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Learning to Be Literate:
Parental Empowerment in Early Literacy Interventions

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Abstract

Considerable research has focused on the success of early intervention programs for children. However, minimal research has focused on the effect these programs have on the parents of targeted children. Many current early intervention programs champion family-focused and inclusive programming, but few have evaluated parent participation in early interventions and fewer still have evaluated the impact of these programs on beliefs and attitudes and parenting practices. Since parents will continue to play a key role in their child's developmental course long after early intervention programs end, it is vital to examine whether these programs empower parents to take action to make changes in the lives of their children.

The goal of this study was to understand parental influences on the early development of literacy, and in particular how parental attitudes, beliefs and self efficacy impact parent and child engagement in early literacy intervention activities.

A mixed method procedure using quantitative and qualitative strategies was employed. A quasi-experimental research design was used. The research sample, sixty parents who were part of naturally occurring community interventions in at- risk neighbourhoods in a south-western Ontario city participated in the quantitative phase. Largely individuals whose home language was other than English, these participants were divided amongst three early literacy intervention groups, a Prescriptive Interventionist type group, a Participatory Empowering type group and a drop-in parent- child neighbourhood Control group.

Measures completed pre and post a six session literacy intervention, on all three groups, were analyzed for evidence of change in parental attitudes and beliefs about early

literacy and evidence of change in parental empowerment. Parents in all three groups, on average, held beliefs about early literacy that were positive and that were compatible with current approaches to language development and emergent literacy. No significant change in early literacy beliefs and attitudes for pre to post intervention was found. Similarly, there was no significant difference between groups on empowerment scores, but there was a significant change post intervention in one group's empowerment score. There was a drop in the empowerment score for the Prescriptive Interventionist type group, suggesting a drop in empowerment level.

The qualitative aspect of this study involved six in-depth interviews completed with a sub-set of the sixty research participants. Four similar themes emerged across the groups: learning takes place across time and place; participation is key; success is achieved by taking small steps; and learning occurs in multiple ways.

The research findings have important implications for practitioners and policy makers who target at risk populations with early intervention programming and wish to sustain parental empowerment. Study results show the value parents place on early learning and point to the importance of including parents in the development and delivery of early intervention programs.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Children have often been depicted as living a life of innocence and discovery. Western thought in particular identified childhood as an idyllic phase, a planning or testing ground for the rational, logical world of the adult (Stephens, 1995). Children in the 20th century were seen as biological entities that developed in a universal and predictable way, moving from stage to stage as their bodies strengthened and as their minds took on adult qualities such as logic and reasoning (Prout & James, 1997). On the way to reaching their higher developmental stages, children were seen as irrational, immature, incompetent, asocial and acultural (Prout & James, 1997). Scholars with opposing views saw children, instead, as malleable objects acted upon by adults who, through socialization, passed on the nuances of their culture and their role in society (Prout & James, 1997). Many current scholars, including this writer, now question both - the concept of childhood as solely a biologically determined state on the path to adulthood and the passive notion of socialization. We see child development as occurring on a continuum where the child is actively involved and engaged, and where both socialization and biology contribute significantly.

Examining evidence from neurosciences, developmental psychology, social sciences, and anthropology among other disciplines, scholars are now redefining our vision of childhood in a way that is more appropriate to the currently available child development research. As a result, the past decade has seen considerable emphasis given to the importance of childhood, especially the early years, the time between zero and six

years. It is now viewed as a pivotal period in an individual's life for determining their developmental trajectory (McCain & Mustard, 1999).

With the shift in our understanding of the vital nature of early childhood there has been a recognition that many children do not successfully navigate this period. They arrive at its end with significant deficits in development that interfere with their capacity to learn, grow and achieve. In particular, children from high poverty urban neighbourhoods and from families with very low incomes are at risk and may begin their formal school years with fewer resources and at a distinct disadvantage (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). This recognition has led researchers to design, policy makers to fund, and practitioners to implement early intervention programs. These programs strive to intervene at an early stage to circumvent delays and ensure that all children are given an equal footing when they are ready to begin formal schooling.

Early Intervention

Early intervention refers to a broad range of activities designed to enhance a young child's development (Ramey & Ramey, 1998; Zigler, Finn-Stevenson, & Hall, 2002). It is the provision of support and resources to families of infants and young children from members of informal and formal support networks that both directly and indirectly influence child, parent and family functioning (Dunst, 2004).

Children who are at risk for developmental delays can have either biological or environmental factors that impede their development. At-risk children can include those whose families are poor, whose parents have not completed high school, whose parents are new to country and culture, and whose parents are teenagers. This group can also include those children exposed to unsafe environments and toxic substances on an

ongoing basis, those living in poor neighbourhoods, and those lacking resources or access to supports and services (Brooks-Gunn, 2003).

Early intervention programs strive to counter the effects of poverty and other frequently co-existing risk factors such as low birth weight, low parental education, and family stress (Berlin, Brooks-Gunn, McCarton, & McCormick, 2004). A frequent goal is to lessen socio-economic status inequality in the preschool years so that poor children enter school on a more equal footing to their more affluent peers (Brooks-Gunn, 2003). These programs have evolved as a primary means of closing the gap that at-risk children face. Success in early intervention programs for at-risk children is usually defined in terms of more positive intellectual and socio-emotional development relative to the expected outcomes achieved in the absence of early intervention (Ramey & Ramey, 1998).

Intervention programs are designed with the intention of changing the odds, for as many at-risk children as possible, as often as possible. Programs aim to alter the developmental trajectory of at-risk children and the child's developmental path long term by providing support or changing life circumstances. The earlier intervention occurs in life the better the results. Altering the developmental trajectories of individuals who have not had supportive early experiences is harder than providing these experiences in the first place; once a trajectory is set, changes are difficult to implement and even harder to sustain (Berlin, Brooks-Gunn, McCarton, & McCormick, 2004). The hope of early intervention is that at-risk children could be placed on a normative developmental trajectory and would show optimal development after their intervention end (Ramey & Ramey, 1998).

Early intervention supports and services are thought to have their effect by altering the experiences and behaviour of individual children and family members (Ramey & Ramey, 1998). In striving for optimal effectiveness in early intervention programs the unique knowledge, understanding and engagement of parents is pivotal (Carpenter, 1997). Interactions between parent and child are central to the development of many child competencies. A secure parent-child relationship and patterns of stable, warm, responsive care-giving have been shown to be linked to the development of competence (Gunnar, Mangelsdorf, Kestenbaum, Lang, Larson, & Andreas, 1989). The variations in sensitivity, warmth and harshness of these interactions can affect the provision of learning experiences and child outcomes (Kochanska, 1995; Brooks-Gunn, 2003). This has been clearly demonstrated in literacy development research (Bus, Van Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Bus, Belskey, Van Ijzendoorn, & Crnic, 1997; DeBaryshe, 1995).

- Considerable research in recent years has focused on the interplay of genes and environment and the effects of each on child development. For example, Uri Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Theory detailed the influence of the characteristics of the developing person, the features of the environment that fosters or interferes with development and the important processes involved (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The positive bi-directional interactions that occur between parent and child are influential in the development of neural pathways on the one hand, but on the other hand a non-stimulating or toxic environment can result in neuron pruning (McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007). Early experiences and the quality of relationships influence gene expression, influencing development, but the child's genetic expression also dictates how his environment, and in particular his parent, responds (Rutter, 2007).

Parent behaviour is the most powerful and potentially alterable influence on the developing child, considering their control over their child's environment and their interaction with their child. While considerable research has been undertaken into the benefits of early intervention programs for children, minimal research has focused on the effect these programs have on the parents of targeted children. Interventions, whether group or individual, will be successful only if the goals or techniques of the literacy program mesh with parents' pre-existing beliefs and are responsive to what the user feels is important (DeBaryshe, 1995; Kraus, 2000). Although parents are seen as playing a pivotal role in early intervention programs, relatively little attention has been paid to parenting beliefs and behaviour as either outcomes or mediating factors in the efficacy of these programs (Berlin, Brooks-Gunn, McCarton, & McCormick, 2004). Barbara DeBaryshe (1995) in her study of parent's involvement in early literacy did find that parent's beliefs and attitudes were strongly related to reading practices.

There is increasing recognition that early intervention programs need to be context specific and that their intensity and specificity should be tailored to the characteristics and functioning of the family, and to the child's ability and risk status (Kraus, 2000). Many current programs espouse family-focused and inclusive programming, but few have evaluated parent participation or the impact of these programs on parents and parenting. In a recent study Berlin et al. (2004) did find that early intervention influenced mothers' parenting and the child-mother relationship. Their analysis indicated a link between the quality of mothers' and children's participation in the intervention activities and both child and family outcomes (Berlin, et al. 2004).

Empowerment

An empowerment approach considers wellness and competence, encourages independence and skill development, supports the changing of conditions to overcome barriers, and encourages collaboration and working with others to overcome obstacles (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998). A goal of empowering interventions is to help people, organizations, and communities become more self-reliant and self-governing and less controlled by external forces (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998).

In practical terms, the outcome of the empowerment process is gaining mastery or control over the challenges one faces on a daily basis (Turnbull, Turbiville, & Turnbull, 2000). Empowerment suggests a belief in the power of people to be both the masters of their own fate and involved in the life of their several communities (Rappaport, 1987). Decision making, problem-solving and leadership skills are all components of empowerment (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998).

Since parents will continue to play a key role in their child's developmental course long after programs end, it is vital to examine whether these programs empower parents to take action to make changes in the lives of their children. Empowerment processes are vital in early intervention programs, as it has become evident that how a program is delivered can be as important as what is delivered.

Effective early intervention programs are often seen as a remedy for the problems faced by children at risk, but in reality children's development depends on both early and subsequent opportunities and experiences and not on short term programs. There is increasing recognition that, to be beneficial, these programs need to be intense, context specific and on-going, or they need to include frequent booster doses (Ramey & Ramey,

1998). Early intervention programs have been shown to be most effective when tailored to the cultural, community, and developmental norms of program participants and when they include target groups and service providers in program planning, implementation, and evaluation (Weissberg, Kumpfer, & Seligman, 2003). One way to achieve this is by engaging parents in the design and on-going delivery of the program. With the intensity and specificity of the early intervention program matched to the unique characteristics of the family, parents can take ownership of the intervention, and implement it on an ongoing regular basis with their children.

One area of early intervention that has received considerable attention and program expansion, in recent years is the acquisition of literacy. While there is evidence that children play a key role in their own literacy development, there is also confirmation that they cannot succeed alone. Considerable research in recent years has demonstrated the invaluable role parents play in early literacy development. There is concern, however, that many parents are not encouraging early literacy, are not participating in family literacy activities, and are not receiving or accepting guidance, counseling or intervention related to furthering their child's literacy development (Zuckerman & Halfon, 2003).

By examining parent empowerment in early literacy interventions, as one type of early intervention program for at-risk children, this research is aimed at contributing to the literature on parental empowerment and involvement in early intervention initiatives.

Mixed Methods

This research study uses a mixed methods procedure, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, in order to examine parental empowerment and parental engagement in early interventions in literacy. The mixed method is used to collect diverse types of data

to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research questions. This research approach originated, in the late 1950s, when Campbell and Fiske used multiple methods to study the validity of psychological traits (Creswell, 2003). Following their lead others began experimenting with collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study in an effort to expand the understanding from one method to another and to confirm data from different data sources (Creswell, 2003). Researchers believed that by using multiple approaches the strength of each would result in a much more comprehensive understanding of the research phenomena under investigation (Bosacki, Marini, & Dane, 2006). In addition to this triangulation of data sources, the mixed method allows for the results from one method to develop or inform the other method (Creswell, 2003). The mixed method approach has been recommended for the study of empowerment, where only using quantitative methods of analysis gives a limited understanding, and the use of qualitative approaches further strengthens the research by reinforcing the quantitative data presented (Zimmerman, 1990; Kraus, 2000; Bosacki, Marini, & Dane, 2006). Employing the mixed methods approach, researchers are able to use multiple forms of data to provide insight into different levels or units of analysis in order to draw out multiple possibilities (Creswell, 2003).

The mixed method is not without its challenges, however, since there is a need for extensive data collection, and analysis of both text and numeric data can be time intensive and costly (Creswell, 2003). The researcher also requires skill in both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Positioning

As the child of immigrant parents, I struggled with early language acquisition and was slower than my peers in developing oral reading skills. I have, however, been greatly influenced by parents who valued literacy, modeled reading and prioritized mastery of written and spoken English in detriment to their heritage language. They sought, against odds, to ensure school readiness and an even playing field for success in academics. I equate their struggles and sacrifices to achieve a functionally literate family with an important parental role and responsibility.

As a university educated researcher I come to the field with inherent assumptions and biases. I view literacy as fundamental to life in 21st century society and the early development of literacy skills as a right and necessity for every young child. I view illiteracy as a determinant of poor health and well-being, which contributes to the construction of the barriers that restrict opportunities and isolate individuals into a life of poverty.

As a community health care practitioner my daily focus is the healthy growth and development of young children. I recognize the many at-risk children in my community and the vital need for strengthening the families and neighbourhoods that support them. While championing empowering, strength-based early intervention programming, I recognize that my education and professional position, and those of many of my colleagues and partners, may exude a sense of power to participating families. This perception, however unintentional, may result in the people we are trying to help developing learned helplessness and limited personal efficacy instead of the capacity to act and engage in early intervention initiatives. For this reason, I'm concerned that

although programs targeting at-risk children have been developed in my community, they may not be well utilized or meeting the needs of the families they are intended for.

To understand the literacy work that parents engage in with their preschool children, I need to put away my own ideas and preconceived assumptions and strive to understand their day to day experience. Only in this way can I gain insight into what either compels or repels them from participating in family literacy activities. It is important for me to experience how parent and child are positioned in their community and in their home culture and how learning occurs in their world.

Having lived, learned and achieved a high level of literacy, despite experiencing developmental risks as a child, I wonder if the disparities in literacy skills I observe in my community today can be reduced through current early child development initiatives. Particularly, I question whether current family literacy interventions are effective in engaging parents and children and improving literacy outcomes. Do at-risk parents support and participate in early literacy activities? What are the characteristics of those that do? Are there barriers that limit the involvement of some parents and their children, and if so what are they and can they be lowered? What are the attitudes of parents of at-risk children towards early literacy attainment?

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literacy Development

Learning to read is a key milestone for children living in a literate world. The conventional definition of literacy is the ability to read and write (Wasik & Herrmann, 2004). In the 20th century, literacy was viewed as a skill taught in an institutional setting that, once imparted on individuals, would enable them to carry out a variety of important functions in society (Puchner, 1995). In 1967, educational researcher Marie Clay was the first to introduce the idea of early or emergent literacy when she hypothesized that literacy development was a continuous process that begins long before formal instruction starts in the first grade (Wells, 1988). Emergent literacy is the term used to describe the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are developmental precursors to reading and writing and the environments that support them (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). In her research Clay found that 5-year-olds could perform skills required for reading such as making appropriate eye movements and matching a spoken word with its written counterpart (Wells, 1988). Other researchers, including Charles Read and Yetta Goodman found that even children as young as age two and three demonstrated the ability to respond when introduced to words presented in a familiar context (Wells, 1988). Prior to that time the common thought was that literacy development must wait until physical maturation, around age 6, at which time the child became capable of learning to read and write. Current thought is that literacy development begins at birth with sensory stimulation and that literacy-related behaviours develop on a continuum, during the early years, through an interactive process. It has been found, however, that not all young children develop

these skills at the same rate and research in literacy development has tried to determine whether observed disparities in early literacy skills are attributed to differences in the children's innate capacity or to differences in their exposure to speech and language (Willms, 1999).

For many years it was widely believed that the architecture of the child's brain was set at birth by the genetic characteristics inherited from his parents (McCain & Mustard, 1999). While factors like poor prenatal nutrition and exposure to toxic substances adversely affect the capacities of the neonate brain, scientists have now discovered that a tremendous amount of brain development occurs between conception and age one and that stimuli from a child's early experiences influence the wiring of neurons and neural pathways of the brain (McCain & Mustard, 1999). The brain connections formed in early life influence how an individual responds to certain kinds of stimuli for their entire life (McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007).

The new thinking indicates that how a brain develops hinges on a complex interplay between the genes a child is born with and the experiences a child has (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; McCain & Mustard, 1999). Experience based brain development in the early years of life influences health, learning and behaviour throughout life (Mustard, 2007). Much of early literacy research has focused on attempting to identify the experiences which facilitate the development of literacy skills. We have learned that emergent literacy is influenced by a pre-school home environment that is enriched with print items such as newspapers, children's books, magnetic refrigerator letters, writing materials and posters (Saracho, 2002). Skills are enhanced when parents actively model use of literacy materials, animatedly discuss environmental print and when children are

actively involved and engaged in the literacy experiences (Evans, Shaw, & Bell, 2000; Saracho, 2002). Beneficial literacy experiences include telling stories, discussing and interacting with literature, dramatizing, engaging in rhyming games, singing, teaching vocabulary, experiencing writing and visiting the library (Evans, Shaw, & Bell, 2000; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Activities can occur both in the home and outside the home in the everyday world of the child.

Storybook Reading

In an effort to determine the specific factors that influence literacy development researchers have studied the relationship between home environment, home literacy, and language and literacy development (Bus & Van Ijzendoorn, 1999, Evans, et al., 2000; Senechal & LeFevre, 2002; Speece, Ritchey, Cooper, Roth, & Schatschneider, 2004).

A major conclusion gained from these international research studies is that parent-preschool storybook reading is one of the most important activities for developing the knowledge required for success in reading (Bus, Van Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; DeBaryshe, 1995; Senechal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998). A meta-analysis on joint book reading conducted by Bus et al. (1995) indicated that parent-preschooler book reading is related to outcome measures such as language growth, emergent literacy, and reading achievement. Senechal and LeFevre (2002) in their five year longitudinal study showed the development of vocabulary and listening comprehension skills was related to children's exposure to books. During shared book reading, parent and child co-construct the foundations of literacy concepts and behaviours, but the benefit of parent-child shared book reading goes beyond the development of literacy skills, since it is through such events that the transmission of parental values also occurs (Makin, 2006).

Researchers have also studied story book reading routines related to the time of day reading occurred, frequency of reading sessions, type of reading interaction and access to books (Serpell, Sonnenschein, Baker, & Ganapathy, 2002; Wasik & Bond, 2001).

Parents who read frequently to their children are also likely to read more themselves, have more children's books in the home and take their young children to the library (Bus, Belsky, Van Ijzendoorn, & Crnic, 1997). The beneficial effect of the frequency of parent-child book reading is not dependant on the socioeconomic status of the families. Even in low socioeconomic status families with on average low levels of literacy, book reading frequency affects children's literacy skills (Bus et al., 1995).

Frequency of book reading promotes the development of language and literacy skills but the manner in which the parent reads to their child also appears to be important, with the most benefit gained when the reader is animated and when the child is interactive with the experience (Bus, 2001; Bus et al., 1997; Whitehurst, Falco, Lonigan, Fischel, DeBaryshe, Vadez-Menchaca et. al, 1988). One technique found to be effective in enhancing children's literacy skills is a method of reading picture books to children called dialogic reading (Whitehurst, Arnold, Epstein, Angell, Smith, & Fischel, 1994). Central to dialogic reading is a shift in roles from the parent reading to a passive listening child, to the child becoming actively involved as the story teller (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). This technique emphasizes the parent's role in providing feedback and following the interests of the child.

Recent reviews have noted that evidence for a strong connection between shared book reading during preschool years and children's literacy development is weaker than originally thought (Bus et al., 1995). Shared book reading is an activity that fosters

vocabulary development in children but the link to other early literacy skills is indirect (Evans, et al., 2000; Frijters, Barron & Brunello, 2000; Senechal & LeFevre, 2002).

