teacher does is a bonus” (Parent Interview, June 2002). They also played Scrabble and other word games, modeled reading, and got him to help with reading while doing the shopping. Luke had his own library card and a complete set of reference books at home. To support him in writing they corrected his pencil placement, practiced spelling, had him copy things down such as scripture verses, had him write emails and thank you notes to relatives and lead by “example, example, example” (Parent Interview, June 2002). Ms J. did not report knowing about the work DH was doing at home. Another discrepancy or misunderstanding arose within descriptions of the reading at home. Ms J. made the comment that “perhaps Luke’s parents feel they are asked to do too much” (Teacher Interview, June 2002), while DH said “I don’t think it is too much. I mean, she expects our kids to read, the goal is to read between 10 to 15 minutes a day. If you can’t read 10 to 15 minutes with you child, you shouldn’t have had them” (Parent Interview, June 2002).

DH was very satisfied with the literacy instruction that Ms J. provided for Luke in the classroom, while Ms J. interpreted that the parents were only somewhat satisfied with the instruction. Perhaps some of the misunderstanding was rooted in a different approach to reading and writing instruction, or a misunderstanding about what was really happening in the classroom. Although Ms J. provided a balanced approach in her language arts program, including instruction about sound-symbol relationships, DH indicated she did not trust this
would happen at school. Instead she taught her son to read phonetically before he came to school.

The relationship between Ms J. and DH was somewhat successful. There were some key misunderstandings in this dyad. There were misunderstandings in the communication between teacher and parent. I had the sense that Ms J. interpreted the lack of frequent face-to-face communication as less than optimal for Luke: It’s nice to share the positives with parents about their child. However, Luke certainly hears from me the positives about his reading and writing…” (Teacher Interview, June 2002). Ms J. was unsure about what Luke was doing at home, while DH listed several things the family did regularly to support reading and writing, and many of the activities she reported were what Ms J. reported as being important for parents to do. For example, she listed modeling reading and writing to children as important, and DH listed leading by “example, example, example” (Parent Questionnaire, June 2002) as something that was important in their home. The same misunderstanding occurred about what Ms J. was offering Luke in the classroom. Ms J. was offering a program based in sound-symbol relationships, while DH indicated she needed to provide this at home on her own in case it was missed at school. Both Ms J. and DH were doing what the other said was important to do, but neither knew what the other was doing.

Although there were some misunderstandings within the dyad, there was evidence that DH believed she shared responsibility in Luke’s reading and writing development with the teacher. Lareau (1987) found evidence of this belief among middle and upper SES families. DH indicated that she was pleased with the instruction Ms J. provided, but she was confident in her own role as well.
Dyad four: Ms J. & Ann’s family (low achievement, minimal involvement). Ann was in Ms J.’s grade one classroom. Her mother was LF. Ms J. communicated with LF through log books and newsletters. She saw her at school frequently, but she was not able to talk with her because she usually stopped in to drop off Ann’s lunch while Ms J. was teaching. She attended the first conference of the year. Ms J. had given LF information about Ann’s difficulties through report cards and a short conversation letting her know that Ann would be a part of the Early Literacy program for a second six week session because she needed extra assistance. Ms J. indicated that she was very unsatisfied with the communication because she was not able to share concerns with LF and also not able to find out if there were anything she could do to assist her with Ann. She anticipated that LF was likely somewhat satisfied with the communication or she would have come to the school to find out more information. Lareau (1989) indicates there could be an alternate explanation for a parent not being present at the school, either because they are intimidated by the school, or they believe it is not the role of the parent to be present at the school building, but rather to ensure the child is prepared for school with proper nutrition and care. Perhaps this offers some explanation.

In terms of the support Ms J. perceived providing LF, she indicated that LF had received all the regular support such as home reading materials, spelling and sight words sent home, and practical tips for helping at home. She had also referred Ann to the Early Literacy program for extra assistance. Ms J. believed that minimal time was spent reading at home, and she had just started practicing spelling words in the past three weeks. Ms J. was very unsatisfied with the home literacy practices and believed that Ann would have had the potential to be more successful with practice. She interpreted that LF was somewhat satisfied with the literacy instruction in her classroom.
The relationship between Ms J. and LF was somewhat unsuccessful. Ms J. was not satisfied with the amount of communication she had with this family, and the lack of data from the parent is consistent with the lack of communication Ms J. reported. Ms J. believed this was less than ideal for Ann, given the difficulties she was experiencing in reading and writing. Ms J. also reported she was not satisfied with the support the family gave to Ann at home to build her reading and writing skills. However, and she was not certain her interpretation was accurate, she believed she had to assume the parent was satisfied with the literacy instruction at school, and the amount of communication they had because she received no feedback that would indicate otherwise.

Ann's mother certainly indicated by her limited contact with Ms J., that she might have been intimidated by coming to see the teacher. She repeatedly came to the school during the morning while Ms J. was teaching to drop off Ann's lunch, and she did not come for parent-teacher conferences regularly. Although I did not find any explanation for this intimidation in the comments made by Ms J. or in the literature, there are certainly explanations for why LF may have been intimidated. She may have believed the struggles Ann was having were a reflection on her as a parent. Lareau (1996) explains that lower SES parents were threatened because of their perception that the school has the power to report any unacceptable child-rearing practices to the authorities. Ann and her mother did not live in a lower SES community, but it would be understandable if LF was intimidated or threatened by the suggestions she knew she would receive for assisting Ann. Perhaps they were difficult for her to do because of time constraints or because of her own difficulties. It is impossible to pinpoint why LF did not come to the school to talk with the teacher, but there are understandable explanations in light of the difficulties Ann was having.
Low Socioeconomic Dyads

Dyad five: Ms D. & Sarah’s family (high achievement, high involvement). Ms D. had been teaching grade one at Frank Elementary School for several years. Prior to that she taught in several other schools in the same school district.

In general, Ms D. communicated with her parents through phone calls, log books and a newsletter, but found casual visits and parent teacher conferences the most helpful when discussing achievement. During her conversations with parents, she communicated information about the strategies she was teaching the children to use while reading, particularly information about strategies a particular child was using or may have needed practice using. She appreciated receiving information about parents’ perceptions of their child’s success, how they interacted with their children at home, and information about the reading at home. She would have liked to have an opportunity early in the year, other than the ten-minute intake conference, to show the parents the details of her language arts program and practices, “to actually take the parents through what we do, because a lot of them are relying on how they were taught, and that is different” (Teacher Interview, June 2002). In general she was somewhat satisfied with communication she had with the parents.

In terms of the role of the parents in supporting their children to read and write, she believed that parents should listen to their children read, they should read to their children, and they should play word games with them. To support their children in writing, they should write down stories their children tell them and have the children illustrate the stories, they should teach their children to write their name with upper and lower case letters, and they should retell familiar stories to the children. To support the parents as they work with their children, Ms D. would have preferred to be able to “show the parents how to read with their
child or how to work with them so the experience is successful and emotionally positive” (General Teacher Questionnaire, May, 2002). She believed that her program was different than language arts instruction used to be, and that it was helpful for the parents to see what their children were doing in the classroom. She also mentioned she would like to build trust so the parents would share the frustrations they had so that she could help them. She believed she was not really able to provide this support, mainly because many of the parents did not attend conferences and they did not come to the classroom to see what was happening during the day. She was somewhat satisfied with the support she received from the families. She said “I am finding that parents here are really focusing on survival. They have to look after the basic needs of their family, so they really do not want school to be a hassle for them … they do the basics that they need to do, but they don’t really want to be hassled about school. They do not want a lot of demands on them. And I find if things are going awry with them in [their] personal lives then they really tend to withdraw from the school. So you don’t see them. You do not hear from them. You don’t have any interaction” (Teacher Interview, June 2002).

Sarah was in Ms D.’s grade one class. Her mother is NS. Both Ms D. and NS indicated that they communicated with each other monthly, on average, about Sarah’s progress. In terms of the content of the communication between teacher and parent, NS indicated that she received the information that Ms D. mentioned was important to give the parents: “she tells me that it is very important to have reading in the home, not just at school. When they began Reading Rainbow, the teacher explained at the conferences how to read to them properly and assist in helping them sound out the words using the pictures as well. She tried to paint a very clear vision of how to help your child read well” (Parent Questionnaire,
Ms D. also provided the parents with some information about struggles Sarah was having initially in her classroom. The information the parents gave Ms D. about Sarah’s work at home was very specific. For example, they worked with flash cards, they practiced printing with the same prompts used in the classroom, they jotted notes for her to read in the morning, and they read books each night. Ms D. said that NS also would provide suggestions to her regarding how to best work with Sarah. The information NS indicated that she communicated to the teacher was mainly about a concern she had with Sarah’s right and left hand switching. NS also believed it was important to let Ms D. know how much they read and wrote, what they were reading and writing, how they encouraged the reading and writing, and how interested Sarah was in reading and writing. She has had the opportunity to share this information, and she was very satisfied with the communication she had with the teacher. Ms D. was also very satisfied with the communication she had with the family, but interpreted the family was likely only somewhat satisfied with the communication they had with her. She said that NS would likely have wanted more formal opportunities to communicate with the school.

In terms of the mutual support NS and Ms D. perceived receiving from each other in helping Sarah’s reading and writing, both were very satisfied. Ms D. described the activities the family did: “Even though mom works and dad works away for stretches, mom would take time to sit with Sarah and work on specific areas that either she perceived needed attention or that I had suggested. They take her places and that is reflected in her journal writing. They write notes in her log book which became a way of communicating between Sarah and dad when he’d have to leave before she got up” (Specific Teacher Questionnaire, May 2002). NS described the work they did at home in much the same way, commenting several times about
acting on the suggestions of the teacher. Ms D. interpreted that Sarah’s parents were likely only somewhat satisfied with the support they received, indicating they would probably have wanted more support if she could provide it. When NS was anticipating the satisfaction Ms D. had with them, and the home literacy practices, she perceived that Ms D. was likely very satisfied with what they were doing at home: “The teacher made it well known that she was aware of how much time is spent learning in the home. Once again, she mentioned that the work of my daughter has reflected to show how much time and effort spent on the part of the parents [helps] to overcome any problems she may have faced throughout the year” (Parent Questionnaire, May 2002).

NS indicated she was very satisfied with the literacy instruction Ms D. provided for Sarah.

The dyad of Ms D. and NS was very successful. There was some misunderstanding on the part of Ms D. about the amount of communication; Ms D. assumed the family would appreciate more opportunities to discuss achievement, but there was no indication of dissatisfaction on the part of the parents. An understanding of the information exchanged between parent and teacher was clear. The support each sensed from one another was high and the satisfaction levels reported were all ‘very satisfied’.

This dyad provides an excellent example of the differences in beliefs Baker, Scher and Mackler (1997) describe regarding the activities parents report doing at home to support their child’s reading and writing development. Ms D. described many enjoyable activities this family took part in regularly. When Sarah’s dad left to go to work he would leave a note on the table for Sarah to read when she woke up. They included Sarah in many different experiences on the weekends. Ms D. described her as “engaged in her world” (Teacher
Interview, June 2002). When Sarah’s mother was describing the tasks they do at home to help Sarah she described the activities from the standpoint of work. NS said “...the teacher explained at the conferences how to read them properly and assist in helping them sound out the words using the pictures as well” (Parent Questionnaire, June 2002). When asked what they do at home to support Sarah with writing she responded, “My daughter had trouble writing letters backward... she spent much time trying to correct this problem at school and practiced her alphabet at home before she would go to bed on the weekends. Through the week she would practice two or three times by writing a letter to a family member” (Parent Questionnaire, June 2002). While Ms D. listed the many real life experiences Sarah had and how it helped her writing, the parents listed the tasks they were doing at home. The practice-like activities like what NS reported are helpful for the children, but there is room for further research on communicating with parents about other enjoyable activities that help the children.

Dyad six: Ms D. & Jane’s family (low achievement, minimal involvement). Jane was in Ms D.’s grade one classroom. Her mother is JK. Ms D. and JK both indicated they see each other face to face at conference time, but JK also indicated they talk at the school when she is picking up Jane, or on the phone, when she or Ms D. calls to discuss a concern. They both mentioned jotting notes in log books. JK said she sensed she was welcome in Ms D.’s class anytime. In terms of the information shared from the teacher to the parents, Ms D. had communicated the standard information she gives to parents as well as her concerns about a tracking problem Jane was having. She also had shared the concerns she had with Jane’s achievement. For example, Jane was relying on sight vocabulary rather than sounding out words phonetically. JK said that Ms D. had told her what Jane was learning, what Jane had
accomplished, and what Jane’s home study needs were. JK told Ms D. that Jane liked to read and she did her homework as soon as she got home. Also, Jane liked to write stories using the computer. While Ms D. said that she usually had to ask about the progress on her tracking problems, JK listed this as information she believed was important to share with the teacher. She also believed it was important to share information about letters Jane was mixing up. Ms D. indicated she was somewhat unsatisfied with the communication she had with JK and said “[JK] tells us things on a need to know basis. She is friendly but not involved” (Teacher Questionnaire, May 2002). On the other hand JK indicated she was very satisfied with the communication she had with Ms D.: “Ms D. is very easy to communicate with. I feel like my concerns are of concern to her also. She keeps me informed as to how she is doing and things I can do to help her at home” (Parent Questionnaire, May 2002). She also anticipated that Ms D. was equally satisfied with her communication.

There was some misunderstanding in terms of the support each perceived the other was offering in helping Jane with reading and writing. Ms D. indicated that the family, with older siblings, would be in the background while Jane was doing her homework, but not working directly with her. JK, on the other hand indicated that Jane read to her each night and that they studied and practiced spelling words. She also indicated that most evenings Jane would draw a picture and write something on it. They often displayed the pictures on the fridge and then saved them in a box. Although Ms D. indicated that she was only somewhat satisfied with the home literacy practices, there was indication in her comments that she was somewhat unsatisfied: “I sense that they’re happy to see her interest in reading and writing but they don’t extend her with experiences in the community and beyond” (Specific Teacher Questionnaire, May 2002). JK was very satisfied with the literacy
instruction in Ms D.’s class. She had seen improvements in Jane’s reading, and indicated she was catching on to the strategies Ms D. taught such as finding smaller words within bigger words and putting the sounds together.

The relationship between Ms D and JK was somewhat successful in spite of a high satisfaction reported within the dyad. There were misunderstandings between parent and teacher about the amount of communication and the information exchanged. There were also misunderstandings between parent and teacher about the type of work the family was doing at home. In both instances the parent was very satisfied, but Ms D. was somewhat unsatisfied.

Dyad seven: Ms F. & Mary’s family (low achievement, high involvement). Ms F. was teaching grade two at Allen Elementary School. She had taught at several other schools in the district in the past few years and had been at Allen School for three years.

In general, Ms F. communicated with parents daily through log books, but also saw parents in the hallway for casual visits, made phone calls if there were any concerns, sent newsletters home every two months, and met with parents at conferences. She reported that the most helpful format for talking with parents was casual visits in the hallway. Phone calls were often because of a concern, but parents also received at least one positive phone call each year as a part of an award program at the school. Ms F. said that one year she did try to give each parent a positive phone call once during the year, but she found that it was difficult to keep it up. At the interviews, Ms F. tried to give the parents information about their child’s writing by showing an example of the writing, pointing out the strategies they were using, and the goals she had for the child to improve the writing. For reading she showed the parents the reading level on the Alberta Diagnostic Reading Assessment (Alberta Education,
1986). She let the parents know that "this is a tool we have in Alberta" and then showed the passages the child could read with ease. She also talked about home reading books. In general she was somewhat satisfied with the communication she had with parents.

In terms of the support Ms F. preferred to receive from parents she reported that she believes the parents are the first teacher when it comes to developing a love of reading, so it is something that needs to be modeled at home. She believes it should be an example of enjoyment rather than a chore. To help the children with writing, she believes parents should provide opportunities for practice, and they should also provide suggestions for writing for their children. She believes she offered support to parents by providing home reading books as well as a weekly homework sheet. She suggested that at the grade two level, the homework time should be no more than about ten to twenty minutes a night. She also often responded to questions about the homework in the log books. In general she was able to provide this support to families, but she did have concerns about the support which families offered to her. She did not want her specific comments recorded, but she had concerns with parents’ inaction at home, and the responsibility they were placing on the teacher in spite of this inaction.

Mary was a grade two student in Ms F.’s class. Her mother is TS. TS said she talked with the teacher more often than conference time, through phone calls or when she dropped in at the school. TS was satisfied with that amount of communication: "...I know if I had to talk to her...I know I could. We also jot notes [back and forth in the log books] (Parent Interview, June 2002)". Ms F. indicated the same amount of communication, through phone calls, log books and casual visits. The information Ms F. had provided for TS about Mary’s reading and writing had been mainly through information sent home in the report cards and
work samples. They also had student-led conferences a few weeks earlier. The information TS reported getting about Mary’s reading and writing was mainly that there were some concerns about understanding what she was reading. Ms F. was somewhat satisfied with the communication she had with TS, and she did allude to her understanding that the family was doing the best it could: “I know it could be better, but I know [there are limits]” (Teacher Interview, June 2002). Ms F. interpreted that TS was likely somewhat satisfied with the level of communication she had with Ms F. as she had not contacted the school with any concerns.

When asked about the support TS perceived Ms F. offering her, she responded mainly with her thoughts about Ms F. as a person and Ms F.’s appreciation of her as a parent. She appreciated some comments Ms F. had made to her about her children the year before: “… I was [supervising] right next door to Ms. F’s room, and she had known J (her older child). So she made a point one day to come up to me in the hallway and tell me about J. ‘I just found out you’re J’s mom and she is such a wonderful person and you know how many times people just think things to themselves and they never pass the information on to the person, and [I just thought I would let you know]’” (Parent Interview, June 2002). The lack of judgment she sensed from Ms F. was important to this parent and she mentioned it here, several months after the comment was made. TS was satisfied with the work that came home, and did not find the amount of work difficult, but found it hard to motivate Mary to get the work done, and done correctly. Ms F. and TS both indicated that the family read the home reading books with Mary, practiced spelling words and sight words and did the weekly homework sheet. Neither Ms F. or TS reported any specific work they did at home to support writing. Ms F. reported being somewhat satisfied with the work that happened in the home and believed the family was likely somewhat satisfied with the support she gave to them.
The dyad of Ms F. and TS was somewhat successful. There were discrepancies in the information communicated between home and school, and some misunderstanding about the best home literacy practices. Ms F. mentioned the "limits" of the family and credited them with doing the best they could. I assume she meant the family had limited time and resources to provide more support to Mary at home.

These last two dyads provide an excellent example of a trend Lareau (1989) noted: lower SES parents trust the teacher to teach the children effectively and they do not believe they have a role in the education of the child other than having the child physically ready for school. Both Mary’s mom and Jane’s mom indicated they were very pleased with what was happening at school. They indicated their daughters had some struggles, but they did not give any indication of worry or concern. Rather, I sensed they believed the instruction the teacher was providing was adequate to deal with the problems. They both spoke highly of the teachers and how they were helping the girls with these difficulties. Both Ms D. and Ms F. indicated they would like the parents to be more active in working with their daughters at home, but neither parent mentioned they believed they could do more to help the child.

Summary

Success in the relationship between parent and teacher was evidenced by reports of clear communication between parents and teachers, similar perceptions of mutual support between parents and teachers, and reports of high levels of satisfaction within the relationship. When looking for factors contributing to the success of a relationship between parents and teachers for these seven dyads, I noted that achievement of the children seemed to play more of a role than the SES of the family (see Table 6). Of the three high achieving
families, two were very successful, and one was somewhat successful. Of the four lower achieving dyads, one was very successful, two were somewhat successful, and one was somewhat unsuccessful. I regrouped the dyads according to SES. Of the four high SES dyads, two were very successful, one was somewhat successful and one was somewhat unsuccessful. Of the three lower SES dyads one was very successful and two were somewhat successful.

Results Between Dyads

In order to examine how the perceived relationship between parent and teacher corresponded to the literacy achievement of the child and SES level of the family, I conducted some analysis of responses between the participants. My three specific research questions addressed three aspects of the relationship between parents and teachers, focusing on how these aspects corresponded to the achievement level of the children and the SES level of the family. The intent was to determine if either or both of these conditions showed any correspondence to relationship between parent and teacher for these seven dyads.

Recall that each participant was asked the same set of questions for purposes of comparison. I grouped the responses for each question first by achievement level of the child, the four dyads of high achieving children in one group and the three dyads of low achieving children in another group. After comparing the responses of these two groups, I then regrouped the dyads by SES of the family and did the same comparisons. Comparisons were done to answer the specific research questions outlined on page 48. Because of the small number of cases in this study, it is impossible to indicate significance in a statistically reliable sense, but there are some interesting comments to be made.
Communication

The first of my specific research questions had two parts and asked about communication: How do the frequency, manner and content of the communication between parents and teachers regarding the reading and writing acquisition of the child correspond to the literacy achievement of the child? The second part of this first question asked how these same aspects of communication correspond to the SES level of the family: How do the frequency, manner and content of the communication between parents and teachers regarding the reading and writing acquisition of the child correspond to the SES level of the family?

High and low achievement. To clearly characterize the communication between parents and teachers, I compared the frequency of communication, the manner or the setting for communication, and finally the content of the communication (see Table 7).