Recent research in emergent literacy concludes that children are exposed to two types of literacy experiences at home, informal and formal literacy (Senechal & LeFevre, 2002). Informal literacy activities are those, like reading a bedtime story, where the primary goal is the message contained in the print, not the print itself. Formal literacy activities, like reading an alphabet book, are those where the focus is on the print. Various pathways leading to fluent reading have their roots in these different aspects of children's early literacy experiences (Senechal & LeFevre, 2002). Informal shared book reading activities influence skills such as oral vocabulary development but not the acquisition of early written language knowledge (Frijters, et al., 2000), while parental activities such as coaching children in learning about letters predict letter name and sound knowledge (Evans, et al., 2000).

Senechal et al. (1998) found that for Kindergarten children, both storybook exposure and parent teaching were positively correlated with children's oral-language and written language skills. Senechal & LeFevre (2002) also demonstrated that high parental involvement in teaching children about reading and writing words was related to the development of early literacy skills and that early literacy skills directly predicted word reading skills at the end of grade one and indirectly predicted reading skills in grade three (Senechal & LeFevre, 2002).

There is some evidence that the considerable variation in both the frequency and quality of home literacy practices is associated with individual differences in children's language and literacy outcomes (DeBaryshe, Binder, & Buell, 2000). When the quality of

book reading is less satisfying to parent and child, frequency of reading is likely to be adversely affected (Bus et al., 1997). High quality book reading depends on the interactional aspects of the parent-child relationship (Bus, et al., 1995; Bus, et al., 1997; DeBaryshe, 1995). Factors that reduce the child's opportunity to respond and receive feedback might reduce the beneficial effects of this intervention.

Relationships

In many cases storybook reading gives young children an opportunity to have a warm and supportive interaction with their caregiver, but in dyads where insecure or avoidant attachment relationships are present the parent is less sensitive and responsive to the child and the pleasure of sharing a book may be low. Insecure-avoidant pairs have difficulty starting interactions about the meaning of pictures and text, while insecure-resistant pairs do interact, but this interaction may be overwhelmingly negative (Bus et al., 1997). Under these circumstances, this type of book reading may adversely affect both the child's interest in literacy activities and his emergent literacy skills (Bus et al., 1995). In addition, this interaction, how a mother does or doesn't respond to signals from her child, influences how the brain and the sensory pathways for sound and vision, vital for learning, develop (Mustard, 2007). Without helping parents to change their joint book reading habits, or without identifying the relationship issues, literacy programs encouraging book reading at home might have a counterproductive effect (Bus et al., 1997).

Literacy Attitudes and Beliefs

It is clear to me that parents play an important role in nurturing literacy acquisition and are vital to the ongoing process of early literacy development (Bus & Van

Ijzendoorn, 1999; Cronan, Brooks, Kilpatrick, Bigatti, & Tally, 1999; Evans, Shaw, & Bell, 2000; Senechal & LeFevre, 2002; Speece, Ritchey, Cooper, Roth, & Schatschneider, 2004). Since parental belief systems play an important role in guiding parental behaviour, the role of mothers' belief systems have been researched in recent early literacy studies (DeBaryshe, 1995; Dickenson & DeTemple, 1998; Sharif, Ozuah, Dinkevich, & Mulvihill, 2003). In two studies of low income and working-class families, Barbara DeBaryshe (1995) found that beliefs were strongly related to reading exposure and reading socialization practices, and that maternal belief directly influenced the child's interest in reading. Parents' views may be shaped by their own recollection of what their parents or teachers did to assist them, and through informal interactions with friends who share similar experiences (Evans, Fox, Cremasco, & Mckinnon, 2004). DeBaryshe found an association between beliefs about the goals and outcomes of reading aloud, the frequency of home book reading, numbers of books available at home, age at which the parents began to read aloud to their child and the richness of parent and child interactions during book reading (DeBaryshe, 1995). This association remained, even when parental education and income factors were controlled (DeBaryshe, 1995; DeBaryshe & Binder, 1994). Mother's education, income and her own reading habits were predictive of her beliefs about reading aloud (DeBaryshe, 1995). There is a strong association between reading beliefs and both reported and observed reading practices (DeBaryshe & Binder, 1994). Parents who don't enjoy reading themselves and don't see value may be unable to support their children's interest in reading, and those with a low level of literacy may be unable to make a book comprehensible to an emergent reader (Bus et al., 1995).

Socio-cultural Influences

Early research reports on literacy development indicated that joint book reading did not occur in low socio-economic status homes but many contemporary researchers have not found this to be so. DeBaryshe (1995) found that both low socioeconomic status parents and those at a high economic status felt positive about reading to their children and placed a high value on literacy. There was a difference however in their orientation to literacy development, with the lower socioeconomic group putting more emphasis on reading instruction than the more advantaged group.

Bialostok (2002), in his study of 15 white, middle-class parents of kindergarten children, explains how literacy is mentally represented as cultural knowledge and how that knowledge motivates behaviour, attitudes and actions. He distinguishes between social literacy and functional literacy. The social literacy of the middle class is associated with literacy events used to scaffold children into reading books to achieve a higher, more “human status” (Bialostok, 2002). Functional literacy refers to forms of literacy that involve doing every day tasks where reading or writing is usually secondary to the primary goal (Bialostok, 2002). Examples of functional literacy might include reading a cereal box, a phone book or mail, and cheque writing or making a grocery list.

Holloway, Rambaud, Fuller, and Eggers-Pierola (1995), in their qualitative longitudinal study of mothers with low-income, found that although parental views about preschool learning were linked to cultural models of childrearing including respecting authority and contributing to one’s family or community, parents were receptive to information from child care professionals and other experts when these perspectives furthered their own goals for their children. In addition, Jones, Franco, Metcalf, Popp,

Staggs, and Thomas (2000) found that the likelihood that parents will engage children in literacy activities at home increased when they were provided with the tools that enabled them to be their child's first teacher at an early age.

Early Literacy Interventions

Literacy programs have traditionally focused on intervention with at-risk children. The initial literacy intervention programs emphasized child-focused interventions and outcomes but often yielded only short term results. While single generation child-focused literacy interventions, such as library story times for preschool children were predominant at first, the current trend in early literacy intervention is to work with parents and children, both during the preschool and early school years, to enhance literacy. Recent research indicates that greater sustainability may be connected to embedding literacy in activities connected to daily life and that retention is higher in family literacy programs that include parents than in traditional literacy programs, perhaps because the goal of supporting their children's learning is a powerful motivator for adults (Ronson & Rootman, 2004). Parents are now acknowledged as both the child's first teacher of language and literacy, and a role model for literacy activities such as reading (Cronan, et al., 1999). Evaluations of model American family literacy initiatives showed some promising improvements in literacy outcomes in the short term, with some family groups, but there have been questions about the sustainability of parental behaviour in many groups (Cronan, et al., 1999).

Recognizing that children grow up in families, schools and neighbourhoods, the trend now is to develop programs that address the needs of the entire family in the community in which they live (Feldman, Sparks, & Case, 2004; Weissberg, Kumpfer, & Seligman,

2003). Interventions, whether group or individual, will be successful only if the goals or techniques of the literacy program mesh with parents' pre-existing beliefs and are responsive to what the user feels is important (DeBaryshe, 1995; Kraus, 2000). There is increasing recognition that early intervention programs need to be context specific and that their intensity and specificity should be tailored to the characteristics and functioning of the family, and to the child's ability and risk status (Kraus, 2000).

Elsa Roberts Auerbach identifies two models of early intervention that predominate in early literacy interventions: the Prescriptive Interventionist model and the Participatory Empowering model (Auerbach, 1995).

Prescriptive Interventionist Model

The Prescriptive Interventionist model focuses on giving parents specific guidelines to carry out school-like activities in the home. The most common goal of this model is to strengthen ties between home and school by transmitting the culture of school literacy to the family (Auerbach, 1995). The intervention starts with the needs, problems and practices that are identified as being deficient and then transfers skills or practices to parents in order to shape their interactions with their children. The Prescriptive Interventionist model reinforces school-like literacy activities within the family setting by prescribing both the interventions and interactions that occur. The direction moves from the professional to the parents and then to the child (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Prescriptive Interventionist Model

Professional (e.g. School or educator) → parents → children

Components of early literacy intervention programs built on this model often include: teaching parents about the educational system and philosophy of schooling, providing concrete methods and tools to use at home, assisting to promote good reading habits, helping parents develop their own basic literacy skills, giving parents guidelines and techniques for helping with homework, training parents in how to read to children or listen to children read, providing training in effective parenting, giving parents a calendar or recipe book of ideas for shared literacy activities, teaching parents to make and play games to reinforce skills, and teaching parents how to communicate with school authorities (Auerbach, 1995).

Examples of Prescriptive Interventionist programs at Ontario Early Years Centres in Hamilton include School Readiness programs and Family Math programs (Figure 2). School Readiness programs are facilitated by Ontario Early Years Centre staff but take place in neighbourhood school classrooms. Here parents are introduced to the school culture and environment, through small group lectures in a classroom setting. They are instructed in preparing their child physically and mentally for school, and the importance of encouraging emergent literacy including book reading, learning the alphabet, phonetic activities and practicing name writing. Young children are separated from their caregivers for the two hour classroom session and encouraged, by early childhood educators, to explore activities in the school classroom. Sessions occur twice a week over a four week period.

The Family Math program engages the parent and child in a preschool curriculum of math and reading activities that include the use of resource materials, hands on activities

Figure 2
Comparison of Two Models of Early Literacy Interventions

Prescriptive Interventionist		Participatory Empowering
To strengthen ties between home and school by transmitting the culture of school literacy	Goal	To strengthen ties between home and school by transmitting the culture and context of home literacy
Giving parents specific guidelines to carry out school-like activities in the home.	Focus	Recognizes a variety of culture specific literacy activities are occurring in the home and seeks to celebrate and enhance these.
Group facilitator → parents → children		Parents ↔ children ↔ group facilitator
Unidirectional	Direction	Bi-directional or Multi-directional
Deficit - based. Starts with the needs, problems and practices identified as being deficient in the child's home. Assumes illiteracy breeds illiteracy.	Orientation	Strength-based. Recognizes and builds on literacy experiences already occurring in the home. Cultural and context specific activities are encouraged and celebrated.
Teach parents skills or practices in order to shape their interactions with their children.	Aim	Empower participants to direct their own learning and use it for their own purposes.
School-like activities are reinforced for use within the family setting. Interventions and interactions to be used at home are prescribed by the group facilitator. For example, calendars and workbooks.	Philosophy	Literacy is defined broadly to include a range of practices that are integrated into daily life in a socially significant way.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School Readiness programs ▪ Family Math program ▪ Early Bird Family Literacy ▪ You Make the Difference 	Examples in Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parent Child Mother Goose ▪ Rhyme Time ▪ ESL Rhyme Time ▪ Toddler Tales and Tunes

Adapted from Auerbach (1995)

and reading books to explore number sense, numeration and measurement. Emphasis is placed on attaining literacy and numeracy skills through focused parent-child interaction that are reinforced at home with supplemental activities that are reviewed the following class.

Criticism of the Prescriptive Interventionist model is predominately based on two schools of thought, the idea that a culture of literacy needs to be transmitted from a school-like setting to the home, and the assumption that illiteracy breeds illiteracy. The deficit hypothesis of this model places the responsibility for literacy problems on inadequacy within the family and ignores the social context in which the problems occur (Auerbach, 1995).

Participatory Empowering Model

In contrast, proponents of the Participatory Empowering model of early literacy intervention claim it recognizes and builds on the literacy experiences already happening in the home. Cultural and context specific activities are encouraged and celebrated. The focus is on empowering participants to direct their own learning and use it for their own purposes (Auerbach, 1995). Literacy is defined more broadly to include a range of practices that are integrated into daily life in a socially significant way. The direction moves from the family and community, where parent and child construct and share literacy experiences, to informing the professional (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Participatory, Empowering Model

Parents ↔ children ↔ Professional (e.g. School or educator)

The professional's role is to connect what happens in the intervention to what happens in the family so that literacy can become meaningful to the family. While the Prescriptive Interventionist model uses a deficit hypothesis, the Participatory Empowering model emphasizes an empowerment hypothesis.

Components of early literacy intervention programs built on this model include direct parent-child interactions around literacy tasks where parent and child share resources and experiences and learn from each other; engaging in various activities that involve literacy like cooking, making a grocery list, writing a letter to a friend or reading the newspaper; singing and playing culturally relevant songs and games; and modeling reading behaviour.

Examples of this intervention model at area Early Years Centres include the Parent Child Mother Goose program, Rhyme Time, ESL Rhyme Time and Toddler Tales and Tunes (Figure 2). Children and parents come together weekly, in small groups, to explore stories, books, hands on activities, songs and rhymes in a small group setting. In this setting, participants engage each other and model developing literacy and language skills.

Based on the literature review it is clear to me that parents play a pivotal role in the literacy development of their children. It is also clear that for early interventions, including literacy interventions, to be successful in changing outcomes for at-risk children, programs need to have breadth, depth, and intensity, and they need to engage the population they target.

Since children's literacy development depends on both early and subsequent opportunities and experiences, parents are pivotal to the success of these programs.

Parents therefore need to be fully engaged in interacting with their child in the early intervention and need to take ownership of the intervention, in this case, the literacy work needing to be completed on an ongoing basis. One component of some early intervention programs that interfere with the engagement of parents is the presence of an imbalance of power. When power is monopolized by the professional, or minimally shared, the imbalance of power in the early intervention relationship can leave the parent feeling alienated, dispirited, dependant instead and reluctant to participate.

Power in Early Intervention Relationships

Power, the ability and willingness to affect the behaviour, thoughts, physical well-being or feelings of another, is an important component of all relationships (Turnbull, Turbiville, & Turnbull, 2000). It is a frequent element of family and professional partnerships that form in early intervention. How power is used in relationships determines whether it is destructive or leads to creative growth (Turnbull, et al., 2000). Parents involved in relationships where they are encouraged to expand their power develop positive perceptions about their ability to achieve outcomes for themselves and their children. As they increase their control over their lives and their environment, they take action to get what they need and their participation in intervention programs increases.

Three common types of power arrangements that occur in early intervention relationships are identified by Turnbull et al. (2000): power-over relationships, power-with relationships and power-through relationships (Figure 4).

Many traditional human services and health care interventions can be classified as power-over relationships. Carl Dunst (1985) in a seminal article on early intervention

described the traditional intervention model as using a deficit approach in which the principles of paternalism and usurpation are dominant. Intervention efforts in this model are often based on correcting weaknesses or alleviating deficits in the child, family or culture (Dunst, 2004). Parents seek out or are offered expert advice from professionals, who prescribe a means to correct the deficit. The professional usurps decision making deciding on what is wrong, what needs to be done to correct the deficit, how and when the intervention needs to occur, how often and for how long (Dunst, 1985). Professional jargon limits communication and reduces information sharing. The control exerted by the professional often fosters a sense of helplessness and powerlessness in parents. Powerlessness defined as lack of control over destiny, has also been called alienation, victim-blaming, learned helplessness, external locus of control and internalized oppression (Wallerstein, 1992). The potentially negative effect of the power or control exercised by professionals in many early intervention programs is the fostering of a personal sense of helplessness or lack of personal efficacy and a depressed sense of interpersonal efficacy (Dunst, 1985). Figure 4 summarizes the key components, family involvement and outcomes of the traditional early intervention relationships that are power-over relationships.

Specific early intervention activities occur while the parent and child are engaged with the expert, but parents may lack the efficacy to continue interventions long term or to pursue further options. The Prescriptive Interventionist model of early literacy intervention might be classified as a power-over intervention. School readiness programs where the educator is seen as an expert who holds the key and the tools to unlock learning are examples of this intervention.

Figure 4

Power Distribution in Early Intervention Relationships

Power Balance	Model of Early Intervention	Key Components	Family Involvement	Outcome
Power-Over (Power is monopolized or controlled)	Traditional treatment and service models Prevention models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differences are viewed as deficits and weaknesses Intervention focuses on remediation of deficits Professionals control decision making and prescribe intervention Professionals determine needs of family, based on their own expertise rather than family's perspective 	<p>Experts make decisions for the family which family feels obligated to follow</p> <p>Experts control information, communication, resources and outcomes</p> <p>Assumes parents need training to be effective</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learned helplessness Lack of personal efficacy Depressed sense of interpersonal efficacy Dependency Low self-esteem Services are limited to those within professional's control
Power-With (Power is shared)	Partnerships Family-centred services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differences are seen as variations resulting from ecological factors Assets, talents, competencies and strengths are recognized Intervention focuses on strengthening family Family choice Professionals are viewed as agents of the family 	<p>Families and professionals work together on an equal basis to make decisions together plan, and implement a course of action</p> <p>Professionals are responsive and advocate for families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased sense of control Increased sense of competence Resources and strengths are pooled Increased ability to meet needs of children Actual outcomes are still child-centred

Power-Through (Power is created or generated)	Empowerment	Centrality of family <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many competencies are present or possible • Family strengths and capacities are focus of intervention; aim is to optimize these • Differences are seen as variations resulting from ecological factors; • Social structure and lack of resources make operation of existing competencies impossible • Access to resources by change community ecology • Participation is key: learning occurs best in a context of living 	Family takes action to get what they need <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use competencies to strengthen functioning • Collaboration and empowerment • Families lead; they control decision making and context in which family and professional interact and collaborate • Opportunities are created for people to exercise existing capabilities and develop new competencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal efficacy • Interpersonal efficacy • Motivation to exert control • More control over life • Skill development • Participatory behaviour in collective actions • Creation of renewable and expandable resources • Increased satisfaction • Interactive change on multiple levels, individual, psychological, organizational, and community
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Adapted from:

Dunst, C. (1985). Rethinking early intervention. *Analysis and Intervention in Developmental Disabilities*, 5, 165-201.

Rappaport, J. (1981). In praise of paradox: A social policy of empowerment over prevention. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 9, 1-25.

Turnbull, A.P., Turbiville, V. & Turnbull, H.R. (2000). Evolution of family-professional partnerships: collective empowerment as the model for the early twenty-first century. In J.P. Shonkoff & S.J. Meisels (Eds.) *Handbook of Early Childhood Intervention* (2nd ed., pp. 549-577). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Power-with relationships occur when there is collaborative decision making in the relationship between parents and professional. Professionals respect family members' competence, listen to their perspectives and are influenced by the knowledge and resources in the family system (Turnbull, et al., 2000). Collaboration occurs through information sharing and problem solving. A change in the power relationships between families and service providers occurs with power realignment from a power-over relationship to a power-with relationship. In this model parent and service provider each has some power to determine what issues should be included and what resources should be provided (Turnbull, et al., 2000). There is recognition of the value of knowledge, experience and expertise that both the professional and family members bring to the relationship (Turnbull, et al., 2000). Although power is shared, this model assumes a limited amount of power is available in the partnership and families who have been conditioned by professionals to be recipients of professional expertise, and professionals who have traditionally been the primary decision makers, often have difficulty sharing this power. As a result many, parents relinquish their planning and decision making task to the professional who agrees to advocate for the child. The end result is that in this model services to young children have continued to be more child than family oriented, and the actual outcomes of the family-centered intervention are still primarily child-centered, with child skill development the most commonly identified outcome (Turnbull, et al., 2000). Figure 4 summarizes the key components and outcomes of professional-parent relationships in the power-with model. The Participative Empowering model of early literacy demonstrated at the Ontario Early Years Centres, in programs such as Rhyme Time, may be classified as power-with models. Here parents contribute to the

success of the intervention through modeling, interacting with group members and briefly sharing the leadership role by demonstrating their own favourite songs and stories.