The first aspect of communication I compared was the frequency of communication with the achievement level. Research indicates that the more frequently a parent and teacher interact, the better it is for the child (Epstein, 1987). An interesting observation of these responses was that three of the four teachers (five of the seven dyads) reported they communicated daily with parents, primarily through log books. However only one parent, who was also a teacher in the same school as her child, indicated she communicated daily. All of the other parents in the study, regardless of the child's achievement level, indicated they communicated either monthly or at conference time only. Teachers believed they were communicating with the parents daily, but the parents did not perceive the log book notices as communication. Epstein (1987) reported the same trend; 95% of teachers in her study reported they communicated frequently with parents while one third of the parents had not
Table 7
Frequency, Manner and Content of Communication Reported by Teachers and Parents Across High and Low Achieving and High and Low Socioeconomic Status (SES) Dyads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency, as reported by:</th>
<th>Achievement (N=3)</th>
<th>SES (N=3)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Conference time only</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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Manner

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<th></th>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Content of information from Teacher to Parent

| Suggestions               | 2        | 1       | 2        | 2       | 3        | -       | 1        | 3       |
| Progress or concerns      | 3        | 2       | 4        | 2       | 4        | 3       | 3        | 1       |
| Motivation/affect         | 1        | 1       | -        | -       | 1        | 1       | -        | -       |
| Introduction to language programs | 3 | 1 | 4 | - | 4 | - | 3 | 1 |
| Teacher’s approach to language instruction | 2 | 1 | 3 | - | 2 | - | 3 | 1 |

Content of information from Parent to Teacher
(as reported by parents and teachers)

| Work done at home         | 3        | 1       | 2        | -       | 3        | -       | 2        | 1       |
| Materials available at home | 1      | 1       | -        | -       | 1        | -       | -        | 1       |
| Parent strategies at home | 1        | 1       | -        | -       | -        | -       | 1        | 1       |
| Progress or concerns      | 3        | 2       | 2        | 2       | 4        | 3       | 1        | 1       |
| Child’s motivation/attitude | 2      | 2       | 2        | -       | 3        | 1       | 1        | 1       |
| Parent satisfaction comments | -     | -       | 1        | -       | -        | -       | 1        | -       |
| Suggestions               | 1        | -       | -        | -       | -        | -       | 1        | -       |
| Other factors             | -        | -       | 1        | 1       | 1        | -       | -        | 1       |
attended a parent teacher conference and two thirds of the parents had never received a phone call from the teacher.

Secondly, I compared the manner of communication. Both high achieving and low achieving groups of dyads reported communicating with each other through all the different options listed on the questionnaires: casual visits, log books, phone calls, newsletters and parent-teacher conferences. The most common option, listed by all teachers in the study, was log books. Parent - teacher conferences were the second most common manner of communication for teachers of both high and low achieving students. When looking at parent responses, casual visits and log books were the most common form of interaction for the high achieving dyads. The low achieving dyads also reported phone calls equally as often.

When looking more closely at these responses, I noted that the daily communication listed by teachers primarily happened through log books, and was mainly comprised of notices about upcoming activities or notes coming home. It was not reported as “communication with the teacher” by parents as often as the teachers reported it. Also, one teacher reported communicating through weekly newsletters home, and this was not reported by the parent in the dyad as communication. When I divided the manner of communication into two-way communication involving both parent and teacher interacting at the same time (casual visits, phone calls, and conferences), and one-way communication (log books and newsletters), parents reported the two-way formats more frequently than the one-way formats in both high and low achieving dyads, while teachers reported one-way communication equally or more often than the two-way formats. The teachers in these seven dyads clearly perceived that communication was happening through notices and log books while the parents did so less often. Perhaps, because the information going home in log books is
general information about upcoming events or homework assignments, the parents did not see this as information particular to their child and did not consider it communication with the teacher. The parents in this study reported face to face interactions with the teacher as communication, leading me to believe this is what they perceive communication with the teacher entails.

Lastly, I compared the content of communication between parents and teachers of high and low achieving students. When comparing the information that was passed from teachers to parents in these two groups of dyads, I created the following categories of responses, as described in the instrument coding section (p. 77): suggestions, progress or concerns, motivation or affect, introduction of language programs, or teacher’s approach to language instruction. These parents and teachers in the high achieving dyads listed all five of the topics. The teachers in the low achieving dyads did not report discussing motivation or affect of the child. The parents in the low achieving dyads did not report discussing motivation or affect, an introduction of the language arts program, and the teacher’s approach to language instruction. A discrepancy arose in the reports of discussing the language programs in the classroom. All teachers mentioned that they introduced the language programs to the parents. One of the three high achieving parents reported receiving the information and none of the four low achieving parents reported receiving the information. Two of the teachers made comments in the interviews about the importance of giving parents this information. For example Ms D. said, “...we need to get these parents in [to the school]...to actually take the parents through what we do, because a lot of them are relying on how they were taught, and that is different” (Teacher interview, June 2002). For these
seven dyads, it does not appear that the information was received or remembered for either
the high or low achieving groups.

Examination of the information passed from parents to the teachers included the
following categories of responses: work done at home, materials at home, parent strategies
at home, progress or concerns, child's motivation or affect, comments explaining
satisfaction, suggestions and other factors. The most common topic for all groups was the
progress of the child. Both high and low achieving dyads also reported discussing the work
parents did at home with the child, and the attitude of the children toward reading and
writing. The dyads of higher achieving students reported talking about the materials they had
in the home for their children as well as offering suggestions to the teacher in working with
their child. The dyads of lower achieving students did not report discussing these topics, but
they did report discussing the satisfaction they had with the teacher as well as some of the
other factors contributing to the child’s difficulties. For example, one parent discussed a
tracking problem her child was having, and the progress the child was making on the
exercises designed to help the child. For both high and low achieving dyads the reports by
parents and teachers were similar. The only noteworthy discrepancy is that three teachers of
higher achieving students and two teachers of lower achieving students reported hearing
about the work the parents did at home with the child while only one parent of a high
achieving student reported that this topic was discussed.

High and low SES. In order to answer the second part of this research question, I
regrouped the dyads by SES. There were three high SES dyads and four low SES dyads. The
same comparisons as above were conducted (see Table 7).
In terms of the frequency of communication, all of the teachers in the high SES dyads reported communicating daily with the parents while one of the low SES teachers reported daily communication, one teacher reported communicating monthly, and one reported communicating at conference time only. Only one high SES parent reported daily communication, and the other two parents who responded indicated communicating only at conference time. The low SES parents reported communication monthly (two responses) and at conference time only (one response).

Regarding the manner of communication, both teachers in the four high SES dyads reported using log books, which may explain the four teacher reports of daily communication, described above. Both of the teachers in low SES dyads reported using log books, but only one reported daily communication. indicating the log books may not be perceived as daily communication by Ms D. Again, for interest, I compared the number of reported two-way contacts with one-way contacts. The teachers in high SES dyads reported more instances of one-way communication but the parents reported more two-way communication. The parents and teachers in the low SES dyads were more evenly matched, and both reported more two-way communication than one-way communication.

The final comparison particular to communication is the content of what was discussed between members of the dyads. The reports by the teachers of the information passed from teachers to parents were almost identical in all the individual dyads, regardless of the SES. The only additional topic was the one high SES parent who talked about her child’s motivation in reading and writing. The high SES parents reported hearing about progress or concerns most frequently. Interestingly, while all three low SES parents reported hearing suggestions for work they could do at home, only one teacher reported giving the
information. For the information passed from parents to the teachers there were more discrepancies between high and low SES dyads. In the higher SES dyads, the teachers reported hearing of the work the parents did at home to help the child in reading and writing, the progress of the child, the attitude of the child, and one report of other factors contributing to reading and writing achievement. The parents reported only giving teachers information about progress or concerns and one report of discussing motivation of the child. In the lower SES dyads, there were no topics reported more than once by parents or teachers, other than work done at home, which was reported twice by teachers. Although the variation in topics was greater for lower SES families, the topics were reported as being discussed less often.

**Summary.** The small number of cases prevents any substantial analysis, but there are some comments to be made. The frequency and manner of communication showed the greatest diversity when I grouped the dyads by SES. The teachers in high SES dyads reported communicating daily, mainly through log books, with parents. The parents, with the exception of one high SES parent who was also a teacher in her son’s school, reported communicating at conference time only. In low SES dyads one teacher reported that she communicated with parents daily, one reported that she communicated monthly and one reported that she communicated at conference time only. The low SES parents reported only communicating monthly, or at conference time. The frequency of communication is tied most closely with the SES of the family for these seven dyads. Similar to the findings of Lareau (1989), the high SES families had more frequent contact.

It would be negligent to avoid looking at the greatest discrepancy this data presents. Although my research questions ask if achievement or SES show any patterns corresponding to the frequency of communication, the greatest discrepancies are between the parents and
teachers. Teachers perceived when they sent daily log books and notices or newsletters home that they were communicating frequently with parents. Parents did not report this as communication and may not interpret it as communication. Epstein (1987) also reported “Although most teachers (over 95%) reported that they communicate with the parents of their students, most parents are not involved in deep, detailed, or frequent communications with teachers about their child’s program or progress” (p.124).

To answer my research question regarding content of communication, there were no notable differences when the dyads were grouped by achievement either in content from teacher to parent or parent to teacher. There was one interesting difference when the dyads were regrouped by SES. The teachers in high SES dyads reported giving suggestions to the parents, but the parents did not report hearing them. Conversely, only one teacher in a low SES dyad gave suggestions to the parents while all three reported hearing the suggestions. Perhaps this reflects the differences in the balance of power Lareau (1989) reported among higher and lower SES parents; the higher SES parents saw themselves as an equal with the teacher while the lower SES parents saw the teacher as the leader in their child’s education.

**Mutual Support**

The second specific research question, again in two parts, concerned perceptions of mutual support: How does the support each party perceives the other offering in achieving the literacy goals for the child correspond to the achievement of the child? And how does the support each party perceives the other offering in achieving the literacy goals for the child correspond to the SES level of the family?

Determining how parents and teachers characterized mutual support was done by looking at the open ended questions that asked about the roles of both parents and teachers in
supporting each other. I looked first at the role of the parents from the perspective of the teachers and the parents; ten categories were created: *reading or writing with child,* *providing exposure to print,* *providing life experiences,* *modeling reading and writing,* *providing educational toys,* *encouraging reading and writing,* *providing a tutor,* *assisting with homework,* *enriching the child's vocabulary* and *storytelling activities.* I then looked at the role of the teachers from the perspective of the teachers and the parents; eight categories were created: *providing materials,* *communicating progress,* *offering suggestions,* *providing understanding and encouragement,* *providing homework and home reading,* *providing quality instruction,* *communicating strategies of reading and writing development* and *recommending child for special programs.* Discrepancies in what parents and teachers reported being offered to one another were of interest, as they would indicate a misunderstanding in the support being offered.