The family is also at the centre of the power-through intervention relationship, but instead of depending on the professional, the family takes the lead on what needs to be done. In this relationship the professional assumes the roles of facilitator, collaborator or partner, rather than expert or specialist. Equality must be established by working to counterbalance the natural imbalance that often occurs between professionals (the powerful) and families (the powerless) (Turnbull, et al., 2000). The professional recognizes and acknowledges the strengths and competencies existing in the family, works to optimize these and seeks to create opportunities for the family to use existing strengths and develop new ones. The synergy between the partners in the power-through relationship leads to the creation of power that works to enhance family functioning and empower family members. As parents expand their power they develop positive perceptions about themselves, their competencies, and their ability to achieve positive outcomes for their children and themselves. Figure 4 summarizes the many positive outcomes that occur in the power-through or empowerment model of early intervention. These support parent engagement in early interventions. As parents increase their control over their lives and their environment, their participation in intervention programs increases as they take action to get what they need. The Participatory Empowering model of early literacy intervention can be classified as a power-through relationship when the parent takes on the leadership role in the intervention and becomes the mentor engaging other parents, the Centre facilitator as a peer, and most importantly, their child.

Theoretical Background to the Research Question

This study is guided in part by the philosophy of social constructivism and the theoretical work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. He proposed that humans are embedded in a sociocultural matrix and that human behaviour cannot be understood independently of this ever-present matrix (Miller, 2002). He suggested that the beliefs and knowledge practices held by the particular community are transmitted in the form of social customs and discourses via the language and symbolism they communicate with, and continue to develop with each generation (Edwards, 2005). Vygotsky viewed knowledge as being socially constructed through talk and collaborative activity between individuals (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000). Learning and development are essential to each other so that instruction leads development (Graue, 1999).

Socioculturalists focus on children's participation in activities in their culture. The family culture defines what knowledge and skills children need to acquire, and give to them tools such as language, technologies, routines and strategies for functioning in the culture (Miller, 2002; Shonkoff, & Phillips, 2000). In some cultural communities, parents directly instruct children, play with them, and engage in conversations with them that are structured around materials and activities geared to the children's interests and abilities. In other communities children are expected to learn through observation and participation in adult activities and through play with siblings and peers (Shonkoff, & Phillips, 2000). Family culture will influence what children think about, what areas they gain skills in, how they acquire information and skills, when in development they are allowed to participate in certain activities, and who is allowed to participate (Miller, 2002). There are differences across cultures in the importance placed on reading compared with math,

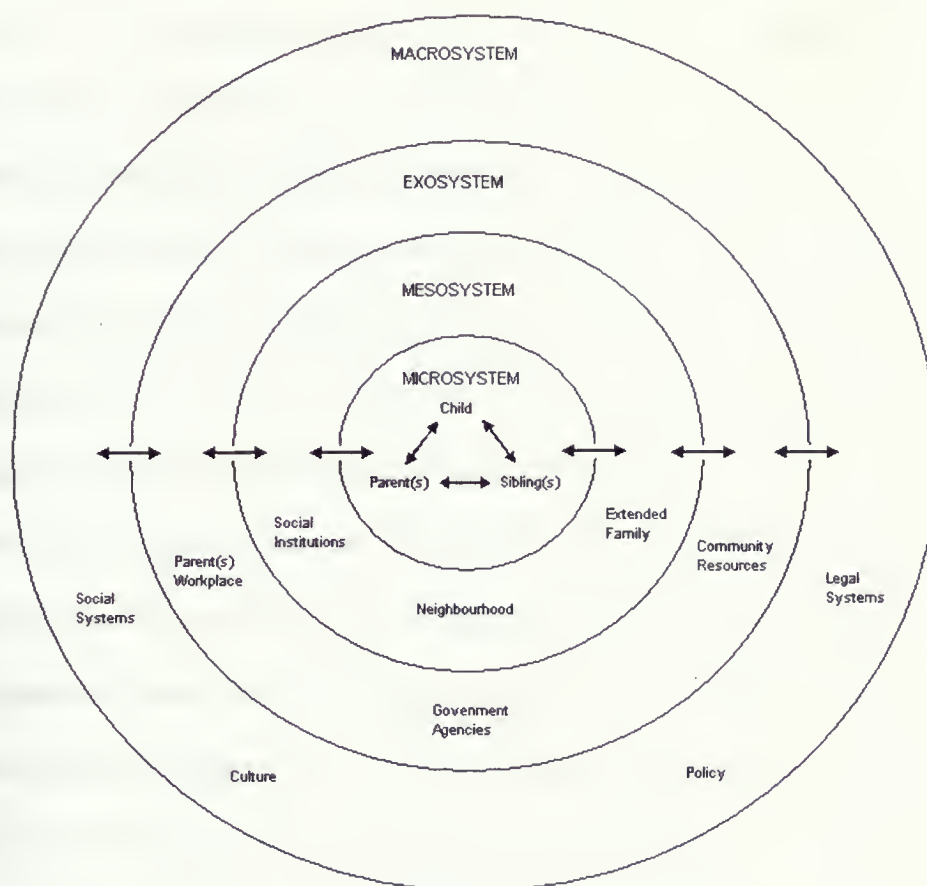
for instance, and the importance placed on being a well-rounded and happy child compared with being a good student (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Interactions between children and adults are viewed as crucial to the process of knowledge acquisition in sociocultural theory, where knowledge is defined in terms of the socio-historical practices, beliefs and experiences of the community into which the child is born (Edwards, 2005). Children gradually acquire the knowledge and then the psychological tools of the people of their community (John-Steiner & Mahan, 1996).

Vygotsky proposed that children's learning is best achieved when parents present material in the child's zone of proximal development, defined as tasks that are difficult for the child to perform independently but have components that can be accomplished with assistance (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Those who teach the child must collaborate with the child in joint cognitive activities that are carefully chosen to fit the child's level of potential development in order to advance his or her actual development (Graue, 1999). This process, known as scaffolding, emphasizes ways in which parents organize experiences with their children to provide them with the most effective levels of support (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Urie Bronfenbrenner further advanced these ideas when he demonstrated how the child's social and physical environments form layers that influence their development (Miller, 2002). The world of the child consists of five interacting systems the Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem, and Chronosystem (Figure 5) that are contextual in nature and offer a diversity of options and sources of growth (Swick & Williams, 2006). What happens in one system impacts the other systems.

Figure 5
Bronfenbrenner's Early Ecological Model of Child Development



The child is at the centre of this model and his immediate family is the most influential aspect of his environment (Figure 5). The relationship between parent and child plays a crucial role in the child's capacity to react with others and influences neural pathways for language and higher cognitive functions (McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007). Positive bi-directional interactions between parent and child will increase both parent and child engagement and motivation to increase literacy work. However, relationships between layers, as well as within layers, are important. The child and the environment directly affect each other during frequently occurring interactions; the child influences the environment and the environment influences the child. This bidirectional relationship

between a person's development and the environmental context occurs from infancy to adulthood.

The Bio-ecological Model of child development introduced in the early 1990s by Bronfenbrenner further refined these concepts and emphasized the dimension of the proximal processes, particular forms of interaction between the developing child and the environment. It detailed the influence of the characteristics of the developing person on the proximal processes, the features of the environment that foster or interfere with the development of the proximal processes, and the impact of the dimension of time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Since the nature of these interactions is dependant on the characteristics of the developing child and of the environment in which the processes are taking place different skills and learning styles may develop (Miller, 2002).

The interplay between early experiences, and how, where and when genes are activated has been the focus of recent research (Moffitt, 2005; Rutter, 2007). Experiences and environments in early life are thought to activate gene expression. Early nurturing and stimulation has beneficial effects while negative or non-existent interaction is thought to produce high levels of cortisol that negatively affect the regulation of genes involved in the formation of neural pathways (McCain, et al., 2007).

Studies show an interaction between genetically influenced child behaviour and parental response (Kochanska, 1995; Moffitt, 2005). Evocative gene-environment correlations indicate that a child's behaviour influences the responses that he elicits from other people (Rutter, 2007). To an important extent, a child's experiences are shaped by his own temperament and behaviour and in this way the likelihood of experiencing risky or protective environments is genetically influenced (Kochanska, 1995; Rutter, 2007).

Recent research about gene-environment interactions also suggest that environmental risks can affect people more strongly than previously thought, within genetically vulnerable parts of the population (Moffitt, 2005). Once genetically influenced behaviour has brought a person into contact with an environment, the environment may have unique effects of its own, limiting opportunities for development (Moffitt, 2005).

Finally, an understanding of Empowerment Theory is central to the examination of the research question. Empowerment is an ecological construct that applies to interactive change on multiple levels: individual, psychological, organizational, and community (Wallerstein, 1992). It involves a relationship between a person and his community, environment, or something outside of one's self (Rappaport, 1987), and an interaction between the individual and his environments that is culturally and contextually defined (Zimmerman, 1990). It is a process by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their affairs, gain control over issues that concern them, develop a critical awareness of their environment, and participate in decisions that affect their lives (Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998).

The central element in many definitions of empowerment is the process of taking action to get what one wants and needs (Turnbull, et al., 2000). The empowerment principle emphasizes control over and access to desired resources rather than provision of supports that are dependency forming and impede competence (Dunst, 2004; Rappaport, 1981).

At the individual level, empowerment includes participatory behaviour, motivation to exert control, and feelings of efficacy and control (Zimmerman, 1990). Empowered individuals have the knowledge and skills necessary to take effective action, the belief

that barriers to independence can be overcome, and the capacity and willingness to make such an effort (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998). Empowered persons may have no real power in the political sense, but may have an understanding of what choices can be made in different situations (Zimmerman, 1990). They may not always make the best or correct choice, but they know that they can choose. Empowered individuals would be expected to feel a sense of control, understand their environment, and become active in efforts to exert control (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998).

An empowerment approach considers wellness and competence, encourages independence and skill development, supports the changing of conditions to overcome barriers and encourages collaboration and working with others to overcome obstacles (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998). A goal of empowering interventions is to help people, organizations, and communities become more self-reliant and self-governing and less controlled by external forces (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998).

In practical terms, the outcome of the empowerment process is gaining mastery or control over the challenges one faces on a daily basis (Turnbull, et al., 2000). Empowerment suggests a belief in the power of people to be both the masters of their own fate and involved in the life of their several communities (Rappaport, 1987). Decision making, problem-solving and leadership skills are all components of empowerment (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998).

Empowerment processes are vital in early intervention programs, as it has become evident that how a program is delivered is as important as what is delivered. Julian Rappaport has proposed principles for a theory of empowerment that can be applied to early intervention programs. These are listed in the Appendix A.

Major Research Question

The goal of this study is to understand parental influences on the early development of literacy, and in particular how parental attitudes, beliefs and self efficacy impact parent and child engagement in early literacy intervention activities. Four major research questions were pursued:

- 1) “Do parental beliefs and attitudes change during parental engagement in early literacy intervention?”
- 2) “What parental beliefs and attitudes influence their engagement in early literacy intervention?”
- 3) “What type of literacy intervention empowers parents to increase their engagement in literacy activities with their children?” and
- 4) “Do empowered parents engage in more literacy interventions with their children than those who feel powerless?”

The hypothesis is that parents involved in participatory, empowering family literacy interventions will increase their engagement and interaction around literacy tasks more than those parents who are involved in a prescriptive, interventionist model family literacy intervention, or those who are involved in no intervention.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Mixed Methods

This research study used a mixed methods procedure in order to collect diverse types of data to best gain a comprehensive understanding of the research questions. This method has been recommended for the study of empowerment, where only using quantitative methods of analysis gives a limited understanding and the use of qualitative approaches further strengthens the research by reinforcing the quantitative data presented (Zimmerman, 1990; Kraus, 2000). By collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study, an effort is made to expand the understanding from one method to another and to confirm data from different data sources (Creswell, 2003).

A sequential strategy was used in this research to employ the mixed method approach. It involved beginning with quantitative data collection and analysis and moving to a qualitative approach to explore in-depth themes related to the questions at hand. It was hoped that this would provide a detailed examination of the questions and a comprehensive understanding of the issue as both emergent and pre-determined themes were viewed and addressed (Creswell, 2003). Field study of the participants, in both the quantitative and qualitative aspects, was an important component of this study.

Before research began, a research proposal was submitted to the Brock University Research Ethics Board and ethics approval was obtained (See Appendix B).

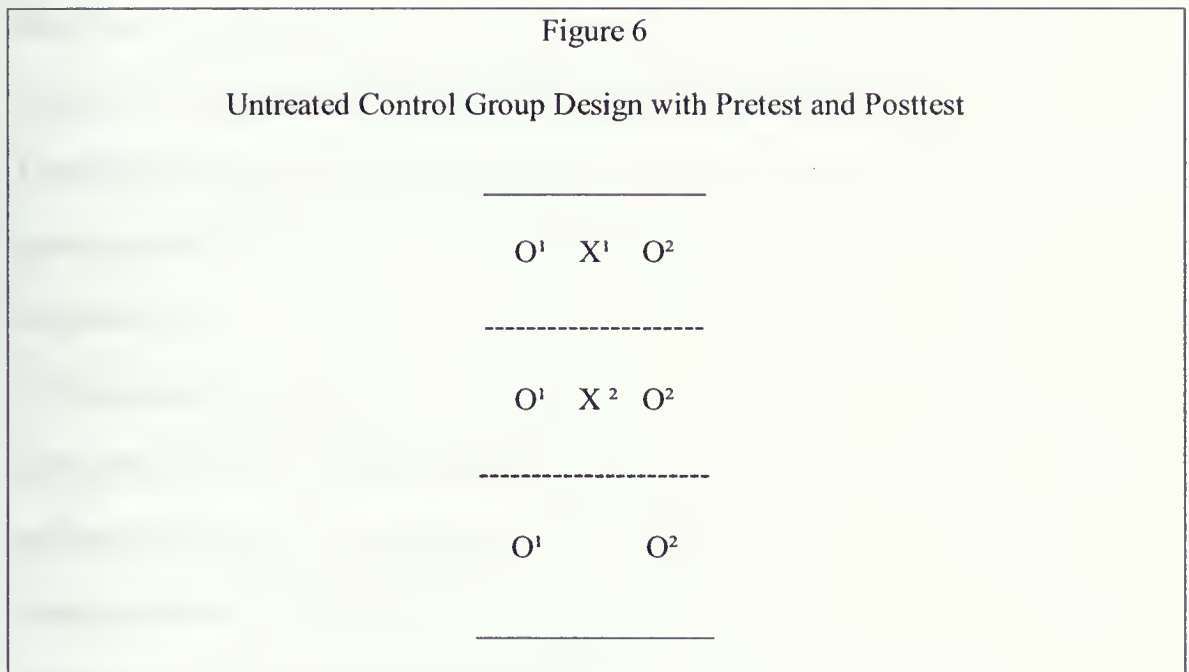
Quantitative

The quantitative aspect of this study describes and analyzes self-reported parental attitudes and behaviour towards early literacy development and measures changes in

parental empowerment. It examines parental beliefs about literacy development and levels of empowerment, prior to and following two different early literacy interventions. It also compares these to evidence provided by the control group.

Quantitative Research Design

The quantitative aspect used a quasi-experimental research design (Figure 6). This type of design is often used for the study of naturally occurring groups of individuals where practical or ethical issues do not allow for random selection of participants (Cook & Campbell, 1979). The independent variable in this design is measured rather than manipulated (Stangor, 2004).



Legend: O¹ = Dependent variable Pre Intervention

O² = Dependent variable Post Intervention

X¹ = Independent variable, Literacy Intervention One: Prescriptive

X² = Independent variable, Literacy Intervention Two: Participative

A comparison group before-after design was employed, using two different types of literacy interventions and one control group (Figure 7). With a comparison group before-after design the use of a control group for comparison allows control for some of the threats to internal validity and attrition that occur with time in before-after studies (Stangor, 2004).

Qualitative

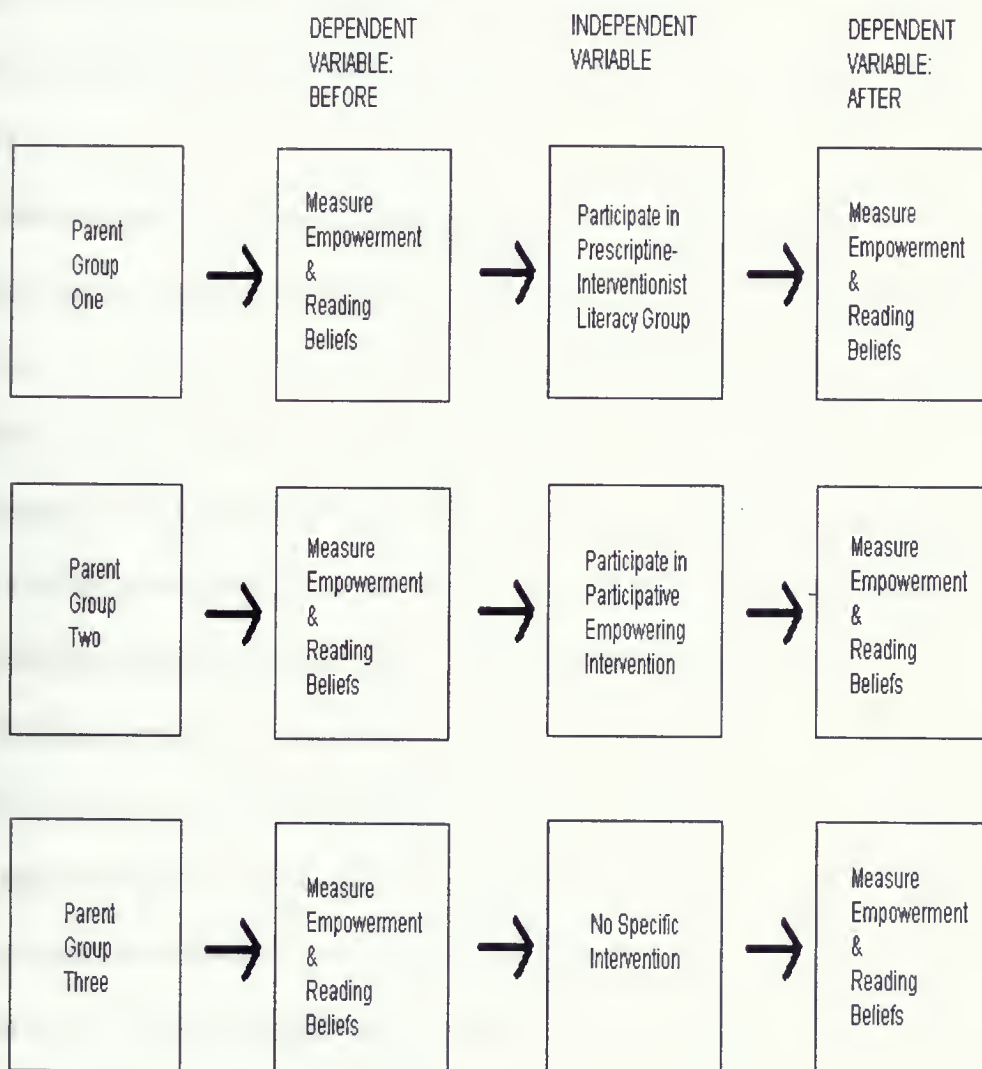
The qualitative aspects of this study are focused on understanding the factors that influence the literacy work that parents engage in with their preschool children. By describing and analyzing themes related to parental attitudes and beliefs about reading to their children, and exploring, with them, their engagement in early literacy activities, I hoped to gain a better understanding of how they felt about their ability to influence early literacy development and how they engaged in intervention in their home. I also hoped to gain an understanding of how parents viewed and used community supports and interventions.

The qualitative questions to be answered were: “Do parents of at-risk children value early literacy?”, “Do they support and participate in early literacy activities?”, “What influences parents of at-risk children to engage in early literacy activities such as storybook reading?”, “What are the parental attitudes and beliefs that impact on literacy intervention use”, and finally, “Are there barriers that limit the involvement of some parents and their children, and if so what are they, and can they be breeched?”

Figure 7

Quasi-Experimental Research Design

COMPARISON GROUP BEFORE-AFTER DESIGN



Qualitative Research Design

To research these questions, I used a phenomenological approach and conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews of six representative parents of young children.

Phenomenology is an approach to studying a problem or concept that includes entering the field of perception of the participants; seeing how they experience, live, and display the concept; and looking for the meaning of the participants' experience (Creswell, 1998).

Phenomenological study describes the meaning individuals give to the lived experience of a concept (Creswell, 1998). In phenomenological research the researcher strives to identify the essence of human experiences or the central underlying meaning, rather than generalizations, concerning a concept as described by participants in the study (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2003; Krycka, 2005). The concept of intentionality is integral, for if we are to understand why people do things, we have to understand the meanings and interpretations they give to their actions (Rice & Ezzy, 2000).

Everyday events are studied from within the life-world of the person experiencing them with the aim of trying to determine what an experience means for the person who has had the experience and is able to provide a comprehensive description of it. (Rice & Ezzy, 2000). An attempt is made to gain an understanding of the lived experience. This procedure involves studying a small number of subjects, ranging from 5 to 25 (Creswell, 1998), through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (Creswell, 2003).

Participants

Participants were naturally occurring members of a population of parents who, with their children, attended an Ontario Early Years Centre or a Community Action Program for Children (CAPC) sponsored site. Ontario Early Years Centres were established across Ontario, with funding from the Ontario Government, to form a strong network of supports accessible to all families with young children. CAPC programs were established across Canada, with funding from the Federal Government, to provide programs that address the health and development of young children who are living in conditions of risk. Both provide programming targeted at young children to age six years, both are part of the Hamilton Best Start Network and both provide drop-in and scheduled programs in at risk neighbourhoods.

Sixty- two participants entered into this research. All families participating in this study had pre-school children under the age of six and spoke functional English. All agreed to participate in the research study and signed an informed consent. Twenty participants were sought for each group, the Prescriptive Interventionist type literacy intervention group, the Participative Empowering type literacy intervention group and the non-specific intervention Control group. Since all participants were parts of naturally occurring groups, some groups initially had more than 20 participants. All participants were recruited from the population of families who attended an Early Years Centre or CAPC site whose mandate was to provide programming to the surrounding neighbourhoods. The Early Years Centre and CAPC site were located in two of the geographic areas identified on the 2002 Early Development Instrument (EDI) as housing a large percentage of children with low scores on two domains of the EDI relevant to this

study. The EDI is a 120-item questionnaire filled out by Kindergarten teachers on all the children in their class. Information collected using the EDI is analyzed at a group level, rather than an individual level (Hamilton Early Years Reporting Project, 2003). The EDI gives an average score for groups of children and can help determine the number of developmentally vulnerable or at-risk children in a city, community or neighbourhood (Hamilton Early Years Reporting Project, 2004). Vulnerable children are defined as those in the bottom 10 percent of scores on any one of the EDI sub-scales. The EDI was administered in Hamilton in 2002 and was repeated in the spring of 2005. The two domains of the EDI included in the determination were the Language and Cognitive Development, and the Communication Skills and General Knowledge domains. Postal codes were collected from the participants to determine whether they did indeed live in these neighbourhoods.

A purposive sample of 6 participant parents, a small subgroup of the sixty-two participants, participated in the qualitative research. All members of the research sample were informed of the need for qualitative research participants and of the potential to be part of the qualitative interview at the time of administration of the quantitative pre-test. Again at the quantitative post-test administration, participants were informed of the qualitative research and asked if they would be willing to participate. Some individuals, about 6%, declined participation in the qualitative interview, but those who accepted were placed on lists according to their research group. After the completion of the quantitative data collection the researcher returned to the lists and began sequentially contacting individuals, by telephone, to participate in the interview. Interviews were then arranged with the first two consenting individuals contacted from each of the Prescriptive

Interventionist, the Participative Empowering and the Control research group lists. Interview consents were signed and two individuals from each of the three research groups participated in an in-depth interview at a time and place convenient to them. Three of the qualitative interviewees were mothers who participated in the CAPC sponsored programs; three attended the OEYC sponsored programs.

Instrumentation

Instruments included in the quantitative study include the following four paper and pencil measures: 1) Parent Information, a 15 item demographic survey administered once to the participating parents; 2) Parent Reading Belief Inventory, a 15 item pre and post parental belief and attitude scale; 3) MIPPA, a pre and post parent empowerment scale; and 4) a Weekly Literacy Diary.

1) Parent Information

This 15 item questionnaire was constructed by the researcher to provide basic information on the literacy demographics of the families in the research population. The questionnaire includes questions about child's age, language spoken at home, book reading practice and patterns, accessibility to books and use of community resources such as the library and Ontario Early Years Centres. It includes the first three digits of the home postal code only, so anonymity is maintained, but membership in the at-risk population can be determined. (Appendix C)

2) Parent Reading Belief Inventory

This 15 item measure was adapted from the Parent Reading Belief Inventory (PRBI) designed by DeBaryshe and Binder (1994) as an attitude scale to measure parental beliefs about reading. The PRBI was designed to assess parents' beliefs about the goals and

process of reading aloud to young children, attitudes about what and how children learn, as well as the parent's self-efficacy as a teacher (DeBaryshe & Binder, 1994; DeBaryshe, 1995). Parents indicate on a 4-point scale the degree to which they agree to each statement. The parents' responses are summed to form a total score, with high scores reflecting beliefs consistent with theories of early literacy development (DeBaryshe & Binder, 1994). The total PRBI score therefore serves as a measure of reading related beliefs. A high score of 60 would indicate perfect agreement with the views implicit in the measure. In the development of this measure DeBaryshe and Binder (1994) indicated that a mean item score of 3.2 indicates a moderate agreement and that parents who score in the average to high range hold beliefs that are compatible with current approaches to language development and emergent literacy. The two week test-retest reliability for this measure is .79 and it has shown an acceptable internal consistency of .50 to .85 (DeBaryshe & Binder, 1994). The measure was administered pre and post literacy intervention (see Appendix E). A reliability analysis completed by this researcher showed a rather low Cronbach's Alpha ranging from .45 to .55 for the Pre-scale and .48 to .55 for the post scale. Given that the reliability was low in this research sample the test results must be interpreted with caution because of the low degree of consistency with which the PRBI performed.

3) Measure of Empowerment-Capacity to Act (MIPPA)

This 30 item measure of parental empowerment was adapted from a measure of empowerment constructed and tested by Le Bosse', Dufort, & Vandette (2004). The measure consists of three factors which are summed. Factor 1 has 16 items that are summed to measure the capacity to act. Factor 2 consisting of 10 items looking at the

presence of a critical conscience or self evaluation, while Factor 3 consisting of four Likert type questions reviewing feelings of personal effectiveness. The MIPPA was administered pre and post literacy intervention (See Appendix F). A reliability analysis completed by this researcher showed a Cronbach's Alpha ranging from .63 to .77 for the Pre-scale and .56 to .66 for the post scale.

4) Weekly Literacy Diary

Each participating parent was asked to complete a weekly chart of family literacy activities. Parents were to record the frequency with which they engaged in literacy activities such as storybook reading and storytelling with their children. The weekly scores were summed to yield a single measure of literacy exposure, with high scores indicating greater exposure of a child to early literacy activities in the home (Appendix D). Unfortunately the rate of return for this measure was poor, with inconsistencies in how it was completed by participants across the three groups, so this measure was not analyzed.

5) Field Study

In many cases at least one home visit was made to collect pre or post intervention data and this allowed the researcher to see interactions between parent and child in their natural environment and observe the home literacy environment. In cases where a home visit was not made individual parent-child interaction was observed at the group site.

Procedure and Data Collection: Quantitative

Consenting families were asked to complete the demographic survey and literacy diary when they first met the researcher, at a pre-intervention site visit, where the research was explained and signed consents obtained. The remaining instruments were

administered to the adults, by the researcher, on that first visit and the last scheduled intervention sessions. This took between twenty and forty minutes, depending on the level of activity occurring at the test administration site. During the instrument administration the involved children were engaged by the researcher, another parent, or the Centre staff, in play activities such as doing puzzles, looking at books, colouring or creating with play-doh. This was to maximize the parent's ability to concentrate on completing the research materials. Participants were given a hard cover Sesame Street storybook at the post-test administration.

Group One – Group Intervention: Prescriptive Interventionist

Twenty-one parents who had registered to attend a 6 to 8 session Prescriptive Interventionist type literacy based community group at an Ontario Early Years Centre in the targeted geographic area were asked to participate in the research. Several different community based literacy interventions currently run out of, or are facilitated by, Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYC) staff, on a rotating basis. Research participants in the Prescriptive Interventionist group attended a School Readiness program at one of three different schools, or a Family Math program at the Ontario Early Years Centre. The School Readiness programs, led by an OEYC Early Childhood Educator, brought parents and young children into their neighbourhood schools to sample literacy activities and learn about school culture with the aim of helping the children develop positive attitudes towards school and learning. The Family Math program, despite its name, was a preschool literacy and numeracy program. In this program families explored and experienced literacy and basic math concepts. The focus was on parents learning to work and play with their child to help their child develop positive learning attitudes. All of the

four Prescriptive Interventionist groups attended by study participants had the similar aim of engaging parents and children in activities that would stimulate early literacy development and facilitate preparation for school attendance.

Baseline measures were recorded prior to commencement of the literacy intervention by the researcher. Pre - intervention participants were asked to complete the 12 item family demographic questionnaire, the 15 item PRBI, and the MIPPA empowerment scale. Prior to the literacy intervention the parents were asked to begin a weekly diary of time spent in early literacy activities including joint book reading, singing and related play, and library use. This was to serve as the base-line and parents were asked to continue to complete the diary each week for the period of intervention. Post intervention participants were also asked to complete a post PRBI attitude scale and a post MIPPA empowerment scale, identical to the pre-scales used.

Group Two- Intervention: Participative, Empowering

Twenty parents who registered to attend one of two Rhyme Time community literacy groups, one at an Ontario Early Years Centre, and the second at a Community Recreation Centre, in the targeted geographic areas were asked to consent to participate in the research. They formed the Participative Empowering intervention group. Rhyme Time, a 6 to 8 session interactive program for parents and young children, focused on introducing families to the pleasure and power of rhymes, songs and stories. Both parents and children were encouraged to participate in a mix of planned and spontaneous literacy activities.

Baseline measures were recorded prior to commencement of the intervention by the researcher. Participants were asked to complete the 12 item family demographic

questionnaire, the 15 item PRBI attitude scale, and the MIPPA empowerment scale. Prior to the literacy intervention the parents were asked to begin a weekly diary of time spent in early literacy activities including joint book reading, singing and related play, and library use. This served as the base-line and parents were asked to continue to complete the diary each week for the period of intervention. Post intervention participants were asked to complete a post attitude scale and a post empowerment scale, identical to the pre-scales used.

Group Three- Control Group, No Specific Intervention

Originally twenty-one parents who attended one of two community drop-in programs for parents and young children formed the Control group. Of these twenty-one, one individual was withdrawn from the sample because she did not meet the criteria of parenting a young child, and was unable to sign an informed consent. A second individual was lost despite repeated attempts to contact her by telephone and letter. The final nineteen control group participants attended community drop-in programs located in the same Early Years Centre and the same Community Recreation Centre in which the Group Two literacy interventions classified as the Participative Empowering interventions were held. The agencies that sponsored these drop-in programs had a mandate and government funding to provide programs and services for children and families with young children to age six, and both were in one of the geographic areas in Hamilton identified on the 2002 Early Development Instrument (EDI) as housing large percentages of children with low scores on the two domains of the EDI of interest. Participants were approached to consent to research and to form the control group receiving no specific literacy intervention. Baseline measures were recorded by the

researcher at the commencement of a six week period. Participants were asked to complete the 12 item family demographic questionnaire, the 15 item Parent Reading Belief Inventory, and the 30 item MIPPA pre empowerment scale. Parents were also asked to begin a weekly diary of time spent in early literacy activities, including joint book reading, singing and related play, and library use. This was to serve as the base-line and parents were asked to continue to complete the diary each week for 6 to 8 weeks, matching the duration of intervention one and two. At the conclusion of this time a post Reading Belief Scale and a post MIPPA empowerment scale were again administered.

In all three research groups, those individuals who did not attend the final group session were contacted by telephone and arrangements were made to meet with them, either in their home or a community location, to complete the post intervention measures. Each participant was given a children's picture-book after completion of the intervention. One participant was lost to the study, despite several attempts to contact, by telephone and letter. In a number of cases, however, because of the mobility of this sample (several families traveled outside of the province for a prolonged period), the time between end of intervention and research tool administration was greater than 8 weeks.

Quantitative Data Analysis

All quantitative data analysis utilized SPSS computer statistical software version 12. Once data collection was complete, descriptive statistics were used to review data on the demographic questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire served as a comparison for the backgrounds of three groups, and as an indicator of the early literacy activities of the parents of this population of at-risk young children.

The Weekly Literacy Diaries were totaled and means were computed with a plan to compare parental engagement in literacy activities, over the three groups, pre intervention and changes in engagement in literacy activities post intervention. A decision was made to not proceed further with data analysis due to the small number of Diaries obtained and the variability across the research sample in how the Diaries were completed by participants.

The group means of the Parent Reading Belief Inventory were computed to compare initial attitudes over the three groups and changes in group means of attitudes and beliefs post intervention. A paired- sample t test was performed on each of the three groups to assess for significant changes within each group in attitude and belief about early literacy pre and post intervention. Analysis of variance was conducted across the three research groups on the post Parent Reading Belief Inventory to assess for significant difference in attitudes and beliefs between groups-post intervention.

After the three factors of the MIPPA pre and post empowerment scales were computed and summed, the means of the MIPPA were compared to determine changes in levels of empowerment within and across the three groups. A paired- sample t test was performed on each of the three groups to assess for significant changes, within each group, in empowerment pre and post intervention. Analysis of variance was conducted across the three research groups on the post MIPPA to assess for significant differences in empowerment between groups post intervention.

Procedure Data Collection: Qualitative

All members of the research sample were informed of the need for qualitative research participants at the time of pre-test. Again at the post-test administration, participants were

informed of the qualitative research and asked if they would be willing to participate. Several declined, but those who accepted were placed on a list according to their research group. After the completion of the quantitative data collection the researcher returned to the list and began sequentially contacting individuals, by telephone, to participate in the interview. Interviews were then arranged with the first two individuals contacted from each research group. Interview consents were signed and an in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted with six families. All parents but one were interviewed in their homes about their thoughts, feelings and actions regarding early literacy and child development. One individual chose to be interviewed in a quiet secure room in the Early Years Centre she attended. Participants were asked to discuss their family life, their view of childhood and their day to day activities with their preschool child. Field notes were made to document the home environment, particularly the presence of books, newspapers, magazines, puzzles and any interactions between any family members in attendance. The interviews were semi-structured and used open-ended questions (See Appendix G). They were tape-recorded, transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy by the researcher before being analyzed. Participants were given a ten dollar gift card for participating.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The interviews and field notes were reviewed three times with the question “How does this participant experience parenting a preschool child and how does he/she feel about participating in early literacy intervention activities?” in mind, before a thematic analysis was conducted. Open coding was used by the researcher to intensively examine the data line by line until themes began to emerge. Focused coding was then employed to

determine key themes identified during open coding and to identify relationships among themes in all the interviews. Once the major themes had been established the researcher returned to the literature to verify whether results were consistent with the findings of other researchers. The thematic analysis was presented for review by another qualitative researcher to explore biases and establish an audit trail. A decision was made not to present the interview transcript to the interview participants due to the English reading literacy level of the participants.

Methodological Assumptions and Limitations

I expected that the in-depth interviews would elicit rich data that would provide thematic information about the family literacy experiences of the families living with their young children in at risk neighbourhoods in Hamilton. I expected that this material, together with the quantitative analysis data, would provide a comprehensive view of each family's early literacy involvement and their engagement in emergent literacy experiences and early interventions. It was hoped that the combined data would help to elicit information about the influence of parental beliefs and attitudes on early literacy intervention use.

One of the limitations of this research is the empowerment tool. The MIPPA, recently developed by Le Bosse', Dufort and Vandette (2004), has shown acceptable psychometric properties in early testing, but future testing and refinement is still needed. It is however one of the few empowerment tools available to date. Zimmerman & Warschausky (1998) suggest that measures to test empowerment include a Likert-type scale to assess the intrapersonal component, but also suggest the use of additional measures to assess knowledge about resources, understanding about causal agents and

what influences them, problem-solving skills assessment and reports of participatory behaviours to assess the behavioural component of empowerment (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998). The use of the Parent Reading Belief Inventory and the Weekly Reading Diary was designed to achieve part of this goal. It has been suggested that the use of personal stories and narratives would be beneficial to help the researcher understand empowerment from the perspective of the population under study (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998). While the qualitative aspects of this research serve that purpose, it is beyond the scope of this project to extend the qualitative assessment to the total quantitative population examined.

A second limitation is the over-saturation of research projects being conducted in the population being studied. While, to my knowledge, no other study is examining empowerment in contrasting early intervention methods, others are looking at community engagement in risk populations. In addition, Hamilton is currently the pilot site for two new government funded early years initiatives that include an evaluation component. There was a concern that territorialism could interfere with obtaining the desired sample.

Careful selection of the population and study design are meant to reduce some threats such as maturational and history threats, but attrition is also a potential concern in that it may be difficult to determine the reason that individuals leave the early intervention since disengagement may be a by-product of a parent involved in a non-empowering early intervention. Attrition in comparison group before-after group designs is always a concern and the researcher must determine the significance of the characteristics of the individuals who leave the intervention, or in the case of naturally occurring groups, the individuals who fail to join the group intervention in the first place versus those who

complete the entire intervention. Maturity is less likely to cause a threat to validity because the control group matures at the same time as the intervention group.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Demographic Data

The research sample consisted of 60 participants. Over 80 % of the respondents were mothers. Eight percent were fathers. The remainder identified themselves as parent or did not respond. Table 1 shows the frequency and percentages of participants' relationship to child across all three research groups.

Table 1. Research Sample (60) Relationship to Child

	Mom	Dad	Parent	No Response
Prescriptive	85.7% (18)	9.5% (2)	4.8% (1)	
Control	84.2% (16)	15.8% (3)		
Participatory	70% (14)		25% (5)	5% (1)
Group Total (60)	80% (48)	8% (5)	10% (6)	2% (1)

One third of participants in this study were identified as having more than one child under the age of six. Twenty three percent identified as having a four year old. Another one third (33.3%) stated their identified child was age four or older.

As shown in Table 2, Age of Child, there was a difference in the identified ages between the three study groups. In the Prescriptive group 65% of the parents identified that their child was between 4 years old and six years old. This compared to 26% in the Control group and 5% in the Participatory group. In the Participatory group 50% of the children were age 2 or under. Forty-two percent of the Control group had more than one

child under age 6 compared to 30% in the Participatory group and 28.6% in the Prescriptive group.