*High and low achievement.* I grouped the dyads into high and low achieving groups and compared the information teachers gave about what they interpreted the parents were doing to support the child at home with what the parents reported they were doing (see Table 8). All teachers, regardless of achievement level of the child, reported that the parents were reading or writing with their children at home. All parents, with the exception of one parent of a low achieving child reported the same thing. Two reports from teachers and parents in the dyads of high achieving students said that the parents gave the children a variety of life experiences. Noteworthy discrepancies in understanding the support of the parents for the group of high achieving dyads were in the categories of modeling reading and writing, and assisting with homework. Two parents reported modeling reading or writing to their children and three parents reported that they assisted with homework. However, only one teacher
Table 8  
Mutual Support Reported by Teachers and Parents Across High and Low Achieving and High and Low Socioeconomic Status (SES) Dyads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High (N=3) teachers / parents</th>
<th>Low (N=4) teachers / parents</th>
<th>High (N=4) teachers / parents</th>
<th>Low (N=3) teachers / parents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parental Support</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Read and write with child</td>
<td>3 3</td>
<td>4 3</td>
<td>3 3</td>
<td>3 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide exposure to print</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>- 1</td>
<td>- 1</td>
<td>1 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide life experiences</td>
<td>2 2</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>1 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model reading and writing</td>
<td>- 2</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>- 2</td>
<td>- -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide educational toys</td>
<td>- 1</td>
<td>2 -</td>
<td>- 1</td>
<td>2 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage reading and writing</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>- 1</td>
<td>1 1</td>
<td>1 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide a tutor</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>1 1</td>
<td>1 1</td>
<td>- -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist with homework</td>
<td>1 3</td>
<td>3 3</td>
<td>2 3</td>
<td>2 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enrich the child’s vocabulary</td>
<td>1 -</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>1 -</td>
<td>- -</td>
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<tr>
<td>Storytelling Activities</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>1 -</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>1 -</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Support</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide materials</td>
<td>2 1</td>
<td>3 3</td>
<td>2 2</td>
<td>3 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication progress</td>
<td>1 -</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>2 1</td>
<td>- -</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offer suggestions</td>
<td>2 -</td>
<td>4 3</td>
<td>3 1</td>
<td>3 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide understanding and</td>
<td>1 1</td>
<td>- -</td>
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<td>1 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>encouragement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide homework and</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>1 1</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>1 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>home reading</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide quality instruction</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>- -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate strategies of</td>
<td>1 -</td>
<td>1 -</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>2 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reading and writing assistance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommend child for</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>1 -</td>
<td>1 -</td>
<td>- -</td>
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<tr>
<td>special programs</td>
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Note. A dash (-) indicates no responses in the category.
reported one instance of assisting with homework. Comparing the responses with the four lower achieving dyads, I discovered that there was more agreement between parents and teachers. The only discrepancy of note was in providing educational toys for the child. Two teachers, but no parents, reported this support.

Secondly, I looked at the perceptions of teacher support, that is what the teachers reported they were doing to support the parents at home and what the parents reported the teachers were doing to support them. The range of activities reported was greater for teachers than for parents in both groups. Teachers in both achievement groups reported providing materials for the child to use at home, communicating progress, offering suggestions, providing homework, and communicating strategies of assisting the children at home. One teacher in the high achieving dyads reported offering understanding and encouragement, and one teacher in low achieving dyads reported recommending the child for special programs. There was more diversity in the types of activities reported as being supportive by the parents. Parents of high achieving students reported getting materials from the school, receiving understanding and support, and receiving homework. Parents of low achieving students also reported receiving information about the child’s progress and suggestions for helping the child. They did not report any instances of receiving understanding and support. Although there were more activities reported by the teachers than the parents, the only discrepancy of note was teachers reporting that they offered suggestions to parents. Two teacher reports but no parent reports were given in the high achieving dyads.

*High and low SES.* I regrouped the dyads, this time into high SES dyads and low SES dyads and did the same comparisons as above. The teacher reports of their perceptions of the work the parents were doing at home in the high SES dyads indicated that three teachers
observed that the parents read or wrote with their child at home and two teachers observed that the parents did homework with the child. One teacher reported each of the following: provided life experiences, encouraged reading and writing, provided a tutor for the child and enriched the child's vocabulary. The responses of the teachers in the lower SES dyads were similar in that all teachers reported the parents read or wrote with their child. With the exception of providing a tutor and enriching the child's vocabulary, all of the above responses were reported for these three lower SES dyads. In addition, these teachers said parents provided exposure to print, educational toys and storytelling activities at home.

Comparing the information the parents reported concerning their support of their children at home provides an interesting contrast to the reports above. The parents in the high SES dyads reported supporting their children by reading and writing with them at home, giving them life experiences, providing educational toys in the home, providing a tutor for the child, helping with homework, exposing the child to print, encouraging reading and writing, and modeling reading and writing in the home. The parents in the lower SES dyads reported only reading and writing with the child, exposing the child to print, encouraging reading and writing, and doing homework with the child. The parents in this study support what Baker, Serpell and Sonnenschein, (1995) report: lower SES parents have a more task-oriented view of assisting their children at home. The teachers in these lower SES dyads did not limit their description of parental support to task-oriented activities, indicating that these families were engaging in more entertainment-oriented activities, and that they were just not aware of the helpfulness of these activities in literacy development (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). There is certainly an opportunity for clearer communication between home and school about what activities do support children.
The second comparison looks at the role of the teacher in supporting the parents. The teachers in high SES dyads reported providing materials, communicating progress or concern, offering suggestions for work at home, providing homework and home reading, and recommending the child for special programs. The parents reported similar activities, with the exception of recommending their child for a special program. Also, three teachers reported offering suggestions, but only one parent reported the teacher offering suggestions. The teachers in the lower SES dyads reported providing materials, offering suggestions, providing homework or home reading for the child, offering understanding or encouragement to the parents, and communicating strategies for working in the home. The parents reported the same activities with the exception of the teacher communicating strategies for them to use at home to assist their child with reading and writing. In both the lower SES dyads and the higher SES dyads, the match between what the teachers reported doing and what the parents reported the teachers doing was close.

Summary. When reviewing my research questions, I noted that achievement had limited correspondence to the supports offered by both parents and teachers. The most interesting differences were in the groupings by SES. High SES parents had a substantially broader list of activities they did in their homes to support the teacher than their lower SES counterparts. Baker, Serpell and Sonnenshein (1995) indicate that lower SES families have a more traditional interpretation of home activities that will cultivate literacy skills. Activities such as practicing the alphabet, doing homework, and reading books, activities that are more task-oriented rather than entertainment-oriented, will be reported more by lower SES families. For these seven dyads, a similar trend can be seen. Teachers of lower SES families did not restrict the types of activities parents were doing to support the literacy of the child,
but parents certainly did report a more limited range of activities and more task-like activities than their higher SES counterparts. The implication is that there is room for more accurate communication with parents about the home activities that support their child’s literacy development. Children who experience more entertainment-oriented literacy activities have an advantage upon entry to school (Baker, Scher & Mackler, 1997; Serpell, 1997). Perhaps if lower SES parents understood that literacy activities could be more entertainment-oriented and highly motivational for the children, this gap between higher and lower SES children would be narrowed.

Satisfaction

My third specific research question, again in two parts, concerned the level of satisfaction of parents and teachers, and was closely tied to the communication and mutual support within the dyads. How does the level of satisfaction reported by parents and teachers, concerning communication and the mutual support they receive from the other party, correspond to the achievement level of the child? The second part of the question asks how does the level of satisfaction reported by parents and teachers, concerning communication and the mutual support they receive from the other party, correspond to the SES of the family? All responses are based on a 4 point Likert scale (very satisfied to very unsatisfied).

The satisfaction levels for communication and mutual support are summarized in Table 9. It is important to acknowledge that, while the reported satisfaction level for these seven dyads is high, I did see evidence of some discontent in the comments made during my conversations with parents and teachers. Five of the seven teacher responses and all of the parents were ‘very satisfied’ or ‘somewhat satisfied’ with the communication. The response was the same for mutual support, with the exception of one additional ‘no response’ from a
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As reported by:</th>
<th>Achievement</th>
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<th>SES</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High (N=3)</td>
<td>Low (N=4)</td>
<td>High (N=4)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>teachers</td>
<td>teachers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>parents</td>
<td>parents</td>
<td>parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with communication</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat satisfied</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Somewhat unsatisfied</td>
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<tr>
<td>Very unsatisfied</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with mutual support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Somewhat satisfied</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Somewhat unsatisfied</td>
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<tr>
<td>Very unsatisfied</td>
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<tr>
<td>No response</td>
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parent\(^1\). However, I characterized only three of the seven dyads as *very successful* because of statements from either a parent or a teacher indicating dissatisfaction. It is difficult to make any conclusive remarks about satisfaction, but there are some interesting points to be made.

*High and low achievement.* When grouping the dyads by achievement, I noted that the teachers and parents in the high achieving dyads all indicated they were *very satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied* with the communication and the mutual support. There was more variation in the teacher responses in the lower achieving dyads. The parents in the lower achieving dyads responded similarly to their higher achieving counterparts and were also *very satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied*. The teachers in the lower achieving dyads indicated some dissatisfaction. For both communication and mutual support, one teacher reported she was *somewhat unsatisfied* and one indicated she was *very unsatisfied*. It is understandable that when a child is not achieving, the relationship between parent and teacher is vulnerable to discontent, but it was only reported by the teachers in this study. The dissatisfaction Ms D. had with Jane’s family was not reported by Jane’s mother, likely because she believed Jane was achieving well in her reading and writing. She was comparing Jane’s willingness to do her homework and her enjoyment of reading and writing activities with Jane’s older siblings while Ms D. was comparing her achievement to her classmates. JK was pleased with Ms D.’s program, she reported that she knew she could contact Ms D. if she had a concern, and she did not interpret that there was any need to be in closer communication with her. Ms J. reported she was *very unsatisfied* with both the communication and mutual support with Ann’s family. There was no parent information for this dyad, but Ms J. reported that she had

\(^1\) One ‘no response’ is from the dyad where the parent did not return the questionnaire. The second ‘no response’ is from a parent whose response did not reflect understanding of the question.
to assume that Ann’s parents were satisfied because she did not receive indication of any discontent, but she believed increased communication with Ann’s family would be of benefit to Ann.

*High and low SES.* When regrouping the dyads, this time by SES, the parents again indicated they were *very satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied* with the communication and the mutual support. The teachers’ indications of lower satisfaction levels did not fall along SES lines. One teacher in the high SES dyads indicated she was *very unsatisfied* with both communication and mutual support. One teacher in the low SES dyads indicated she was *somewhat unsatisfied* with the same.

*Summary.* The parents in this study indicated that they were satisfied with the communication and mutual support while the teachers indicated some dissatisfaction. There are a few explanations for the lower teacher satisfaction ratings that have been found in research. One explanation may be a reflection of a commonly held belief of teachers, also evident by the teachers in this study, that more communication with parents is better (Epstein, 1987). For example, Ms J. indicated in this study that she would like to have the opportunity to convey positive comments to Luke’s family about his progress. Ben’s mother, on the other hand, indicated that she believed it was important that Ben be independent and was careful to not be present at the school all the time. DH also indicated that she would contact the teacher if she had a concern. She was aware of Luke’s success in reading and writing, but did not believe it was important to hear it from the teacher. Teachers in this study also indicated that they wanted opportunity to clearly convey to parents information about their language arts programs about the best ways to support their children at home. Lareau (1989) indicates that some parents, particularly those living at a lower SES level, do not
believe it is important to understand what is happening at the school. There is an element of trust, and they do not believe it is necessary to be informed about their child's schooling as they trust that the teachers are competent. The also believe they do not have a role in the education of the children other than meeting their physical needs and ensuring they behave properly at school. Ms D. mentioned this in her interview as well: “...I am finding parents here are really focusing on survival. They have got to look after the basic needs of their family, so they really do not want school to be a hassle for them” (Ms. D., Teacher Interview, June 2002). Perhaps this discrepancy in satisfaction scores can be interpreted with these findings in mind.

For these seven dyads, dissatisfaction with communication or support was only reported by the teachers, and corresponded marginally more to achievement than to SES. Although I did not find any research explaining lower satisfaction rates among parents of lower achieving students, Lott (2001) reviewed the literature looking at teacher perceptions of lower SES families. Widespread negative beliefs about lower SES parents were found throughout the public education system in a variety of studies. In comparison to their higher SES counterparts, lower SES parents were assumed to be uninterested in the schooling of their children, were described negatively, received negative responses, faced degrading behaviors, and had their views discounted by school personnel.

**Parental Involvement**

In addition to SES of the family and achievement level of the child, there was a third factor included in the selection of participants for this study that must not be overlooked. Although the factor of parental involvement, as determined by the teachers, was included only to control for the likelihood that teachers would nominate parents with whom they
already had a successful relationship, this factor did show some clear patterns with the success of the relationship.

Of the four dyads with highly involved families, there were no unsuccessful relationships (see Table 6). Three of the four were very successful and one was somewhat successful. Of the three dyads with minimally involved parents, there were no very successful relationships. Two dyads were somewhat successful and one was somewhat unsuccessful. Parental involvement appears to be the critical factor in the success of the relationship between parent and teacher for these seven dyads.

Parental involvement in the school has been thoroughly researched as a factor in the success of children in school, and the correspondence between a child’s success and the involvement of the parent is high (Epstein, 1987; McAfee, 1987). As mentioned in the literature review, lower SES parents are often not able to be physically present at the school, they frequently are not comfortable being at the school, and they do not believe it is their role to be at the school (Lareau, 1989). My observation in this study, is that research into factors contributing to a child’s success in school continues to be done from the point of view of the teacher, and research into parental involvement is no exception. Definitions of parental involvement traditionally have the parents doing school-related tasks at home or volunteering at the school. The responses of the teachers in this study, when asked to describe a highly involved parent, were no exception. In their list of tasks that highly involved parents do to support their children, Ms O., Ms J., Ms F. and Ms D. all included helping the child complete assignments from school such as home reading or homework, and reading the log book that goes back and forth each day. Ms D. and Ms O. indicated that providing the child with
interesting experiences outside of school is an important role of parents. This is a less school-like activity, but one certainly more accessible for higher SES families.

The intent of this study was not to look at the connection between a successful relationship and the level of parental involvement, but there is certainly room for further research on this topic. If parental involvement is important in the achievement of a child in school, and if a successful relationship between parent and teacher corresponds to higher parental involvement, then improving relationships between parent and teacher is a worthwhile goal. If the parents who help the children with the school-related tasks at home or who come to the school to volunteer are met with approval from the teacher, the likelihood that a helpful relationship between parent and teacher will be formed is high. Likewise, if the parent who is not able to assist with the school-related tasks at home or who is not able to volunteer at school is met with disapproval from the teacher, the relationship between the parent and teacher is vulnerable to discontent. This puts lower income families at risk once again. Lott (2001) acknowledges that there is very little research looking at the experiences of lower income families when interacting with public school personnel but what has been done is startling. The experiences lower SES parents have with school personnel are overwhelmingly negative.

The parents in these seven dyads who responded all reported high levels of satisfaction, but the teachers indicated dissatisfaction with parents who were uninvolved in the schooling of their children, perhaps jeopardizing the success of the relationship.
Summary

The frequency and manner of communication showed greater diversity when I grouped the dyads by SES than by achievement, but the most notable differences were found when comparing the teacher reports to the parent reports. Teachers believed they were communicating with parents when they were sending log books and newsletters home but parents did not interpret this as a form of communication. When comparing the content of the communication, the most notable pattern emerged when I grouped the dyads by SES. Teachers in high SES dyads reported giving suggestions to parents, but parents did not report hearing them. Conversely, only one teacher in a low SES dyad reported giving the parents suggestions, while all three lower SES parents reported hearing suggestions.

The most interesting patterns of mutual support between parent and teacher emerged when I grouped the dyads by SES. Higher SES parents had a broader list of home activities that support literacy development than lower SES parents reported. Also, the teachers did not limit the type of activities they reported parents doing to support their children, but parents in the lower SES dyads reported more task-oriented activities than entertainment-oriented activities.

For these seven dyads satisfaction corresponded marginally more to the achievement of the child than to the SES of the family, and dissatisfaction was reported only by the teachers.

Parental involvement emerged as an important factor in the success of the relationship between parent and teacher. Dyads who were highly involved in the schooling of the children, according to teachers' nominations, had more successful relationships with the teacher. There were no unsuccessful relationships among the four dyads with highly involved
parents. Of the three dyads with minimally involved parents, there were no very successful relationships.
Children in lower SES settings are at greater risk for lower achievement in schooling. The implications of lower achievement in school, particularly lower literacy achievement, are life-long, affecting later employment, health and economic status (Keating & Hertzman, 1999). As explained in my literature review (p.18), there are explanations for why these children raised in lower income families are at a higher risk for difficulties in reading and writing. The language used in lower SES homes is often different than the language traditionally used in schools putting these children at risk when they get to school (Bourdieu, 1977; Wells, 1986). Having an educated and literate parent has been associated with higher literacy levels for the children; parental literacy levels are lower in lower SES homes (Keating & Hertzman, 1999). The literacy activities in the homes of lower SES children are different than the literacy activities in higher SES homes. Activities tend to be more task-oriented rather than entertainment oriented and tend to be less like the activities the children will encounter when they go to school (Baker, Serpell, & Sonnenschein, 1995; Heath, 1983). The economic resources middle and higher SES homes have for preschool programs, higher quality and more stable child-care situations, and readily available books and toys in the home are often not options for lower SES families (Neuman, 1996). Parental involvement in school, in the traditional sense where parents are present at the school or working with their children at home on homework and extra practice, is typically not an option for parents in lower income jobs where shift work and inflexible schedules are common (Lareau, 1989).

In researching likely reasons for lower SES children being at risk for failure in reading and writing I also came across some false assumptions about this population that may
contribute to their failure (Lott, 2002). The first assumption is that lower SES families and communities do not support literacy or schooling. This assumption was found to be false by researchers in previous studies (Baker, Serpell & Sonnenschein, 1995; Edwards & Pleasants, 1998; Lott, 2001) and I certainly found no evidence to warrant this assumption for three lower SES families in my study. The second assumption often held by teachers that has been challenged by researchers is that lower SES parents are less involved in the literacy of their children. Lareau (1989) found the parents were at the school less often, but that they saw their role more as a supporter of the teacher from home, ensuring the children behaved, did their homework, and were at school. Again, this was evident in my study. All three lower income families were busy with jobs, but they believed it was their role to do what the teacher suggested at home and had this as a priority. The third assumption, and one that I was particularly interested in researching in this study, is that lower SES parents are less interested in having a successful relationship with their child’s teacher. Specifically, it is assumed by teachers that lower SES families do not communicate with the teacher, are not supportive of the teacher, and are not satisfied with the teacher. There was evidence of this assumption in the research (Lareau, 1989; Lott, 2002), but it was primarily evident to me during my own work as a classroom teacher in low SES communities. The intent of my study was to determine if this assumption was true and if the relationship a parent has with a teacher can be added to the list of factors that have been found to correspond to the achievement of the child or the SES of the family.

I conducted my study in three phases. The goal of the first phase was to select four teachers to participate. In order to ensure the children who were to be involved later had similar language arts experiences, I selected teachers who provided comparable language arts
programs. I selected two teachers employed in a higher SES community and two teachers employed in lower SES communities, in a small city in Western Canada. The goal of the second phase of my study was to select eight families to participate. Teachers nominated four students, each with a unique profile of parental involvement and achievement level. Of the sixteen students nominated, I selected eight who would continue on to Phase 3. One high achieving student with highly involved parents, one low achieving student with highly involved parents, one high achieving student with minimally involved parents, and one low achieving student with minimally involved parents were selected from the lower SES classrooms. The same profiles were selected from the higher SES classrooms. The goal of the final phase of my study was to answer my research questions. I sought to characterize each of the relationships between parent and teacher in terms of the communication within the dyad, the perceptions of mutual support within the dyad, and the level of satisfaction with the communication and support within the dyad. Using questionnaires and informal interviews with each of the participants, I characterized the success of the seven relationships between parent and teacher. In this phase I also grouped the dyads by achievement level of the students, and again by the SES level of the families to look for any patterns in the relationships that corresponded to these profiles. Although the attribute of parental involvement was included only to control for the likelihood that teachers would nominate only highly involved parents, I also noted some patterns when the dyads were grouped according to the involvement of the parents.
Major Findings: Organized by Research Question

How does the relationship between parent and teacher, in terms of the perceptions of communication, the perceived level of mutual support, and the level of satisfaction both parties report based on these perceptions, correspond to the literacy achievement of the child and to the SES of the family? My assumption, from both research and personal experience, was that SES would be the strongest predictor of a successful relationship, and these three components of a relationship would look different at high and low SES levels.

Success of Relationships

Of the seven dyads, three were very successful (see Table 6). Two of these dyads were high SES dyads and one was low SES. Two were dyads with high achieving students and one was a dyad with a low achieving student. All three of the very successful dyads had parents who were highly involved in their children's schooling. These three dyads provided examples of clear communication between parent and teacher; both members of the dyad reported hearing what the other reported saying. These three dyads reported that the support the other was providing for the child was helpful. All members in these three dyads reported high levels of satisfaction with both communication and mutual support.

Three of the remaining dyads were somewhat successful. One was a high SES dyad and two were low SES dyads. One was a dyad of a high achieving student and two were dyads of low achieving students. The parent in one of the somewhat successful dyads was described as highly involved, and two were described as minimally involved. When looking at the communication within these dyads, I observed that there were indications of misunderstanding and lower satisfaction levels reported by the teacher, generally because of infrequent communication. The support each party was offering in these dyads was
acknowledged by the other party, but there was indication of misunderstanding of the support being offered. The teachers in these dyads reported lower satisfaction rates with the support.