Table 2. Age of Child

	Prescriptive	Control	Participatory	Total
Under One Year		10.5% (2)	15% (3)	8.3% (5)
Age 1		5.3% (1)	5% (1)	3.3% (2)
Age 2		10.5% (2)	30% (6)	13.3% (8)
Age 3	4.8% (1)	5.3% (1)	15% (3)	8.3% (5)
Age 4	52.4% (11)	10.5% (2)	5% (1)	23.3% (14)
Age 5	9.5% (2)	15.8% (3)		8.3% (5)
Age 6	4.8% (1)			1.6% (1)
More Than One Under 6	28.6% (6)	42.1% (8)	30% (6)	33.3% (20)
Total	100% (21)	100% (19)	100% (20)	

Sixty-seven per cent of the participants identified a language other than English as the main language they spoke in their home. Twenty different languages other than English were identified by participants as their home language. Twenty of the sixty participant families (33%) spoke primarily English. Next to English, Urdu 8.3 % (5), Chinese/Mandarin 8.3% (5) and Gujarati 6.7% (4) were the most frequent languages spoken at home. Figure 8 shows the Home languages of the participants in this study.

Over 70% of the study participants indicated they read to their child (Figure 9) and a large percentage, 65%, indicated they started reading by one year of age (Figure10). Families varied on the number of books they owned, with 15% having less than 5 and 18% indicating they owned over one hundred (Figure 11).

Figure 8. Home Languages Spoken by Study Participants (n=60)

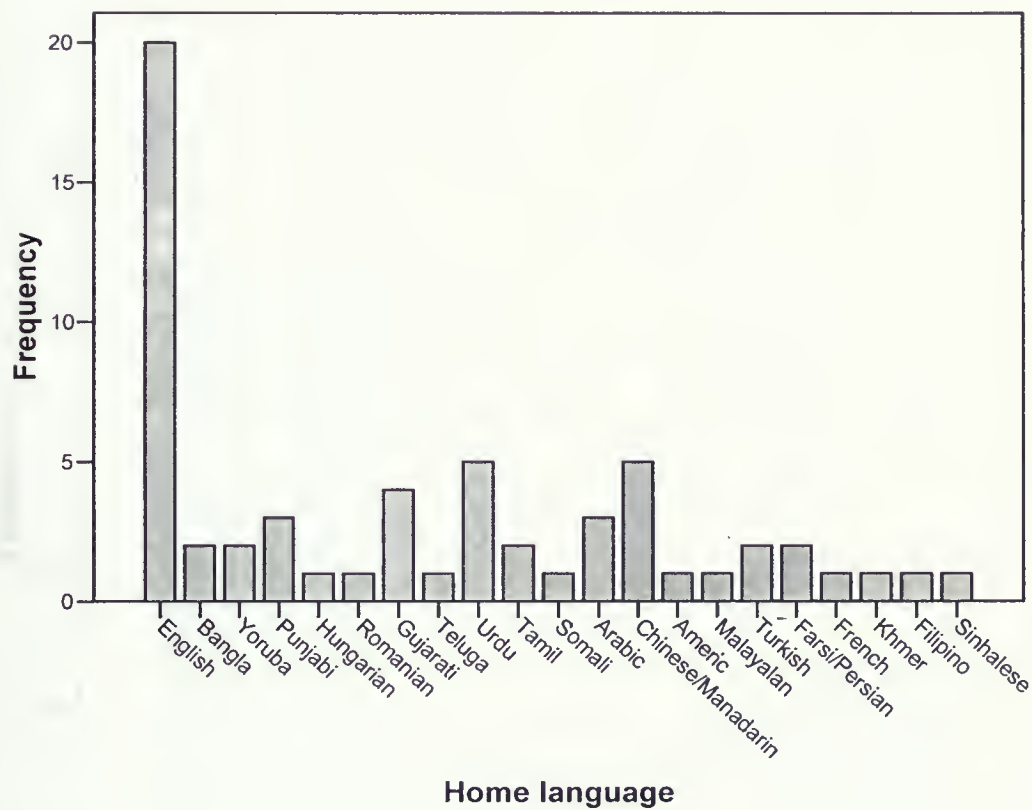


Figure 9. Story-book Reading Behaviour of Study Participants (n=60)

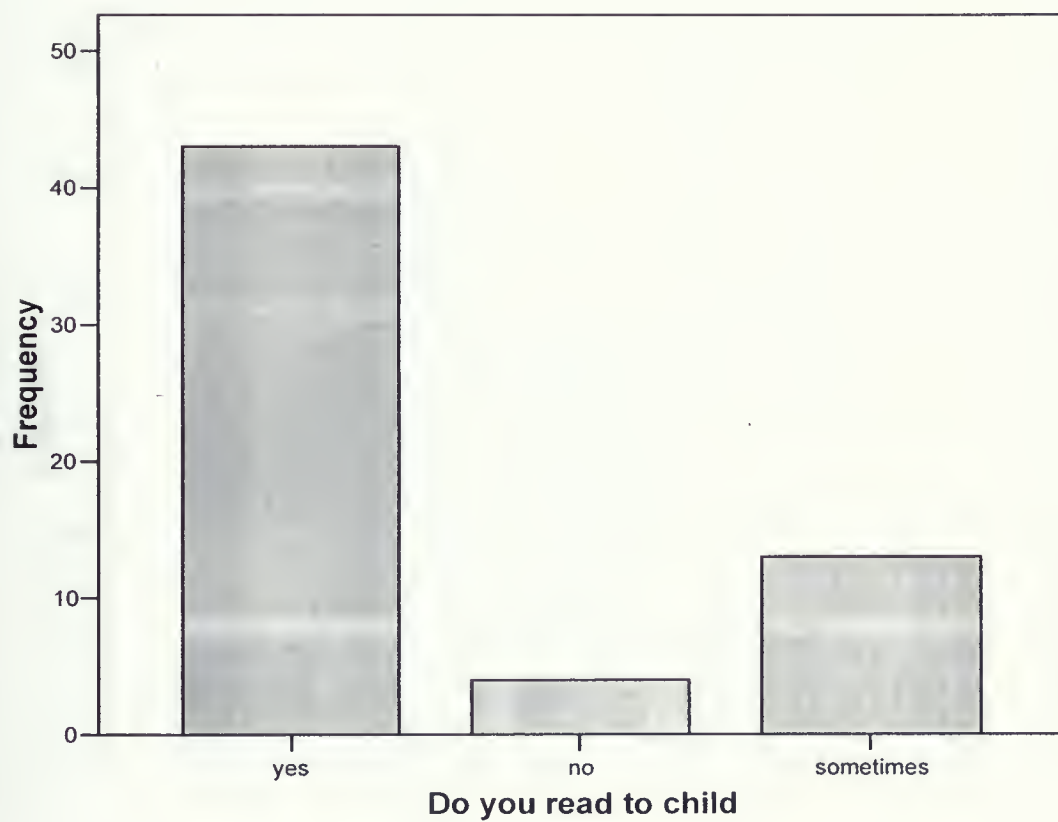


Figure 10. Age Study Participants First Read To Child (n=60)

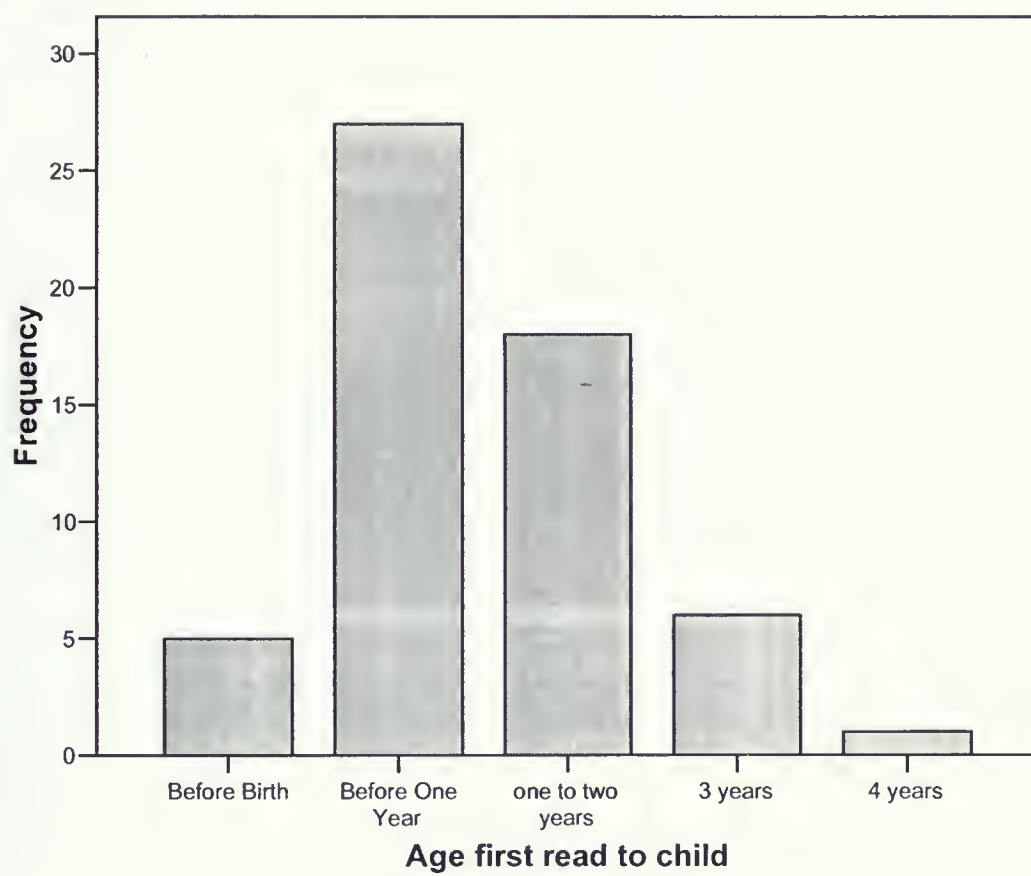


Figure 11. Number of Books Owned by Study Participants (n=60)

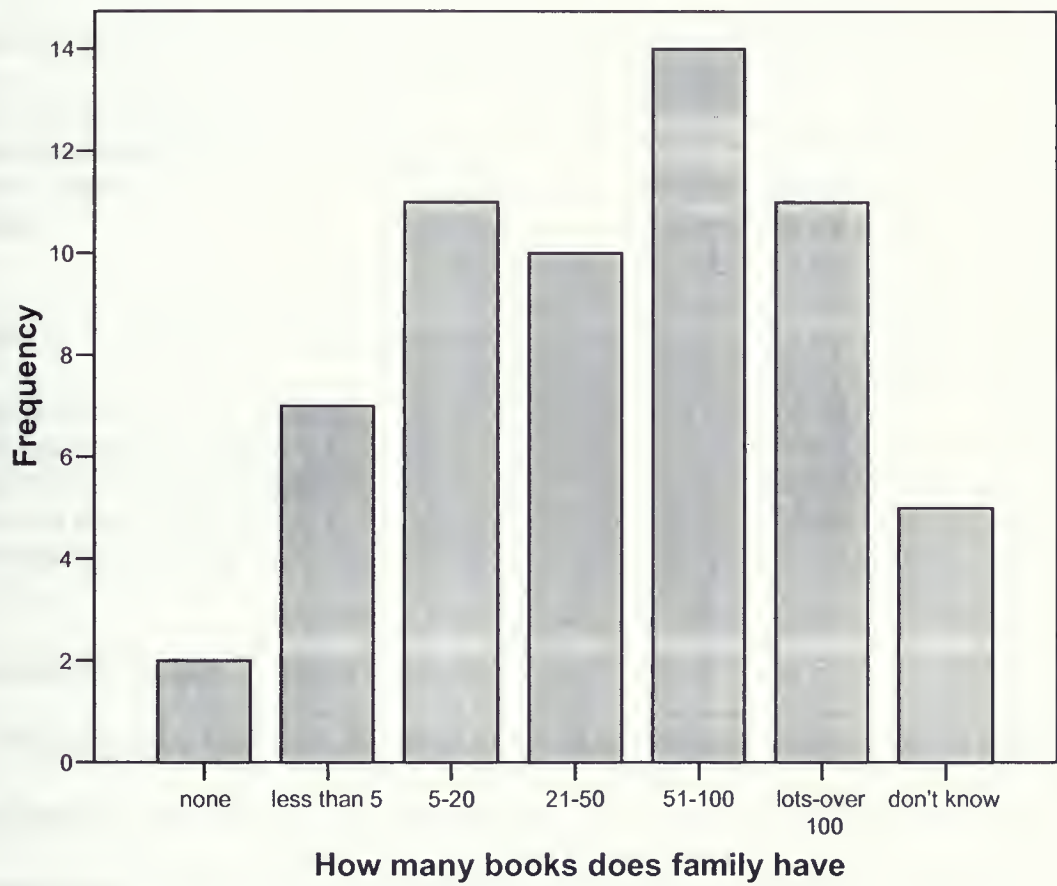


Table 3. Why Parents Attended Group (Top 5 Responses) Prescriptive Group

Prepare for School	33.3% (7)
Get Knowledge/To Learn	14.3% (3)
See Problems Earlier and Get Help	9.5% (2)
Learn Math Skills	9.5% (2)
Get Help Teaching Reading	9.5% (2)

Table 4. Why Parents Attended Group (Top Responses) Control Group

Play and Interact With Other Children	31.6% (6)
Get Knowledge/To Learn	15.8% (3)
No Response	26.3% (5)
Other	26.3% (5)

Table 5. Why Parents Attended Group (Top 5 Responses) Participative Group

Play and Interact With Others	20% (4)
Get Knowledge/To Learn	15% (3)
Learn/Teach Reading/Literacy	10% (2)
Child to Enjoy and Learn	10% (2)
Develop Good Habits	10% (2)

Quantitative Results

The quantitative aspect of this study sought to describe and analyze parental attitudes and behaviour towards early literacy development and to measure changes in parental empowerment. It examined parental beliefs about literacy development and levels of empowerment, prior to and following two different early literacy interventions. It also compared these to evidence of control group empowerment.

Parent Reading Belief Inventory

The group means of the Parent Reading Belief Inventory (PRBI) were computed to compare initial attitudes over the three groups and changes in group means of attitudes

and beliefs post intervention. A high score of 60 would indicate perfect agreement with the views implicit in the measure. In the development of this measure DeBaryshe and Binder (1994) indicated that a mean item score of 3.2 indicates a moderate agreement and that parents who score in the average to high range hold beliefs that are compatible with current approaches to language development and emergent literacy. Table 6 shows the PRBI scores obtained pre and post test administration. The mean item scores were in the average range with scores from 3.15 to 3.29 indicating parents tended to agree, but not strongly agree with the views in the inventory.

Table 6. Mean Item Comparison of Parent Reading Belief Inventory Scores

Group	Time	Total Scale Mean	Mean Item
Prescriptive	Pre	48.24	3.22
	Post	49.28	3.29
Participative	Pre	47.30	3.15
	Post	48.65	3.24
Control	Pre	47.89	3.19
	Post	49.31	3.29

A paired- sample *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether there was a change in parental beliefs and attitudes, after the literacy intervention, in all three groups of participants.

In the Prescriptive Interventionist group, the results indicated that the mean for the post-test ($M = 49.28$, $SD = 4.20$) is not significantly greater than the mean for the pre-test ($M = 48.24$, $SD = 5.53$), $t(20) = 0.91$, $p > .05$. The standardized effect size index, d was

.20 indicating a small effect size; η^2 was .04. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference between the two tests was -3.44 to 1.35.

In the Participative Empowering group, the results indicated that the mean for the post-test ($M = 48.65$, $SD = 6.45$) was not significantly greater than the mean for the pre-test ($M = 47.30$, $SD = 12.11$), $t(19) = 0.58$, $p > .05$. The standardized effect size index, d , was .13, indicating a small effect size; η^2 was .02. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference between the two tests was -6.19 to 3.49.

In the Control group, the results indicated the mean for the post-test ($M = 49.31$, $SD = 4.69$) is not significantly greater than the mean for the pre-test ($M = 47.89$, $SD = 9.21$), $t(18) = 0.84$, $p > .05$. The standardized effect size index d , was .19 indicating a small effect size; η^2 was .04. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference between the two tests was -4.97 to 2.13.

A univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to evaluate the relationship between the interventions and the change in the attitudes and beliefs about literacy intervention. The independent variable, the intervention group, included three levels: Prescriptive, Control and Participative. The dependant variable was the change in literacy attitudes and beliefs as measured by the post Reading Belief Inventory.

The dependant variable was the PRBI post-test score. The ANOVA was not significant, $F(2, 57) = .024$, $p = .98$. The standard deviations ranged from 3.9 to 5.3 and the variances ranged from 14.4 to 28.9, indicating the variances were somewhat different from each other. The test of homogeneity of variance was nonsignificant, $p = .98$. The strength of the relationship between group attendance and attitudes and beliefs as

measured on the PRBI, as assessed by η^2 was .001, indicating a very small effect size or difference between the means on the dependant variable.

The results of the one-way ANOVA do not support the hypothesis that different types of literacy intervention groups have a differential effect on parental early literacy attitudes and beliefs as measured by the Reading Belief Inventory.

Measure of Empowerment Capacity to Act (MIPPA)

A paired- sample t test was conducted to evaluate whether there was a change in group levels of empowerment, after the literacy intervention, in all three groups of participants.

In the Prescriptive Interventionist group, the results indicated that the mean for the post-test ($M = 91.61$, $SD = 17.48$) was significantly less than the mean for the pre-test ($M = 98.81$, $SD = 16.05$), $t(20) = 3.34$, $p < .01$. The standardized effect size index d , was .73, indicating a large effect size; η^2 was .36, also indicating a large effect size. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference between the two tests was 2.70 to 11.69.

In the Participative Empowering group, the results indicated that the mean for the post-test ($M = 99.64$, $SD = 11.16$) is not significantly greater than the mean for the pre-test ($M = 97.81$, $SD = 16.33$), $t(19) = -.69$, $p > .01$. The standardized effect size index d was .16, indicating a small effect size; η^2 was .03. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference between the two tests was -7.37 to 3.69.

In the Control group, the results indicated the mean for the post-test ($M = 91.70$, $SD = 13.66$) is not significantly less or greater than the mean for the pre-test ($M = 93.63$, $SD = 15.68$), $t(18) = .48$, $p > .01$. The standardized effect size index d was .11, indicating a small effect size; η^2 was .01. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference between the two tests was -6.45 to 10.29.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to evaluate the relationship between the literacy interventions and the change in empowerment as measured by the Measure of Empowerment Capacity to Act (MIPPA). The independent variable, the intervention group, included three levels: Prescriptive, Control and Participative. The dependant variable was the post intervention MIPPA.

The ANOVA was not significant, $F(2, 57) = 2.05, p = .14$. The standard deviations ranged from 11.16 to 17.48 and the variances ranged from 14.4 to 28.9, indicating the variances were somewhat different from each other. The test of homogeneity of variance was nonsignificant, $p = .21$. The strength of the relationship between group attendance and attitudes and beliefs as measured on the PRBI, as assessed by η^2 was .07, indicating a very small effect size or difference between the means on the dependant variable.

The results of the one-way ANOVA do not support the hypothesis that different types of literacy intervention groups have a differential effect on parental empowerment as measured by the MIPPA.

The quantitative aspect of this study sought to describe and analyze parental attitudes and behaviour towards early literacy development and to measure changes in parental empowerment. In answer to the first research question “Do parental beliefs and attitudes change during parental engagement in early literacy intervention?”, the quantitative study found that there was no significant difference in the attitudes and beliefs about early literacy in the parents who participated in the three different groups, the Prescriptive Interventionist model, the Participatory Empowering model and the Control group. Parents did not differ in their attitudes and beliefs about early literacy intervention regardless of which of the three types of groups they attended. Parents in all three groups,

on average, held beliefs about early literacy that were positive and that were compatible with current approaches to language development and emergent literacy. In addition, there was no significant change in the beliefs and attitudes between pre and post intervention in any of the three groups tested.