The final dyad was characterized as *somewhat unsuccessful*. This dyad was a high SES dyad with a low achieving student and a minimally involved parent. There was no information from the parent in this dyad, and infrequent communication was a concern for the teacher in this dyad. The teacher also reported a low level of satisfaction with the support being offered at home.

The success of each of the dyads, although an interpreted designation, did not show any correspondence to SES, and rather showed some correspondence to the achievement of the child and clear correspondence to the parental involvement described by the teachers. My concern is that the relationships are in jeopardy for those families that do not support the teacher in what is the traditional perception of parental involvement. Epstein (1987) outlines for four types of parental involvement: meeting the basic needs of the children, communicating with the teacher or school personnel, assisting at the school, and participating in learning activities at home. Dissatisfaction with the communication and the mutual support for these dyads was reported only by the teachers most commonly about the parents who were not involved in this traditional sense. Of the five dyads that were not rated *very successful*, none of the parents was present at the school to assist the teacher, but most provided me with evidence that they were supporting the teacher both in the activities at home and in their high satisfaction with the literacy instruction. My concern is that lower SES parents are less able to be involved in the traditional sense of parental involvement and that the dissatisfaction on the part of the teachers is jeopardizing these relationships. My
sample is small and limited with respect to generalizability, but it does appear that traditional parental involvement contributes to a successful relationship between teachers and parents.

The assumption that lower SES parents are not interested in forming a successful relationship with the classroom teacher was certainly not supported by the findings of this study. I saw telling examples of the priority that the families gave to requests from the teacher when scheduling interviews with the three lower SES parents. Although this study was not a requirement, their participation was at the request of the teacher. One parent came to my workplace for the interview, insisting that I was busy and it was not a problem for her to make this effort. The second parent had taken the time to type out all her responses to the questionnaire. The third parent welcomed me into her home, making arrangements for her older daughter to be available to care for the younger children during the interview. All three lower SES parents indicated high satisfaction with their children’s teacher.

**Communication**

To answer my specific research questions about communication, mutual support and satisfaction, I grouped the dyads first by achievement level of the students and then again by SES level of the families and looked for noteworthy patterns of correspondence. The small number of cases in my study prevented statistical analysis but several interesting patterns emerged.

Communication was reported more frequently by teachers in high SES dyads than their counterparts in lower SES dyads, although there were no notable differences in the reports of parents. The content of communication provided some interesting differences, particularly in the reports of what the parents heard from the teacher. The teachers in high SES dyads reported giving suggestions to the parents, but the parents did not report hearing
them. The teachers in lower SES dyads did not all report giving suggestions, but all three of the lower SES parents heard suggestions. The fact that higher SES parents did not report the suggestions indicates to me that they do not consider the teacher someone who prescribes activities for them to do at home, while the lower SES parents handled the suggestions by the teacher as directives and remembered these suggestions. This finding supports the research indicating that higher SES families consider themselves a peer or an equal with the teacher, while lower SES families consider themselves under the authority of the teacher (Lareau, 1989).

The strongest pattern of communication for these seven dyads did not correspond to achievement level or SES level, but rather to teacher reports and parent reports. Teachers reported daily communication with parents while parents reported less frequent communication, with the exception of one parent who worked in the same school as her son’s teacher. As reported by Epstein (1987), parents in this study indicated that communication with the teacher entailed face to face conversation or discussion with the teacher.

**Mutual Support**

Perceptions of mutual support offered by parents and teachers showed the greatest diversity when grouped by SES. High SES parents reported a broader list of activities that they did in their homes to support the teacher than did the lower SES parents. Teachers of lower SES families did not report any fewer activities parents were doing to support the literacy of the child, but parents certainly did report a more limited range of activities and more task-like activities than their higher SES counterparts. This finding indicates a different understanding of the purpose of the activities they do in the home to support the literacy
achievement. Lower SES parents perceived literacy learning as serious business, whereas literacy activities were more a form of entertainment for higher SES homes. This difference in purpose may lead to a difference in the type of activities children choose and, for lower SES children, the environment may be less intrinsically motivating. Baker, Serpell and Sonnenschein (1995) report this same misunderstanding among parents in lower SES communities.

Lower SES parents more frequently struggled in school themselves (Keating & Hertzman, 1999; Lott, 2001). Serpell (1997) indicates that the agenda of schooling matches more closely with the agendas of middle and upper SES parents. Lott (2001) found evidence that school personnel largely hold negative beliefs about lower SES parents. The likelihood that these parents will continue to believe they are unsuccessful when interacting with their child’s teacher is high. Baker, Serpell and Sonnenschein (1995) indicate that the activities in lower SES homes are not less literate, rather these parents perceive entertainment-oriented activities are less literate. The families in my study were no exception to this finding; lower SES parents reported doing less entertainment-oriented activities than the teachers reported these parents were doing. Perhaps if lower SES parents received the message that “they are doing the right thing” a small step toward them believing they are successful in supporting their child’s schooling can be taken. The impetus lies with the classroom teacher to communicate the message that the entertainment oriented-activities that lower SES families are doing regularly do support their children’s literacy development.
Satisfaction

Satisfaction, for these seven dyads, corresponded more to achievement than to SES, and was reported only by teachers. All parents reported being very satisfied, or somewhat satisfied with both mutual support and communication, while the teachers had some reports of being somewhat unsatisfied and very unsatisfied. The dissatisfaction corresponded slightly more to achievement than to SES, but again showed the clearest correspondence to teacher ratings of involvement of the parents.

As mentioned before, if teachers are less satisfied with parents who do not support their children in the traditional sense of parental involvement, where the parents are communicating frequently with the school and present at the school, lower SES parents are at risk of being unsuccessful in relating to the teachers. Neuman (1996) found that when she compared parent-child storybook reading interactions of parents who were proficient readers with parents who were not proficient readers, the interactions between the parent and child were different, but the gains the children made in receptive language and concepts about print were significant for both groups. Although parental involvement in the school is different than storybook reading, it is similar in that it is a factor that has been tied closely to student achievement, and it comes with a traditional perception of what it entails. Perhaps there is room for studies that look at the benefits of non-traditional parental involvement, particularly for children in lower SES communities. Perhaps the type of involvement does not matter and there are ways to include lower SES parents. Work needs to be one with teachers, helping them to recognize the non-traditional ways parents are supporting the children and the teachers. It would mean these parents have a better chance of meeting with satisfaction from the teacher.
Limitations and Further Directions for Research

My findings are limited to these seven dyads. Inherent in the methods of the study are some limitations to be noted. Characterizing a “relationship” is a difficult task, requiring many interactions with the individuals involved. The number of participants included in my study was kept small in order that the investigation was thorough enough to describe accurately the “relationship” between parent and teacher as successful or unsuccessful. Through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to discuss responses further, I believe I did gain a clear picture of the relationships for these seven families and teachers. I do, however, acknowledge that findings from such a small number of dyads cannot be generalized. Future research projects need to include a greater number of participants.

The participation of the seven families was controlled by the nominations by teachers. I understood the likelihood that teachers would nominate parents where the relationship was already at the point where they were comfortable contacting them and requesting their participation. To control for this, I asked teachers to nominate families with high parental involvement in the school and families with minimal parental involvement in their child’s literacy development. Even with this control in place, I understand that the high success rate of the families involved is influenced by this design feature. In future studies, teacher nomination should not be included in the design, and instead a larger number of participants should be included for initial participation. If necessary, a smaller number could be interviewed for clarification.

Because one dyad did refuse to participate, and the replacement withdrew, the picture I present is unbalanced. The profile that was not represented in this study was a high achieving, low SES, minimally involved dyad.
The instruments I used were open-ended. Thorough review of the responses led to categories of responses being developed for coding purposes. The low inter-rater reliability scores prior to discussion were a result of different interpretations of responses, and is a limitation of the study. These categories of responses created can now be used in further investigations. This also will control for the likelihood that participants did not include information in their response simply because they did not think about it at the time or had forgotten. Having a set of responses to choose from will likely provide more consistent ratings across parents and teachers for these questions.

Because the factor of parental involvement featured prominently in the results, this is certainly an area for future research. Investigating non-traditional activities that provide children with the same advantages of traditional parental involvement is necessary. Also, examining the perceptions both lower and higher SES parents have of their own involvement in the education of their children may shed some light on the type of involvement they choose. In my study, I asked teachers for their descriptions of a highly involved parent, but in future studies a list of characteristics should be provided to teachers prior to nomination to ensure these designations are comparable. Parents should also have the opportunity to describe what they believe is a highly involved parent.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study have important implications for the practice of teaching. Teachers in this study have indicated that their satisfaction with parents is closely tied with the involvement of the parents in the school. The success of the relationships was also tied to the involvement of the parents. Because lower SES parents may not have equal opportunity
to be involved in the school in the traditional sense, steps need to be taken to increase opportunities for this population. Baker, Serpell and Sonnenschein (1995) indicated that there are many literate activities happening in lower SES homes, but they are not perceived to be activities that support reading and writing development by these families. Validating what these families are already doing in their homes becomes important.

Parents in this study have shown that the communication from the teacher is more suggestion based and happens less frequently for lower SES families. Support for families from the teacher was misunderstood by parents across all seven dyads, and not reported. This same trend happened for parental support (higher self-reports by parents than teacher reports). This data indicates a general misunderstanding between parents and teachers about what each is doing to support the other. Clear communication about activities both at home and at school is needed.

In my opinion, the underlying responsibility to initiate this communication lies with the classroom teacher. Dispelling the belief that lower SES parents or parents of lower achieving students do not wish to interact with the teacher, do not support the teacher, and are not satisfied with the teacher, needs to be a priority. The parents in this study showed no indication of this belief. Secondly, the relationship a parent and teacher had with one another corresponded to the teacher’s perception of the family’s involvement in the schooling of their child. Increasing parental involvement has been correlated with success in school (Epstein, 1987; Neuman & Roskos, 1995). Teachers need to evaluate their own construct of parental involvement, and find ways to support parents as they participate in the schooling of their children in a way that works for them. As researchers we can support teachers in this process. Examining current perceptions of parental involvement held by both teachers and parents
should be a priority. We need to start by asking parents what they believe “parental involvement” does encompass and what it should encompass. We also need to ask parents what activities they believe are not important or are difficult to manage. At the same time we need to examine the activities teachers believe are important for parents to do. An honest analysis of these activities to determine which are helpful for the children needs to be conducted. What is it about the activities that makes them helpful for the children? Finally, for activities that prove to be helpful for children but difficult for parents to manage, another activity needs to be found that will bring the same benefit, but be manageable for all parents.


experiential deficits as basic causes of specific reading disability. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 88*, 601-638.


Appendixes

A  Informational Letter to District
B  Informational Letter to Principals Requesting Involvement
C  Informational Letter to Teachers Requesting Involvement
D  General Teacher Questionnaire
E  Classroom Observation Instrument
F  Student Nomination Template
G  General Informational and Consent Letter to Parents
H  Specific Teacher Questionnaire
I  Teacher Interview Format
J  Parent Questionnaire
K  Parent Interview
August 1, 2001

Don Falk, Superintendent
Red Deer Public School District
4747 53 Street
Red Deer AB T4N 2E6

Dear Mr. Falk,

I am a graduate student in the Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology and Special Education at the University of British Columbia. As a part of my Master of Arts degree in Special Education, I am researching how teacher-parent relationships influence children's achievement in school, particularly in reading and writing, and how these relationships differ as a function of students' level of achievement and socioeconomic status (SES). The purpose of this letter is to provide some detailed information about my research project, and request permission to conduct my research with teachers and families from Red Deer Public School District.

Selection of participants: I would like to include four primary teachers and eight families in my study. If you agree to allow me to conduct my research in your school district, I will ask you to identify two or three schools in both a low and a high SES community. Next, I will ask the principals of these schools to nominate two or three primary teachers on their faculty who they believe are highly effective teachers of reading and writing, and who they feel would be interested in my study. If these teachers agree to participate, I will observe in their classrooms during a language arts lesson, with the goal of selecting four teachers (two teachers working in a low SES community and two in a high SES community) with comparable instructional approaches. Finally, I will ask participating teachers to nominate four children (two high achieving students and two low achieving students) and their families to be involved in my study. Informational and consent letters will be sent to these families. From these sixteen families, I will select eight (two from each of the four classrooms) to participate.

All participants will be informed about the nature of their involvement in my study and asked to indicate in writing their willingness to participate. Moreover, they will be made aware that participation is voluntary and that they may withdraw from my study at any time with no negative consequences. The names of all participants will be kept confidential in all reports and presentations resulting from my study. Also, all of the data from my study will be stored in a
<November 17, 2001>

Dear Principal;

I am a graduate student in the Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology and Special Education at the University of British Columbia. As a part of my Master of Arts degree in Special Education, I am researching how teacher-parent relationships influence children's achievement in school, particularly in reading and writing, and how these relationships differ as a function of students' level of achievement and socioeconomic status (SES). Red Deer Public School District has agreed to support my study, and your school is one of several that have been nominated to participate. The purpose of this letter is to provide some detailed information about my research project, and request permission to conduct my research with teachers and families from your school.

**Selection of participants:** I would like to include a total of four primary language arts teachers and eight families to participate in my study. If you agree to include your school in this study, I would like to meet briefly with you to review a list of features of contemporary approaches to literacy instruction of interest to me, and then ask you to nominate two or three primary teachers on your faculty who you feel would be interested in the study and whose instructional approach includes many of these features. If these teachers agree to participate in my study, I will observe in their classrooms during a language arts lesson, with the goal of selecting four teachers from across the district with comparable instructional approaches. Finally, I will ask these selected teachers to nominate four families (two families of high achieving students and two families of low achieving students) to be involved. Informational and consent letters will be sent to these families. From these sixteen families, I will select eight (two from each of the four classrooms) to be participants. The other eight families will be available in case a family chooses to not continue in the study.

All participants will be informed about the nature of their involvement in my study and asked to indicate in writing their willingness to participate. Moreover, they will be made aware that participation is voluntary and that they may withdraw from my study at any time with no negative consequences. The names of all participants will be kept confidential in all reports and presentations resulting from my study. Also, all of the data from my study will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and results pertaining to participants or their schools will only be discussed using an identification code.
Dear Teacher;

I am a graduate student in the Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology and Special Education at the University of British Columbia. As a part of my Master of Arts degree in Special Education, I am researching how teacher-parent relationships influence children's achievement in school, particularly in reading and writing, and how these relationships differ as a function of students' level of achievement and socioeconomic status (SES). The purpose of this letter is to provide some detailed information about my research project, and invite your participation in the study.

Selection of participants: I would like to include four primary teachers and eight families in my study. Your school has been selected to be one of the schools involved in the study, and you have been suggested by your school principal as someone who may be interested in being involved. If you agree to participate in my study, I will observe in your classroom during one language arts lesson. The goal of this observation is to find four teachers from the district (two teachers working in a low SES community, and two in a high SES community) with comparable instructional approaches. If I find that your instructional approach is closely aligned with three other teachers, and if you choose to continue on to the next phase, you will have that opportunity. The four teachers who continue, will nominate four families (two families of high achieving students and two families of low achieving students) to participate. Informational and consent letters will be sent to these sixteen families and, from this group, I will select eight (two from each of the four classrooms) to participate. The eight families not selected at this point will be called on if any family is not able to continue on to the final phase, or if a family needs to withdraw at any point.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time with no negative consequences. The names of all participants will be kept confidential in all reports and presentations resulting from my study. Also, all of the data from my study will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and under password access on my computer hard drive. Results pertaining to participants or their schools will be discussed using an identification code.

Study procedures: If you agree to participate you will complete one questionnaire (approx. 30 minutes) before I observe in your classroom. Then, if
Teacher Questionnaire

General Questions

NAME: ________________________________

SCHOOL: ________________________________

DATE: ________________________________

Instructions: The questions here relate to your general beliefs about reading and writing instruction. Please write as much as you wish. If you need more space, feel free to use the back, or a separate sheet of paper.

Thank you for your time. I know you are busy.

Carla J. Nordby

1. On average, how often do you communicate with parents?
   - Daily
   - Weekly
   - Monthly
   - At conference time only

2. How do you communicate with parents? (Please check all that apply.)
   - casual visits during the week, in the hallway or at the end of the day
   - daily log books between home and school?
   - phone calls
   - class newsletters
   - parent - teacher conferences
   - other ________________________________

Which of the above do you find most fruitful or helpful when discussing issues of achievement? (List all that apply)
3. What information about how children learn to read and write do you like to communicate to parents during the meetings or conversations you have?

4. What information, about their child's reading and writing, do you like to receive from the parents during the meetings and conversations you have?

5. How satisfied are you with the communication you have with parents, in general?
   - [ ] Very satisfied
   - [ ] Somewhat satisfied
   - [ ] Somewhat unsatisfied
   - [ ] Very unsatisfied

   Explain

6. How would you describe a parent who is "highly involved" in their child's schooling? What kinds of things do they do?

7. What do you believe is the role of a child's parent(s) in learning to read?

   What is the role of a child's parent(s) in learning to write?
8. What do you believe is your role in supporting families as they work with their child at home?

Are you able to provide the support you would like?

Explain.

9. In general, how satisfied are you with the support you receive from families?

☐ Very satisfied
☐ Somewhat satisfied
☐ Somewhat unsatisfied
☐ Very unsatisfied

Explain.
Appendix E

Classroom Observation
Running Record

DATE: ________________ TIME START __________ TIME END __________

TEACHER __________________________ GRADE ______________

OBSERVER ________________________________

LANGUAGE ACTIVITY ________________________________

Running Record
Running Record (continued).
# Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Obs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACTIVITIES</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent use reading for enjoyment and to obtain meaning from print</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent opportunity to writing for real purposes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to spelling-sound relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of reading and writing activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INSTRUCTION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit teaching of literacy skills through modeling, mini-lessons, and whole-class and individual instruction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect instruction of literacy skills and appreciation through modeling and supportive groupings.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to the nature of the alphabetic writing system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit teaching of various types of writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicitness and extensiveness of instruction varying with reader ability (i.e., more scaffolding for weaker readers, but no difference in content).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific attention to understanding the structure of spoken words (e.g., through rhyming or patterning activities).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ORGANIZATION and MATERIALS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of extensive opportunity for interaction with print</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety in genre of reading materials</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tools to help with reading and writing activities readily available (e.g., dictionaries, word wall, paper, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible grouping strategies to target the students who need some direct instruction while allowing other students to work on other helpful activities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SELF REGULATED LEARNING</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students have a level of control in terms of choice of topic, materials, work space, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students have a level of control in terms of challenge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students have a level of control in terms of self-evaluation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher evaluation is non-threatening and oriented toward mastering goals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental support in strategies for self-regulated learning is available from peers as well as the teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This chart is an consolidation of characteristics of supportive instruction for reading and writing acquisition taken from Perry, Ott, Mercer & Nordby (1999), Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998), Wharton-MacDonald et al (1997) and IRA.
Appendix F

**Student Selection Form**

**Achievement and Parental Involvement Ratings**

NAME: ________________________________

SCHOOL: ________________________________

DATE: ________________________________

---

*Teachers: Please give the first names only of the students you nominate in each of the following categories. Each student will have a different profile of achievement and parental involvement. Please read the profiles carefully. I will give the consent letters to you to send home with these students. Also, please nominate students typical of the SES community of your school.*

**Question:** What does it mean to be successful in your classroom in reading and writing? How would you describe a “high achiever” in reading and writing?

---

* Student A profile: *High achievement in reading and writing and highly involved parent(s).*

Student’s first name only: ________________________________

Reading and writing **strengths:**

Reading and writing **concerns:**

Continue on next page.
• Student B profile: High achievement in reading and writing and minimally involved parent(s).

Student's first name only: ________________________________

Reading and writing strengths:

Reading and writing concerns:

• Student C profile: Low achievement in reading and writing and highly involved parent(s).

Student’s first name only: ________________________________

Reading and writing strengths:

Reading and writing concerns:

• Student D profile: Low achievement in reading and writing and minimally involved parent(s).

Student’s first name only: ________________________________

Reading and writing strengths:

Reading and writing concerns:

Teacher’s response to question 6 on General Teacher Questionnaire:

Do you have anything you would add to this, or anything you would say to describe a "minimally" involved parent.
May 1, 2002

Dear Parent(s) / Guardian(s),

I am a graduate student in the Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology and Special Education at the University of British Columbia. As a part of my Master of Arts degree in Special Education, I am researching how parents and teachers at varying levels of socioeconomic status work together to help children learn to read and write. I plan to conduct this research with families of children who read and write very well, and with families of children who need assistance in reading and writing. The purpose of this letter is to explain my project, and invite you and your child to participate in it.

Study participants: I would like to include eight families and four teachers in my study. I will be recruiting 16 families in case a family needs to withdraw from the study at any point. Your child’s teacher suggested you may be interested in being involved.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without any negative consequences to you or your child. Your name, and the names of all people involved, will be kept confidential. Also, all of the data from my study will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and under password on my computer hard drive. The results will only be discussed using an identification code in all reports resulting from my study.

Study procedures: If you agree to participate in my study you will be involved in the following:

1) completing a questionnaire that will take approximately 30 minutes.

2) discussing your responses to the questionnaire in an informal interview with me, at a time that is convenient for you (this will take approximately 45 minutes).