The quantitative aspect of this study also attempted to measure changes in levels of parental empowerment pre and post intervention and across all three groups, and parents' engagement in early literacy activities. A second research question answered by the quantitative data was "What type of literacy intervention empowers parents to increase their engagement in literacy activities with their children?" Parents from all three types of groups engaged in early literacy activities with their children to some degree. When levels of empowerment were measured across the three different groups once again there was not a significant difference. In addition, in two of the groups, the Participatory Empowering and the Control group, there was not a significant change in empowerment as measured by the empowerment tool pre and post intervention. There was however a significant change in empowerment scored after the intervention in the Prescriptive Interventionist type group. This reduction in empowerment level indicates that the Prescriptive Interventionist type group did not empower parents to increase their engagement in literacy activities with their children.

Qualitative Results

The qualitative aspects of this study sought to understand how parents are empowered to participate in early literacy and the factors that influence the literacy work that parents engage in with their preschool children. By describing and analyzing themes related to parental attitudes and beliefs about reading to their children, and exploring, with them, their engagement in early literacy activities, I hoped to gain a better understanding of how they felt about their ability to influence early literacy development and how they participated in intervention in their home and community. I also hoped to gain an understanding of how parents viewed and used community supports and interventions.

The open-ended questions to be answered in the Qualitative Interview (Appendix G) included:

- 1) Do parents of at-risk children value early literacy?
- 2) Do parents support and participate in early literacy activities?
- 3) What influences parents of at-risk children to engage in early literacy activities such as storybook reading?
- 4) What are the parental attitudes and beliefs that impact on literacy intervention use?
- 5) Are there barriers that limit the involvement of some parents and their children, and if so what are they, and can they be breeched?

Six parents, representative of the three research groups, participated in the qualitative interviews. All the respondents were mothers and all but one of the interviews took place in their home. The remaining interview was conducted in a secure room in the Ontario Early Years Centre attended by the mother and her child.

Two thirds of the families spoke a language other than English at home and the remaining families spoke English at home but were not native to Canada (Figure 12). Two thirds indicated they read to their child every day and one third indicated they either did not read, or read only sometimes (Figure 13). Half of the mothers stated they began to read to their child before one year, with two thirds of those indicating they started reading before the child's birth (Figure 14).

In fifty percent of the families, mother and child were actively involved in reading together, but in one third of the families the child read alone or no one regularly read (Figure 15). Fifty percent stated they had a regular reading time, and half did not.

Families varied somewhat in their access to children books. Thirty-three percent indicated they had no books at home, a similar number had between fifty one and one hundred books and the remainder indicated varying amounts of books in their homes (Figure 16). Half the mothers stated they used the library regularly, while fifty percent did not.

The six mothers, who participated in the interview, spoke openly and honestly, often in halting English, about the reality of their attempts to positively influence the development of their young children. They spoke of the influence of extended family on their beliefs about literacy, and their attempts to continue the lessons learned from their own lives in order to build a better future for their children. They spoke about being poor, about the challenges of too little time and too little energy, too few resources and limited supports. Overwhelmingly, though, they endorsed the importance of reading to young children and emphasized that, despite the challenges, they as parents would do whatever was necessary to achieve the best for their child.

Figure 12. Home Languages Spoken By Interview Participants

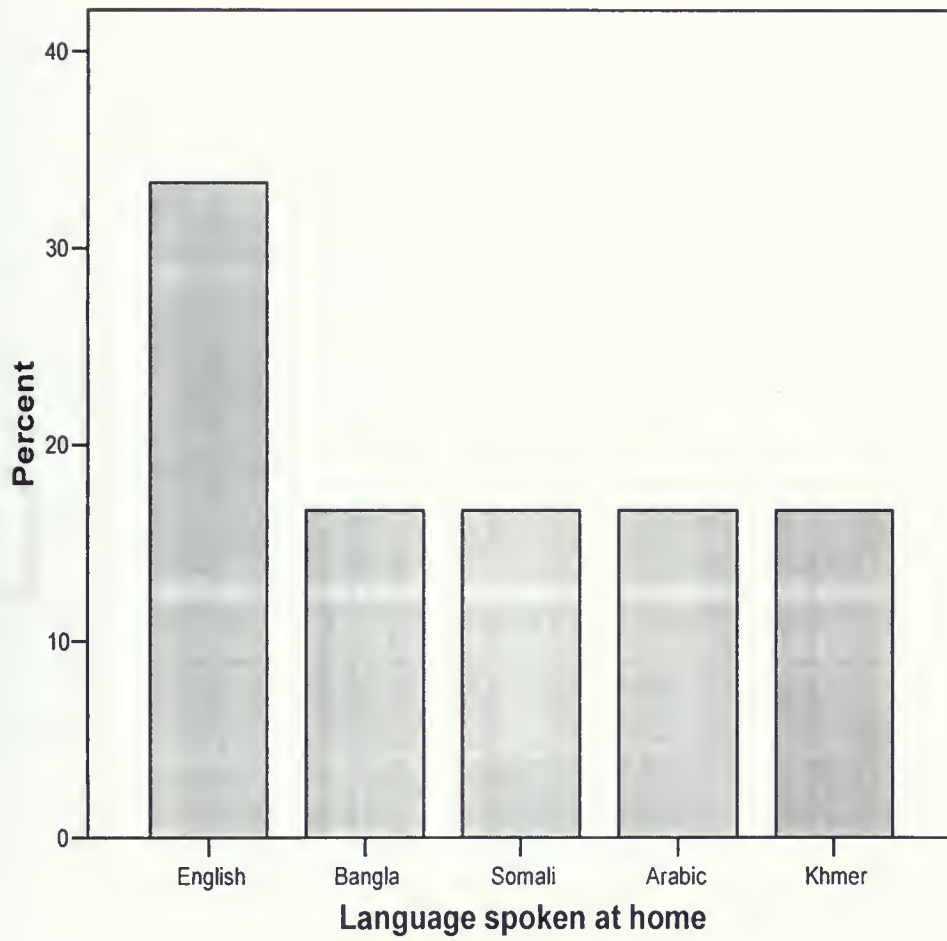


Figure 13. Story-book Reading By Interview Participants

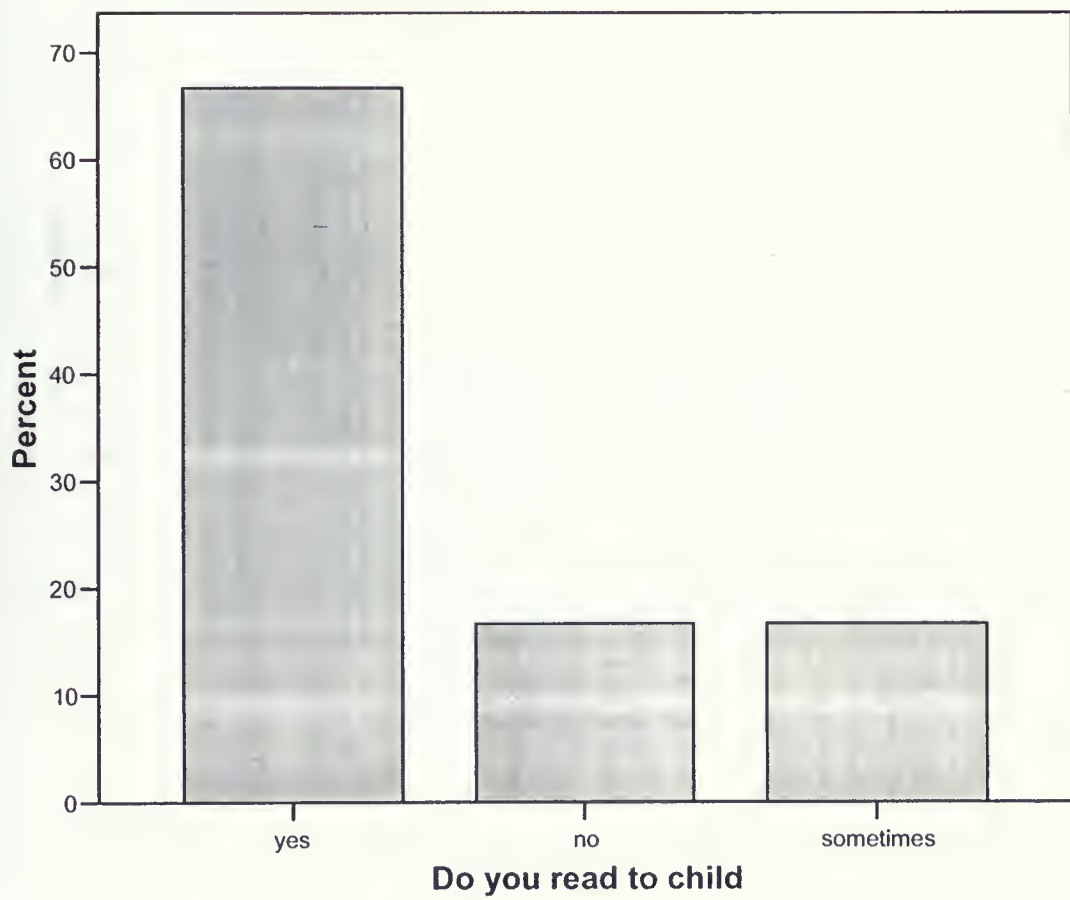


Figure 14. Ages Interview Participants First Read To Child

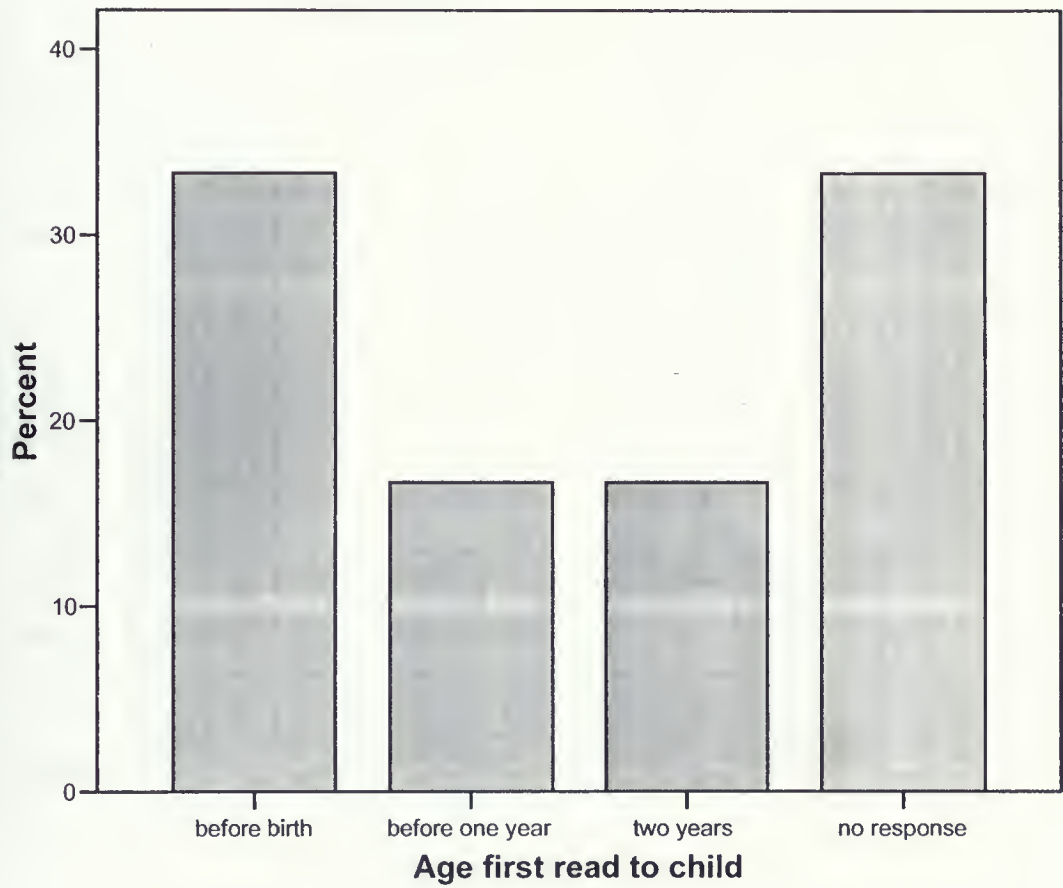


Figure 15. Who Takes an Active Part in Reading in Interview Participant Families

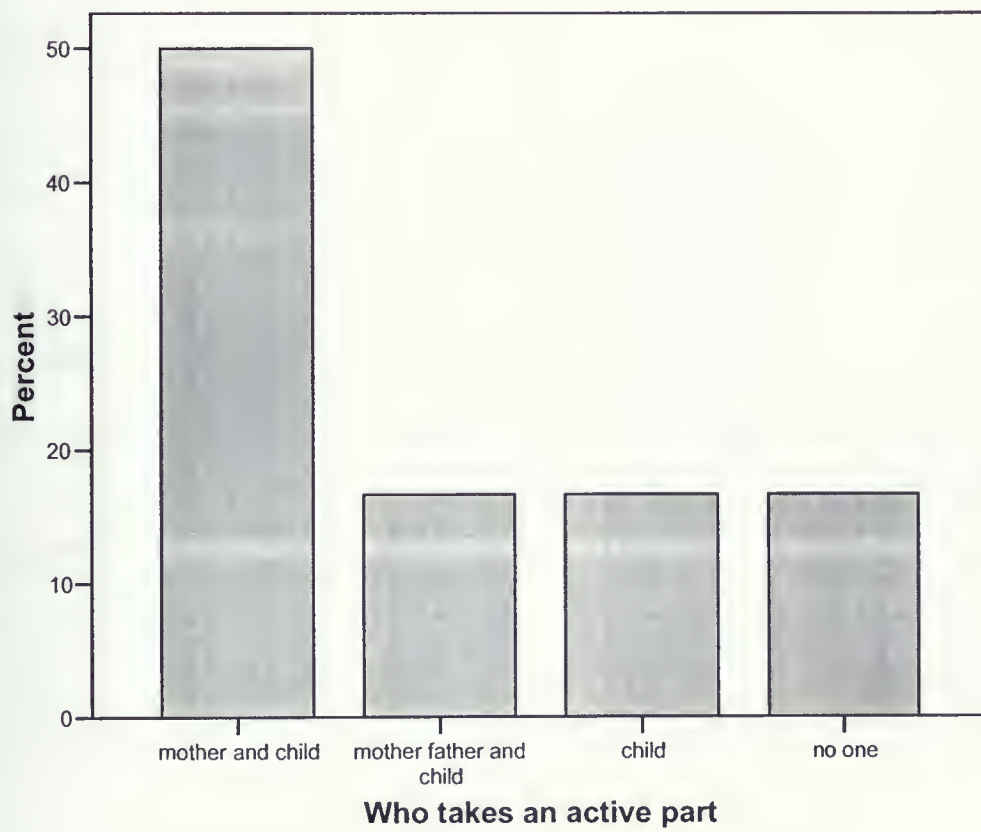
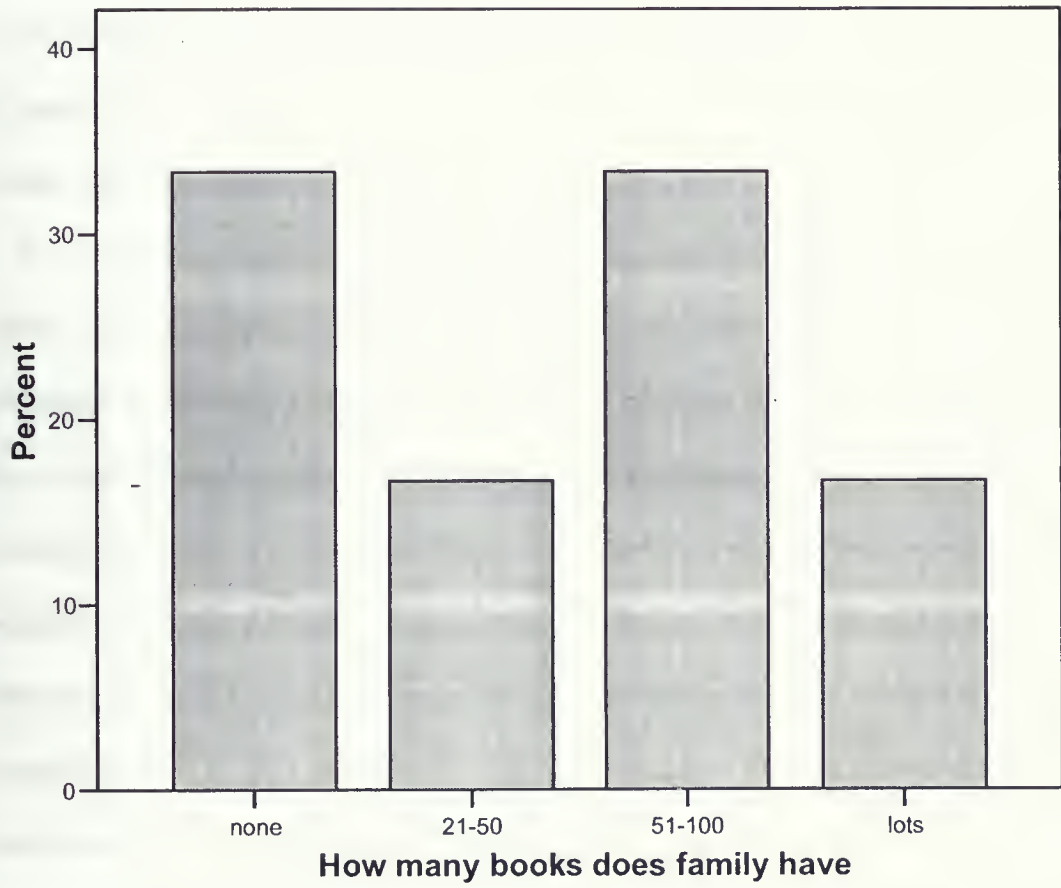


Figure 16. Books Interview Participant Families Have



Four major themes emerged from their words that brought understanding to how these mothers viewed their attempts at bringing literacy to their children and how parental empowerment develops through the challenges of parental life. The key themes identified were: 1) learning takes place across time and place; 2) participation is key; 3) success is achieved by taking small steps; and 4) learning occurs in multiple ways (Figure 17).

Theme One: Across Time and Place

Parental beliefs, attitudes and behaviour were influenced by learning that occurred across time, sometimes spanning generations. Instead of changes occurring because of attendance at a literacy focused early intervention program, the mothers identified that the greatest influence on their learning and positive attitudes about literacy came from observing or listening to their own family, during earlier years of development. The behaviours and attitudes were not gained at any one time or at one place, but were remembered and recreated when they interacted with their children. While the mothers valued their own literacy experiences continuing education in the language of their forefathers was not enough, and all the parents saw their children's future secure only if their children now learned to read in the English language first. While some introduced only the one language, English, others also strived to give their children the best of both cultural worlds. Three sub-themes were identified: 1) embracing the past, 2) building a future, and 3) keeping the best of both worlds.

1) Embracing the past

Learning from family members was identified as the most frequent way that the respondents gained values and experience about introducing literacy to their young children. All respondents identified family members as having the earliest influence on their own attitudes about reading and their own literacy development, and several of the mothers indicated that they followed the ideas or ways of their family members with their own children:

“No I learned it from back home, like my sister had a daughter before, before I came up here and my mom always used to read to her and change her voice and do all these different things. So I was always around, so I used to do it too. I used to pretend to be the monster or be the good guy or the bad guy according to what the book said and she really liked it.”

Michelle, Participative Group

“...always my grandfather he used to tell me, well to myself and my cousins, you guys have to read. And then you know, he always say, like he as a well he was a comedy writer and he was always reading and he was, he was speaking English too, you know when I was small.

For me it is good, if you read you are going to know more things. Like, this I remember my grandfather, he say, if you read you have, you can, you have things to talk to somebody else, to another people and that's true.”

Maria, Control Group

“No special way, but you must have a book. Any time and every time, from the library, by buying books, but reading, the books is very, very, very important. My mom did that with me.

Did your mom read with you?

Yeah. A lot, a lot, a lot. When I was young, so that's why I know the importance of the books”

Saima, Prescriptive Group

2) Building a future

Although parents valued the learning passed on from their family, they looked to their child's future and made a deliberate attempt to acquire English language skills and

introduce them first to English language storybooks and English language conversation, despite having a limited command of the language themselves.

Despite poor English language skills, Ana (pseudo name), a Bengali speaking immigrant chooses to speak and read to her 4 year old child only in English:

"Okay, do you tell stories without a book or with a book?"

With book.

With book?

Yeah, with a book mostly

So you read in which language to him?

In English.

Only in English?

Only English.

But English isn't your first language

Yeah, my language is, my second language is Bangla But here is book also, is English Sometime he don't understand, I can explain my language"

Ana, Prescriptive Group

Saima (pseudonym), on the other hand, attempted to introduce both English and Arabic, her home language, to her four year old son, but had difficulty obtaining Arabic books:

"For my child I read in Arabic and in English.

So you read in two languages. Good. And how does he respond to that?

He responds to English more

Does he? Why do you think that is?

Because school is in English, cable is in English

But you have, you have been able to get books that are in Arabic as well.

Ya, from my country.

How about from the library, have you gotten them from the library, do you know that they are there?

Not available"

Saima, Prescriptive Group

Medina (pseudonym), a Somali speaking mother of two young boys took great delight in practicing English language conversation at the group she attended:

"My conversation, yes. I have a lot of conversation with the staff there and they really great. It helped me my English and that helped me help to read for my son."

Medina, Participative Group

She, however, did not have the ability to read in her home language; that task was performed by the boys' father while she read to them in English:

"Do you read to him in which language?"

I read to him in English

What about Somali?

I don't read in Somali, I can only speak Somali. But my husband reads with him Somali. We also borrow a multicultural language; we find Somali books in library now.

You found them in the library as well, in the literacy kits?

Yes, and then my husband, we borrow them and my husband reads with him. So your husband does the reading in Somali language and you do the reading in the English language.

Yes

Great, great. So your really getting him involved in both languages which is a great thing as well. Wonderful. Do you have books in the Somali language at home or just books that you borrow?

We just borrow at the library; so far we don't have any books in Somalian.

How many English books would you have?

English books? A lot of them. Yes, a lot of books in English"

Medina, Participative Group

The same mother expressed great excitement that she had discovered an English language author, Dr. Seuss, who her son adored:

"He likes when I talk about, after I read it, when I close the book, I talk about how does he like it. So far, most of his favourite book, is Dr, ah...I am going to tell you his favourite book that he like to read now (goes to closet and comes back with a bag of Library books)

He already has favouritesDr Seuss,

Yes

Hop on Pop?

Yes, he likes that

Why do you think he likes that one?

Because when I read it I make different sounds and I act different, like the animals, the people in there."

Medina, Participative Group

3) Best of Both Worlds

Medina kept her heritage Somali language alive through everyday activities and transmitted her home language and culture through song:

"Do you transmit your culture or language in other ways, do you tell stories?"

I do, I sometimes, like when I was potty training my son, I borrowed a book talking about how to potty train your son, but I changed into all my language because all the words that I can use at home, is in my language. Even though it was in English, I was telling him in my language and he did understand.

Do you ever spend time, and some people do and some people don't, spend time talking of tales or folk tales, from your own country, stories that would be part of your culture?

Yes we do that. Yes, there is a song that we play together. It's in my language but its kind of a rhyme song, but it's in my language. Now he can sing that in my language, even though he doesn't really speak my language.

He doesn't speak your language, he speaks English very well.

Yes, I find that that song, once I put on that song, he kind of sings now, in my language."

Medina, Participative Group

Ana, although she didn't read to her son in Bengali, did take her son to weekly language classes where he was exposed to their home language:

"Which language do you speak?"

Bengali. He also goes to Bengali School

Does he? When did he start?

This September

And do they start to sing songs and stories in Bengali

Yes stories

And do you go take him there? When does he go?

Every Saturday.

Every Saturday, so that's important too. Do you spend, do you read to him, tell him stories in your language, in Bengali?

No

Do you tell him stories in your language, in Bengali?

No"

Ana, Prescriptive Group

Like Ana's family, other parents also made extra attempts to keep their heritage language alive by obtaining hard to find books imported from their homeland, securing dual language literacy kits from the library, or enrolling their child in heritage language classes. Emmie (pseudo name), a Cambodian mother of a five year old girl learned the power of cultural stories from her mother and valued their transmission:

"My mother she doesn't learn that much, but she always remember from her parents, but when she was born, she born in the poor family too.

Yes?

But, she still remember, remind in her brain
So from her own memory she told you stories?

Yeah

Not from a book. But from... and what do you do with your own children?

I do with my own children with a book

With a book?

Yes

Cambodia books or English books or both?

Both of them

Yes?

Yeah

Are you able to get those books? Are you able to get Cambodian books?

Cambodian...I used to get them. It's hard to get them in here. There used to have some stories in the library, public library.

Yes?

Yeah they had in the box.

In the box

Yeah

The kits?

Yeah

The language kits?

Yeah language kits

That have both the English, and the...

Yeah

And the Khmer?

Yes Khmer

Yeah

They had both

Good, so you used those?

Yeah

And the puppets, they have the puppets in there too?

Yeah, they have puppets. Other things like dictionary, yeah, to explain to the kids.

And also, I used to ask that every parent who had came longer than me. They might have brought some stories from Cambodia books, you know? From Cambodia. Yeah

So you would ask them their stories or ask them for books?

I ask them for the book.

Oh good. So do you have many books at home?

Yes I do.

How many would you say you have?

I think, for my language, I think around 15 books"

Emmie, Control Group

Theme Two: Participation is Key

A second strong theme that evolved from the conversations with these six mothers was that literacy development was an interactive process where the early, frequent, active participation of all was important. Learning occurred best in the context of living and when it was made fun for all involved. The sub themes identified were 1) start early, 2) read often, 3) make it fun, and 4) involve the child.

1) Start Early

The majority of mothers advocated for a very early start to reading; several indicated beginning reading to their child before the child was born. When asked to give advice to a parent about what was important about developing literacy the most frequent response was to read as often as possible, as early as possible. Michelle, (pseudo name), a single mother of a ten month old son was an advocate of early reading, as were Medina and Saima:

“Well, my opinion, as I did with my son, I have to tell him from the time he was born, I have always been singing, reading books and telling him stories. I have always been doing that. Because I think, the earlier you start doing it, get them used to different words and sounds.”

Michelle, Participative Group

“I have read my children while they were inside me, like while I was pregnant with them and I am still reading with them, like I take them to the Library, borrow books and read at home, we look the pictures.”

Medina, Participative Group

“I think the most important time is when the child becomes two years old... At this time the child begins to understand the world. He begins to interact with the surrounding, surrounding world. He begins to contact with eyes, he begins to understand more, begins to... I think this an important age”.

Saima, Prescriptive Group

Maria, a busy single mother of a toddler and a ten year old felt early reading had benefits:

“Well I think it is good when they start, like a maybe, I think it is better like a, to read to the child when we are pregnant. And when they born is kinda, is good and they learn faster that’s what I ‘m thinking.”

Maria, Control Group

2) Read Often

Parents were in agreement that frequent reading was beneficial and that reading could be easily and effectively done in a number of settings:

“No I don’t have a special place. Anywhere is I have time. At the park, at home, on the sofa, in the bedroom, everywhere.”

Emmie, Control Group

None were more adamant about the importance of frequent reading than Saima, however, who had seen a vast improvement in her young son’s delayed speech when she began to read to him on a regular basis:

“It makes a very, very big difference....we can..... so you can keep reading and reading and reading and you will see a very, very big difference.....you can make more than what the school made and more than anything,....so the more reading is the most important thing”

Saima, Prescriptive Group

“Any time, when it is available, before sleeping, when it is available you know. There is no special time available but when it is available I read”

Saima, Prescriptive Group

“What I would tell them is to read to their kids alot and not stop reading.”

Saima, Prescriptive Group

3) Make it Fun

The participants like Michelle also emphasized the importance of making literacy fun, and that both parents and children need to be actively involved in the literacy experience:

“You have to make it fun; you have to make it fun. Especially if you are reading them a story and there is a bear, you have to try to change your tone of voice, if there is something scary try to change your voice, if there is something that’s smoothing you know try to change your voice.”

Michelle, Participative Group

“Read, read, read. Read to your kids. Make reading be fun, you don’t have to force the kid to read. If the kids don’t like reading, it also has to do with the parent. You also have to read, the kids see you reading, it’s very important that you read. And to encourage the kids to read, buy colorful things, colorful books or colour and if you cannot buy the book, you buy crayons, colour, colour, draw pictures, colour it and make a story. And that I think will encourage the kids to read.”

Michelle, Participative Group

“I would think if they are being forced to do it, if there is no fun in doing it, and if you like, just give them the book and tell them go and do it yourself. I think there should be an involvement, or an interaction with an older person, it don’t have to be the parent, but somebody that is older than them, or somebody that they can interact with and somebody that they feel comfortable with.”

Michelle, Participative Group

4) Involve the Child

The parents stated that the active involvement of the child was a key to literacy success. They felt children must be actively involved in the literacy experience and when they weren’t the child’s interest in reading declined.

Emmie and Medina felt that children lose interest in reading when parents are not actively involved:

“In my opinion maybe because they didn’t have help from the home, like nobody even read to them before, maybe that’s one thing and the other thing, some children they just don’t like to read

Why do you think they don’t like to read?

It’s just they don’t have nobody encourage them, I think”

Medina, Participative Group

“Let them hold the books, and maybe you can hold, when the baby born, you can hold them on the thigh, on the lap...And then your one hand hold the book in front of the baby, then you read out loud. Then they can understand”.

Emmie, Control Group

“I read to my children, by eye to eye and hand to hand. And then I ask them the, I ask her, reply ask her to answer the story and then sometimes she doesn’t understand the words, but she understands the picture...I ask her, and then what

this, what's that, what's this picture is called? What animal or what this book called or what colour? Yeah. She answers back."

Emmie, Control Group

Positive experiences observed at the community group positively influenced Medina's literacy interactions with her children:

"We talk about the pictures, we do activities, we like we sometimes pretend what the pictures on, the picture on the book, and after that, when we finish the story I ask my son what I read it and what, how does he like it."

Medina, Participative Group

"Yes he looks for certain books now. Because of the story time that we go on Thursday and Theresa she reads different stories, so he knows that there's different books now..."

Before he wasn't interested he would just run and play, but last week we go we said "we are going to pick out books" and so he comes and picks whatever he wants."

Medina, Participative Group

"Normally our best time is the afternoon, after breakfast, he likes that he doesn't watch TV. I borrow a lot of books from the library, I put all the books on the floor and then he chooses one by one, one by one."

Medina, Participative Group

Theme Three: Taking Small Steps

Although strongly believing in the value of introducing literacy early in life to their children, the six mothers were clear that it was not always an easy task. Those mothers who experienced greater difficulty gave clear messages about the challenges and suggested strategies that had helped them reconcile the dissonance they felt and that others may feel when literacy interactions weren't frequent. The third theme identified by the parents was the importance of taking small steps to literacy learning by: 1) making the time for reading, 2) confronting and working through the barriers impeding early literacy interactions, 3) doing whatever could be done at present, and by 4) trying new ways to introduce literacy in the child's everyday life.

1) Making Time

In their conversations, the mothers discussed how time was a barrier to initiating and sustaining early literacy. They spoke of recognizing the importance of not delaying the introduction of reading and how life's events and pressures got in the way of their best intentions. They advocated for establishing a regular reading schedule and a regular library day so that time was set aside for a regular emphasis on literacy.

"Before that I had time of course to go there, to improve the skills of my son to helping to communicate with others, to have more experience with the other world but now really I have no time...."

Saima, Prescriptive Group

"Before I never spend doing time before because my friend said it is too early for him because if I start pressure him after when he is like growing like bigger then that time then he don't like to read and write.

So you didn't want to pressure him, you were afraid if you spent time with him you would pressure him and he wouldn't want to do it when he was older.

Yes, yes, that's right.

So this way you got him ready, you went to the group, you got him thinking about school? Now-sometime I spend time"

Ana, Prescriptive Group

"Well, we have to make sure; like we have to work, even the parents, we have to be, make a schedule and do it, because sometimes we don't it. Just we say we are gonna do it but I don't know, something happens, but we have to have that time."

Maria, Control Group

Saima speaks of the power of literacy interactions in improving relationships and communication with her speech delayed son:

"When I speak with him he refuse to speak with me. I start to speak to him. So look at my face and he refuse to look at my face. But by the book, he accepts the book more than me.

Really?

But because I start him late it takes more time, but now he is sooo, likes the book so much and when he sees the library "I run away... I like to go to the library. I like to go to the library". He likes the library so much"

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Saima, Prescriptive Group

"So what can parents do?

Read more and more and more and more to be adaptive for reading.

Ya. So are there special things that you as a parent have done with your child?

Go to the library more and more and more

Ya. So think that's important, to go to the library?

Ya, very important and to be the preferable place. And there's a normal day, to be the day of the library,

Ok, so one day of the week...

One day of the week is the day of the library

So that becomes part of the schedule?

Ya"

Saima, Prescriptive Group

2) Confronting Adversity

Barriers to literacy acquisition also included not having easy access to books and parents who were not involved. Libraries and early intervention programs were sometimes inaccessible because of distance when transportation was unavailable or parents had difficulty negotiating a stroller through winter snows:

"Shape book you give him, reading shape book

And did you read it?

I read him

And he likes that book?

Yes, he knows everything shape

Do you have many books?

Yeah I have two books

Two books, just two?

Yeah

Do you go to the library and use the books in the library

No, no. "

Ana, Prescriptive Group

"The downtown library is very far for me, I can't go there, many times."

Saima, Prescriptive Group

"I would tell them it's a nice program, but the most important, to be more , to be more, I would tell you to be more, to not to be more far, to be in the downtown at Queen Street. We can't go to Queen Street every day, so they must be more near to us. And to keep the program as it is, that's the most important thing and many of the mothers, and ninety five percent of the mothers, don't have any car."

Saima, Prescriptive Group

“Oh, yah, I used to go, every, it depends, like a Tuesdays, sometimes Saturdays, like that but I used to go
But right now it's just too hard?
 I can try it, I can try it.
And is transportation a problem at all, getting there?
 Well right now maybe, because it's kind of cold and sometimes snowing. You can't go out like that, with a stroller, no it's hard.”

Maria, Control Group

In many families attempts were made to circumvent the barriers. Sometimes the motivation to make changes came from adversity itself:

“Ya, the reading is very important for me with my child, cause my child somehow latent in speech, but the reading gets me to speak more and even speaking another language...
 When I see him late in speech and I make a hearing test and a name test, they said your baby is normal, so the problem is with you. It's your problem, it is not the problem with your baby, your baby is normal. So you are not a good mother... I felt that. I felt that my baby is normal. Nothing bad. He hears well. His intelligence is well. An intelligence test, I did an intelligence test. His intelligence is well. So why he didn't speak up to this age? So the problem is with you.
And how did you get help?
 By reading.”

Saima, Prescriptive Group

“They can have more, the more the more the parents can have. The parents who have enough, enough patience, enough money. They don't have, I mean. For my family, I don't have enough money, I am poor. But I try. See at my daughter, I mean, my kids...
 I don't want to be their life, the same my life. No. It's a hard life to growing up.”

Emmie, Control Group

In Emmie's family, the inter-generational transmission of literacy continues from both the mother to daughter and the father to daughter, regardless of the visual handicap of one of the parents.

“Because my husband blind. So he can't read by see, by eyes. But he reads from his heart.
From his heart, he tells stories?
 Yeah
Yeah?
 Yeah
And the children like that?

Yeah. By hand.

By hand?

Yeah write on hand

He writes on their hands?

Yeah. Her hand on his hand and then he asks, what letter? What number? What animal?

So even though he's blind, he still takes part in teaching your child to learn to like reading.

Yeah.

In a different way.

Sometimes yeah in different ways.

How does your child respond to that?

She loves to do that. Enjoy with her dad."

Emmie, Control Group

3) *Doing what you can now*

Parents acknowledged the struggles experienced in day to day life, but spoke of the importance of each little effort:

"Yeah, because it's just me. You have to do everything when you have no body.

So you think I have to do this, this and this oh, and reading too?

Oh yes, you know, but I say, well if we don't do it today or tomorrow but we have to do it. Try to do it... Just because I am tired that's all. And I have to fix things right now in my life, but I think in the future I can do it... Oh yeah, just you know, because I'm just by myself and I have to fix a lot of things... Oh yeah. Yeah when you're tired, but you know I think in the future I'm gonna do my best."

Maria, Control Group

"And do you do that every day, every night or most night-times?

Not every night-time no, because now I'm still sick. Just when I like have the time, the time for story

Right .You try to do that regularly at the same time and he gets used to doing that. Do you think that is important?

Yes It is important regularly, if he regularly read to book and write to his name."

Ana, Prescriptive Group

"I don't know sometimes I'm very busy to read to my kids. Sometimes like a right now I guess maybe twenty minutes or ten minutes I try to read my kids because I think it's important...Oh well I get busy but when I'm sitting down or ah, drinking tea, then I say oh, okay it's better to read to my kids something. I think it's good, like this weekend you know we can start do it, but it's hard."

Maria, Control Group

“Well, my only message for the parents is, as I said read, read, it’s very important that the kids get to read. If you haven’t start now, it’s never too late, just start read.”

Michelle, Participative Group

“Well, I would think its maybe because the parents, there is no reading at home, because children will do what they see. Right. If you are constantly reading or the children see you reading, even if the child does not like to read but every time the child see you reading then obviously the child is going to want to learn to read and going try to do exactly what the parents or what the people in the home are doing. So I think that the children who do not like to read or do not want to read is because they are not seeing that at home. And maybe that might be the children who the parents allow to watch a lot of TV or do things on their own and I say it’s very important that the parents also get involved. And by getting involved you encourage the children to read.”

Michelle, Participative Group

“It can never be too early and can never be too late. Just start it whenever you can. I prefer to think its best to start it as early as possible but it’s better to do it late than never.”

Michelle, Participative Group

4) Trying new ways

As well as interacting directly with their child, one on one, through reading, parents spoke of the importance of making literacy an every day experience, and that learning needed to occur in the context of living.

“Go to the library; go if you have the internet. Search and find out where you can go to have them read. And if the kids don’t like reading, in the library for sure they have this puppet show, and then it’s very funny, it fun, they will like it, and then you can get books about these things and encourage it.”

Michelle, Participative Group

“Well right now I like to read. You know like, every time when I, if I’m going to sign something, I read it, or even the food, I read it, or anything.

So when you say the food, you mean like the labels?

Yeah the labels, everything, yeah, I read it

And even though that’s certainly when you read, even reading the labels to your child that’s reading

Oh yes

So when you you’re doing that, say it out-loud it has an influence.

I say to my kids the oldest and the younger you have to read it, you have to know what is inside because sometimes you know you buy something and it's expired and you don't know."

Maria, Control Group

"Well I take him, another thing I do, I take him out, like if the weather is good, I take him out and then I always point at everything, like the stop sign, the color of the light, the vehicle passing by, the people passing by, the building and most importantly whenever I am walking down the street with my son, I try not to walk the same place all the time. I try to walk different places and while I am walking, I sing, and then I talk to him, I show him things like the bus, this is the bus and stuff like that."