Consent: If you would like to be involved in my study, please indicate your consent on the attached form and return it to your child’s teacher in the envelope provided by May 13, 2002.
CONSENT FORM
Family Participation

Research Project Title: Examining the Role of Parent-Teacher Relationships in Young Children’s Achievement in Reading and Writing

Investigators: Nancy E. Perry, Carla J. Nordby

- I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any without experiencing any negative consequences.

- I have read the attached informational letter

- I have kept a copy of this consent form for my own records.

- I agree to complete a questionnaire and be a part of an follow-up interview with Carla at a time convenient to myself.

Please complete the following:

☐ I do agree to participate as a family in the study as outlined.

☐ I do not agree to participate as a family in the study as outlined.

Name of Child ___________________________ Name of Parent(s) or Guardian(s) ___________________________

Signature of Parent / Guardian ___________________________ Date ___________________________

☐ Yes! I would like to receive a written summary of the results of the study.

If yes, please provide mailing information.

** Please keep this copy for your own records.
CONSENT FORM
Family Participation

Research Project Title: Examining the Role of Parent-Teacher Relationships in Young Children's Achievement in Reading and Writing

Investigators: Nancy E. Perry, Carla J. Nordby

- I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without experiencing any negative consequences.

- I have read the attached informational letter

- I have kept a copy of this consent form for my own records.

- I agree to complete a questionnaire and be a part of an follow-up interview with Carla at a time convenient to myself.

Please complete the following:

☐ I do agree to participate as a family in the study as outlined.

☐ I do not agree to participate as a family in the study as outlined.

Name of Child __________________________ Name of Parent(s) or Guardian(s) __________________________

Signature of Parent / Guardian __________________________ Date __________________________

☐ Yes! I would like to receive a written summary of the results of the study.

If yes, please provide mailing information:

**Please return this copy of the consent form in the attached stamped and addressed envelope**
Teacher Questionnaire
Specific Questions

Please fill out this survey for each student in the study.

STUDENT NAME: ____________________________________________

TEACHER NAME: ____________________________________________

SCHOOL: ___________________________________________________

DATE: ______________________________________________________

Instructions: The questions here relate to a specific child in the study. Please answer them as completely as you can. If you need extra space, feel free to write on the back or attach a separate paper. Your responses will be kept confidential, and any reporting will be done with pseudonyms.

Thank you for your time. I know you are busy.

Carla J. Nordby

1. How often do you communicate with the parents of this child?
   □ Daily
   □ Weekly
   □ Monthly
   □ At conference time only

2. Please describe the type of situations in which you have talked with this parent.
   (Check all that apply)
   □ We usually talk when the parent is at the school
   □ The parent will often call the school discuss a concern
   □ I call when I have a concern
   □ We jot notes back and forth in log books
   □ I see this parent only at conferences
   □ Other
3. What information have you given to these parents about this child's reading and writing?

4. What information have you received from these parents about the reading and writing of their child?

5. How satisfied are you with the communication you have had with these parents?
   - Very satisfied
   - Somewhat satisfied
   - Somewhat unsatisfied
   - Very unsatisfied
   Explain.

6. How satisfied do you think these parents are, with the communication they have with you?
   - Very satisfied
   - Somewhat satisfied
   - Somewhat unsatisfied
   - Very unsatisfied
   Explain.
7. What does this family do to support their child in learning to read?

What does this family do to support this child in learning to write?

8. How satisfied are you with this child's family in terms of their home literacy practices?
   - Very satisfied
   - Somewhat satisfied
   - Somewhat unsatisfied
   - Very unsatisfied

Explain.

9. What do you do to support this family in their home literacy practices?

10. How satisfied do you think this child's parents are with the support you give them?
    - Very satisfied
    - Somewhat satisfied
    - Somewhat unsatisfied
    - Very unsatisfied
Explain
Teacher Interview

DATE: ________________________________

TEACHER: ________________________________

STUDENT: ________________________________

PLACE: ________________________________

INTRODUCTION:

Thank you for your participation in my study to this point. The intention of this discussion time is to provide you with an opportunity to explain some responses you gave on the questionnaires, as well as giving me an opportunity to make sure I have understood your responses correctly and completely.

I assure you that your comments will not be passed along to anyone. Anything you say will be kept confidential and any report that is made will use pseudonyms.

TAPE RECORDING

It is easiest for me if we record the interview. This allows me to be free from writing everything down. Do you have any questions about that?

PURPOSE

As I mentioned before, I am interested in knowing how parents and teachers work together for the education of the child. I am looking, in particular, for areas where the relationship between parents and teachers can be improved. I am looking forward to your input into how you see teachers best working with parents.

FORMAT

The format of this discussion is informal. I have some questions written down that I would like to ask you, but we are free to discuss whatever comes up regarding the topic, and I look forward to hearing whatever you have to say.

Does this sound okay? Let's get started.
1. Do you have any questions or comments about the questionnaires you filled out? Was there anything unclear?

2. Do you have any comments (specific or general) about relationships between parents and teachers?

3. QUESTION:

   _________________________________

   _________________________________

   _________________________________

4. QUESTION:

   _________________________________

   _________________________________

   _________________________________

5. QUESTION:

   _________________________________

   _________________________________

   _________________________________

Do you have any further comments about anything we have discussed?
Parent Questionnaire

PARENT NAME: __________________________ PHONE NUMBER: _____________

STUDENT NAME: __________________________ GRADE: _____________

TEACHER NAME: __________________________

DATE: __________________________________________________________________

Instructions: Please answer the questions as honestly and completely as possible. The results will be kept confidential. If you need additional space, please use the back or attach an extra sheet of paper.

Please return the questionnaires to the school in a sealed envelope or mail in the stamped envelope attached. I will be the only one to read your responses.

Thank you for your time.

Carla J. Nordby

1. How often do you communicate with your child's teacher?
   □ Daily
   □ Weekly
   □ Monthly
   □ At conference time only

2. In what types of situations do you generally communicate with your child's teacher?
   □ We usually talk when I am at the school to pick up my child, or help out
   □ I call the school when I have a concern
   □ The teacher will call to discuss a concern
   □ We jot notes back and forth in log books
   □ I see the teacher only at conferences
   □ Other
   ____________________________________________________________________
3. During your conversations, what does your child’s teacher tell you about reading and writing in general?

4. What does your child’s teacher tell you about your child’s reading and writing?

5. What information about your child’s reading and writing do you feel is important to share with the teacher?

Have you had the chance to share this information?

6. How satisfied are you with the communication you have had with your child’s teacher?
   □ Very satisfied
   □ Somewhat satisfied
   □ Somewhat unsatisfied
   □ Very unsatisfied

   Explain.

7. How satisfied do you think your child’s teacher is, with the communication they have with?
   □ Very satisfied
   □ Somewhat satisfied
   □ Somewhat unsatisfied
   □ Very unsatisfied

   Explain.
8. What do you do at home to support your child in learning to read?

What do you do at home to support your child in learning to write?

9. What does your child's teacher do to support you as you work with your child at home in reading and writing?

10. How satisfied are you with the literacy instruction your child's teacher provides?
    
    □ Very satisfied
    □ Somewhat satisfied
    □ Somewhat unsatisfied
    □ Very unsatisfied

    Explain.
DEMOGRAPHICS (from Perry & Nordby, 2000)

Children come to school from a wide variety of backgrounds. The following information helps me in my research about families and schools working together. This is an optional section. The information will be confidential and will not be reported out.

How many adults are in your home? ________

How many children are in your home? ________ Ages? __________________________

What kind of work do you do now, or most recently? If you work at home, caring for the children, please include that information.

What kind of work does your spouse/partner do now, or most recently (if applicable)? If he/she works at home, caring for the children, please include that information.

Please check the highest level of education or training you have completed.

☐ Grade School
☐ High School
☐ Trade / Vocational School
☐ Job Training Program
☐ 2-year College Diploma Program
☐ 4-year College / University Degree
☐ Other: __________________________

Please check the highest level of education your spouse or partner has completed (if applicable).

☐ Grade School
☐ High School
☐ Trade / Vocational School
☐ Job Training Program
☐ 2-year College Diploma Program
☐ 4-year College / University Degree
☐ Other: __________________________
Appendix K

Parent Interview:

DATE: ____________________________________________

PARENT: __________________________________________

STUDENT: __________________________________________

TEACHER: __________________________________________

INTERVIEWER: ______________________________________

PLACE: ____________________________________________

INTRODUCTION:
My name is Carla Nordby. As I mentioned before, I am a graduate student at University of British Columbia. I am also a teacher here in Red Deer. I am interested in talking with you about your child and his / her schooling, particularly I am interested the relationship you have with your child's teacher.

I assure you that your comments will not be passed along to anyone. Anything you say will be kept confidential and any report that is made will use identification codes.

TAPE RECORDING
It is easiest for me if we record the interview. This allows me to be free from writing everything down. Do you have any questions about that?

PURPOSE
As I mentioned before, I am interested in knowing how parents and teachers work together for the education of the child. I am looking, in particular, for areas where the relationship between parents and teachers can be improved. I am looking forward to your input into how you see teachers best working with your children.

There may be things you are very happy about with your child’s schooling, and there may be some things that are frustrating or confusing. I am looking both of these kinds of information.

FORMAT
This is intended to be an informal interview. I have some questions I would like to ask, but there may be additional things you would like to discuss, so feel free to bring those up.
REVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE:
I brought along the questionnaire you filled out for me a short time ago. It asked questions about what you feel is important in relating to your child’s teacher and about parental involvement. Is there anything you want to clarify or explain before I ask you the questions I have?

1. Did you have any questions or comments about the questionnaire you filled out (e.g., length of time to complete, clarity of questions)?

2. You mentioned on the questionnaire that you talk with your child’s teacher [frequency]. You were/were not satisfied with that. Is there anything you would like to add to that?

3. You mentioned that you talk with your child’s teacher: (name contexts)

Do you have any comments about that?

4. Do you have any comments about barriers to the kind of communication you would like to have with your child’s teacher?

5. Can you tell me the situations or contexts you have found to be most helpful when talking to a teacher? Are there any things that make the situation uncomfortable?

6. Do you have any comments about the information, particular to the reading and writing of your child, which you and the teacher talk about?
   • Are there things that you would like to know more about?
   • Is there information you feel is necessary / unnecessary to talk about?

7. Can you tell me about the work you do at home with your child to improve his or her reading and writing?

Do you think the amount of work you are asked to do is appropriate?

What about the type of activities you are asked to do. Are they appropriate?

Do you have any frustrations?
8. Do you feel supported by the teacher? Is there anything he or she could do to support you more?

9. Would you describe your child as a “high” achiever, “average” achiever, or a “low” achiever in reading and writing?

Additional Questions:

QUESTION:

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

QUESTION:

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

QUESTION:

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

Final question: Are there any further comments you would like to make about parent-teacher relationships?