Michelle, Participative Group

Theme Four: Multiple Ways of Knowing

The final theme identified was that learning occurred in multiple ways. Parents overwhelmingly identified that their motivation for involvement in activities was that they wanted the best for their child. They found that through multiple interactions they learned not only from group facilitators and other parents, but from their child. Three sub-themes were identified 1) learning from your child, 2) learning from others, and 3) wanting the best.

1) Learning from your Child

Much of the learning that occurred in each of the groups involved the parent developing improved communication and learning to understand how and what their child was communicating to them. Parents learned that the ways they interacted with their child during literacy sessions influenced how the child responded. They became aware of the child's affirmation of their efforts, and as the child's response heightened the parent's literacy enhancing behaviour increased. Literacy learning became bi-directional as the back and forth actions and response of the dyad led to increased interaction. At its best literacy learning was not one-way from parent to child, but bi-directional.

"...what I realize I used to do, I used to do all the talking, right, and I didn't use to give him a chance, to, even though he cannot use the words, but then I have learned that when you talk to them, when you talk to the baby, you have to wait, let them respond."

Michelle, Participative Group

"Sometimes I change my voice, if I use funny language
Then you change your voice?"

Yes

And what does he do when you do that?

When I change my voice he is laughing. He says Mommy your voice is changed
He notices and he likes that and he wants more then?

Yes"

Ana, Prescriptive Group

"Most times I use books. There times I just come up with any story, like if he smile, I will talk about his face show movement, show him that the face is round, wink my eyes, touch his eyes to let him know that there's a connection. Also I like showing very colorful books so that I will show him pictures and he will watch it, even if we think that they do not understand, but I think, I personally think they do understand, its just that they cannot, the words cant come out yet.

How does he show you?

Okay well, what he does, he tries to touch the book, or he tries to grab the book from me, or sometimes he would laugh.

And how old is he now?

Now he's nine months.

Nine months. So he laughs and tries to touch the book.

Ya, and mostly he will try to take the book and put it in his mouth.

Right. So he gets involved with reading.

Ya, he do. And you know, like any book my son sees, it doesn't have to be a colorful book, any book he sees, he opens."

Michelle, Participative Group

"It changed how I feel myself when I start reading for my son
How did that change?

Because he likes when I read for him, he asks me a lot read for him, and it makes me like, I feel happy that I'm doing something that will help my son in the future."

Medina, Participative Group

"Yes. And also, my son is enjoying it too. Especially when I change my voice- Sometimes he laugh, sometimes he watch me like he stops trying like where is this voice coming from? You know. So I see all the different expression on his face and that makes me know he's really listening."

Michelle, Participative Group

“Okay. I realized at the early stage because I always start, I communicate with my son at an early stage, I realized that he likes singing. Right. So I got involved in this group where you have the kids coming together and they are singing so I take him there because as I say, yes they can’t talk, but if you watch his face, if you watch certain things, especially the “ceinsy weensy spider”, as soon as you do that, he would laugh. And whenever you sing, old MacDonald have a farm, he would laugh and he would pick up his foot and his hand. So I think that this thing, he has heard it before, so he knows that okay this is something I have heard before and I like it. So that’s why I took him there”

Michelle, Participative Group

2) Learning with others

In the community setting learning was best when it was not just from early intervention group leader to parent, but when it was multi-directional and parents, leaders and children all participated in the literacy interaction and shared their experience. Parents spoke too of the beneficial effects for them of the opportunity to interact with others in the community experience. Parents learned from others but also found that they were able to give to others by sharing their experience and learning:

“The Early Years Centre has taught me a lot of things. Help me, help my daughter, how to learn, how to talk, they have a lot of things in the early centre. Have a lot of patience to ask. Yeah. Important for me. I learn a lot of things from everybody who was in the Early Centre. How to speak, how to talk, how to get around with them....

Now I start to do thing different. Reading the, I mean the parents learn with the child”.

Emmie, Control Group

“Yes before I didn’t start going that place I was just reading not often but now I read every day so and all that because of I went there.”

Medina, Participative Group

“I think it good if I go to Early Years Centre
You feel...

Yeah, I find another kids and another mom.
So you talk more to moms when you go there?

Yeah
Do you feel different?

If I talk to Mom I feel good
You feel good? Better than if you stay at home?

Because if I stay home it is alone, if I go to Early Years Centre I feel more better.”
Ana, Prescriptive Group

“... because you meet all of the different parents and you talk, they will tell you, give you advice like what you can do, like the experienced one what can you do to help your child. And it’s always an open dialogue with everybody”.
Michelle, Participative Group

“Well they just want to see development, positive development in the child. Helping other people who have no experience, like the new parents, helping them and teaching them and telling them how to go about doing things. Like, I have learned from them because there are certain things I didn’t know, for example like giving the baby a chance to respond. I did not know that and I learned that in the group so I think that’s a good thing”
Michelle, Participative Group

Right “I learned at the library, like, we go to Play Corner at the community centre and then we have a library lady who comes every Thursday.

Right And I just looked at her how she reads

And how she talks and how she includes the kids while she is reading, she asks them”

Medina, Participative Group

“Well they, I guess the parents also want to be a leader in one way or the other, whether a leader to their kids, or maybe one may become a leader in the community itself.”

Michelle, Participative Group

3) Wanting the Best

Overwhelmingly parents stated that the greatest factor influencing their engagement in literacy activities, their use of supports and their attendance at community intervention programs was their desire to have the best in life for their children. They all wanted a future for their child better than their own and this was a very great motivator.

“To me, they would like to involve their child to the world, in more communication with others cause we are here... we are alone... we have no one, we have no relationship here, so that’s why we need to have to communicate for our child with others”

Saima, Prescriptive Group

“Ahhh, yeah I know how important to communicate my son with others, how important to introducing him to the other world.”

Saima, Prescriptive Group

“Even if it is not close by, you know for me, anything that has to do with the development of my child, I will participate in it. Because I would like my child to read, and I think it’s good for the community as a whole, to have the kids reading. I think it’s very, very important that they all, not only my child, but it’s very important that all kids learn to read.”

Michelle, Participative Group

“They want a lot that kids can get along and parents can get along, to learn different things. That’s really what every parents want, every parent wants what’s best for their kids. So when ever we’re getting that we’re happy to go”

Medina, Participative Group

“I think like every parent we want the best for our kids, to find just the way how we can learn our kids to learn more how to read, I don’t know like schools, I don’t know something.

Every parent wants the best for their child?

Because myself I want the best for my kids.

So you are doing the best you can right now, you can’t get there, but there are lots of different things that get in the way at times

...Yes, sometimes I say, you guys have to read even 20 minutes, or 10 minutes or even myself, sitting down and we read just a little the book, for now, cause before I didn’t read nothing at all. The first time when I saw you I didn’t read... You know I’m a mother and like I think that another moms want to have the best for the kids, and I think maybe they try their best too the way I am doing it... I am going to try to do my best, and they gonna be, I want my kids... Oh yeah I try. It’s hard, but someday...”

Maria, Control Group

The qualitative aspects of this study were illuminating in answering the question of “What parental beliefs and attitudes influence parental engagement in early literacy intervention?” Mothers across all three groups identified similar themes related to their beliefs about early literacy, participation in early literacy activities and barriers they encountered and conquered. Their responses indicate that parents of at-risk children value early literacy and support and participate in early literacy activities. Parents of at-risk

children are influenced to engage in early literacy activities such as storybook reading by their own familial childhood experiences with literacy, by their child's reciprocal response, and by their own desire to provide the best for their child.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Considerable attention has been given in recent years, to programming focused on the early years, that time in a child's life between birth and six years, when physical, mental and socio-emotional growth is rapid. Understanding that a child's lifelong health, learning and behaviour is affected by the experience-based brain development that occurs during this time (McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007) and recognizing that not all children have optimal experiences, early intervention programs have been implemented. The hope is that these programs will engage parents and children and provide opportunities for learning and development for children considered to be at risk for a poor transition to school. As our understanding of the critical periods in development has increased, and as we recognize the small windows of opportunities we may have to effect a change in the developmental trajectories of at risk children, we are forced to critically examine our early intervention efforts.

This research study was designed to examine parental beliefs and attitudes about one type of early intervention, early literacy. It examined parental participation in early literacy intervention activities, to determine whether these programs empower parents to take action to make changes in the lives of their children.

The goal of this study was to understand how parental attitudes, beliefs and self efficacy impact parent and child engagement in early literacy intervention activities. The major research questions to be answered were:

- 1) "Do parental beliefs and attitudes change during parental engagement in early literacy intervention?"

- 2) “What parental beliefs and attitudes influence parental engagement in early literacy intervention?”
- 3) “What type of literacy intervention empowers parents to increase their engagement in literacy activities with their children?” and
- 4) “Do empowered parents engage in more literacy interventions with their children than those who feel powerless?”

The hypothesis was that parents involved in Participatory Empowering family literacy interventions would increase their engagement and interaction around literacy tasks more than those parents who were involved in a Prescriptive Interventionist model family literacy intervention, or those who were involved in no intervention.

A mixed method procedure using both quantitative and qualitative approaches was employed in order to collect diverse types of data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. A quasi-experimental research design was used. The research sample, sixty parents who were part of naturally occurring community interventions in at-risk neighbourhoods in a south western Ontario city participated in the quantitative phase.

The quantitative aspect of this study attempted to describe and analyze parental attitudes and behaviour towards early intervention initiatives in early literacy development. It examined parental beliefs about literacy development prior to and following two different early literacy interventions and compared these to a control group who attended neighbourhood based drop-in programming. The study found that there was no significant difference in the attitudes and beliefs about early literacy in the parents who participated in the three different groups, the Prescriptive Interventionist model, the Participatory Empowering model and the Control group. Parents did not differ in their

attitudes and beliefs about early literacy intervention regardless of which of the three types of groups they attended. Parents in all three groups, on average, held beliefs about early literacy that were positive and that were compatible with current approaches to language development and emergent literacy. In addition, there was no significant change in the beliefs and attitudes between pre and post intervention in any of the three groups tested.

The quantitative aspect of this study also attempted to measure changes in levels of parental empowerment pre and post intervention and across all three groups, and parents' engagement in early literacy activities. Parents from all three types of groups engaged in early literacy activities with their children to some degree. When levels of empowerment were measured across the three different groups once again there was not a significant difference. In addition, in two of the groups, the Participatory Empowering and the Control group, there was not a significant change in empowerment as measured by the empowerment tool pre and post intervention. There was however a significant change in empowerment scored after the intervention in the prescriptive interventionist type group. Congruent with the Prescriptive Interventionist model proposed by Elsa Roberts Auerbach(1995) there was a statistically significant drop in the empowerment tool score post intervention suggesting a drop in empowerment level.

The lack of a significant change in levels of both beliefs and attitudes towards early literacy and in beneficial levels of parental empowerment is not surprising if one examines the components of a theory of empowerment outlined in Appendix A (Rappaport, 1987). A key principle of this theory is that empowerment is a multi-level construct concerned with relationships. In early literacy development the nature of the

relationships is important. Research has demonstrated that a unidirectional relationship between mother and child has limited benefit in enhancing literacy development (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998). Similarly a unidirectional relationship between group facilitator and group participant restricts growth in adult learners. Positive bi-directional or multi-directional interactions between parents and professional are thought to strengthen parental learning however (Auerbach, 1995). Parents attending the Participative group and the Control group spoke of the learning they obtained from others and how they contributed information to help other parents, leading to a good feeling and an increased sense of worth. On the other hand, the unidirectional interactions that were observed by this researcher during the Prescriptive literacy groups appeared to increase the participant's sense of helplessness, rather than their sense of competence. Both the parents and facilitator entered the intervention assuming the parents needed training to effectively prepare their child for school. The didactic method of interaction employed in the Prescriptive intervention may have contributed to an unequal balance of power (Turnbull, Turbiville, & Turnbull, 2000). Both seemed to perceive that the facilitator had the control of information and resources that would help them prepare their child for school (Turnbull et al., 2000). In contrast, both the Participative and Control group interventions involved multi-directional interactions among individuals of different ages and abilities where competencies were celebrated. Parents spoke openly to the researcher during quantitative data collection and in the qualitative interviews of the benefits, at Early Years Centres, of children, parents and group leaders learning from each other on a daily basis, and of also being able to contribute to the learning's of others. They spoke of

the diversity of opinion they encountered and the richness it brought to their families' lives.

A second important principle of empowerment is that cultural context matters (Rappaport, 1987). Although all the interventions occurred in neighbourhoods known to house a large percentage of newcomers to Canada, the Prescriptive intervention in particular was not geared to the socio-economic or cultural make-up of the neighbourhood, but to a middle-class English speaking population instead. Seventy-one percent of the Prescriptive group spoke a language other than English at home, but printed group materials were provided in English only, and at an advanced literacy level, not easily deciphered by a new learner of the English language. Although terms and concepts were explained to parents, parents had little opportunity to share their own cultural concept of school and their own personal history in the school setting. The theme of *across time and place* identified in the qualitative interviews demonstrates the strong effect that family and culture have on beliefs about literacy and learning. The historical context in which a person operates has an important influence on empowerment too, according to Rappaport (1987). Parents attending the Participatory and Control group interventions however, participated actively in sharing songs and rhymes, and identified sharing parenting beliefs, culture, food and language as a positive aspect of their involvement at the Early Years Centre.

Rappaport (1987) suggests that a mismatch between persons and settings is of consequence in empowerment. School readiness can be viewed as children and parents being ready for what professionals believe is necessary for success in school, or as schools being ready for the range of children that come to them (Brooks-Gunn, Berlin, &

Fuligni, 2000). Since the Prescriptive group parents' response to the Parent Information questionnaire indicated that twenty percent of them wanted their child to learn math or reading skills by attending the group, perhaps a didactic, school like encounter was what they were expecting in the intervention. For two-thirds of the participants, however, the meaning of preparation for school was undefined. Discussions during quantitative data collection and the qualitative interviews across all three groups identified a variety of other meanings for school readiness. For a number of parents it meant developing good habits and routines, being able to get along with peers, share, talk nicely, and listen to the teacher. For others it meant learning to hold a pencil and learning to separate from parents for the first time. Significantly, these were some of the beneficial activities of attending the drop-in group, as identified by parents attending the Control group.

E.F. Zigler, one of the fathers of the U.S. Head Start program, has summarized the necessary elements of effective early intervention programs identified by research. These include a need for a comprehensive program, high quality services provided along the developmental continuum, and the involvement of parents (Zigler, 2004). Early intervention programs that provide more comprehensive services and use multiple routes to enhance child development generally have larger effects than do interventions that are narrower in focus. Programs should provide services that address physical and mental health, and social support for children and their families, as well as age appropriate learning experiences (Zigler, 2004). Respondents in this study verified the importance of this multi-pronged approach. A large percentage of both the Participative and Control groups indicated that socialization for both them and their children was as important a reason for attending the groups as was mastering skills and obtaining knowledge. A home

literacy intervention which is part of a comprehensive culturally relevant education and support program with a child growth and development focus tailored to the family's specific goals will be embraced by parents. Similarly, a culturally relevant community based literacy program, that is only one component of a comprehensive early learning and support program may also meet parent and child needs, provided, in both cases, the literacy component is of a sufficient intensity and duration to effect a change.

Research has shown that short term preschool education will not guarantee success in school (Zigler, 2004); interventions of two hours duration lasting six to eight weeks, like the Participative and Prescriptive interventions, will have little effect on changing developmental trajectories and changing parental attitudes and behaviours long-term unless parents begin the intervention early in the child's life, internalize it and continually repeat or reinforce it. Similarly drop-in programming like that provided to the Control group may not have the breadth and intensity to effect change for at-risk children. It is the child's early experiences that influence the wiring of neurons and neural pathways of the brain (McCain & Mustard, 1999), and it is the intense reciprocal relationship with the parent that provides the experience necessary. When the child is actively involved in the literacy experience, by his response, he has an impact on his parent's behaviour as well as being influenced by it. The relationship between parent and child plays a crucial role in the child's capacity to react with others and influences neural pathways for language and higher cognitive functions (McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007). Positive bi-directional interactions between parent and child will increase both parent and child engagement and motivation to increase literacy work. This effect was clearly articulated by two of the mothers in the qualitative interviews who spoke of increasing their reading frequency and

library attendance related to their children's exuberant engagement with books and circle-time in their group intervention; but other parents indicate infrequent reading sessions and less intense engagement in the reading activities.

To be effective intervention programs must last longer than the year or so before the child begins school (Zigler, 2004). Many parents and program administrators still seem to be expecting that a short school readiness program will prepare a child for school despite the research that shows that those programs that begin earlier in development and continue longer provide greater benefits to the participants than do those that begin later and do not last as long. In the Prescriptive group, over sixty-five percent of children who participated were over the age of four, compared to the Participative group where fifty per cent were under age two. While some parents did indeed indicate the Prescriptive type group was the first community program they and their child had attended, it may be that for others the group was the final step on a developmental continuum of early intervention community groups attended since the child was small. Programs need to be targeted at the developmental level of the child, and there is some indication, from discussions with participants, that both the Participative and Prescriptive type intervention groups may be providing intervention to children on a developmental continuum. Senechal and LeFevre's (2002) longitudinal study of parental involvement in the development of children's reading skills demonstrated that the various pathways leading to fluent reading have their roots in different aspects of children's early literacy experiences, so attendance at a variety of intervention programs over the development course may provide this.

Research also indicated that programs that are more intensive produce larger positive effects than do less intensive interventions. A six week, two hour program in isolation will have little long term effect. In early literacy terms, a child is exposed to book reading only at a weekly group will have little sustained benefit. The earlier the parent and child establishes a regular pattern of book reading, the number of times in a day that a parent animatedly interacts with his child around a book, or provides alternative literacy related experiences, the more beneficial. Early literacy research corroborates this; daily concentrated picture-book sharing sessions provided by engaged parents have been shown to enhance literacy development (Bus, 2001; Bus et al., 1997; Whitehurst, Falco, Lonigan, Fischel, DeBaryshe, Vadez-Menchaca et. al, 1988). Children immersed in a literate environment and bombarded by ongoing literacy experiences in their everyday world thrive. Sixty percent of individuals in this study indicated they had a regular reading time for their children, but a large percentage, forty percent, did not.

Parents in this study appear to have embraced the message that they have an important role in early literacy development, at least in the early years. Over fifty percent of the sixty parents who participated indicated they began reading to their child before one year of age. Over seventy percent indicated that they and their children read regularly. While parental efficacy in storybook reading is present while children are very young, it is not clear that parents feel as confident about taking ownership of the intervention as children age. A number of parents with more than one child delegated the reading task to older children in the family. In addition, two of the parents interviewed, just after their children started Junior Kindergarten, indicated reducing their reading activities since their child now read in school. Parents need to have the belief that they have an ongoing integral

role not only in the early development of literacy but in their child's lifelong learning. They need to feel that the continued daily activities they engage in are as important as those provided by early childhood educators, elementary school teachers and other professionals.

Children grow up in families, not programs, so that the initial positive effects of early intervention will diminish if there are not adequate environmental supports to maintain the child's positive attitude and behaviour and support continued learning (Ramey & Ramey, 1998). An early literacy program, whether community or home based, will not succeed in modifying the developmental trajectory of an at-risk young child without an engaged, involved parent who believes in the value of early literacy work and commits to maintaining a stimulating home environment.

The qualitative aspects of this study were illuminating in answering the question of whether these programs empower parents to take action to make changes in the lives of their children. Mothers across all three groups identified similar themes related to their beliefs about early literacy, participation in early literacy activities and barriers they encounter and conquer. Together their words show a population of parents struggling but wanting to provide the best start in life for their children. They show a group of parents who, once equipped with knowledge and tools, would and do take action to influence the early development of their children.

Limitations

Unlike laboratory based research or intervention research in which all intervention is provided by a research team, there are many variables that are not under the control of the researcher in applied research settings. The individuals in this study were all part of a

convenience sample; they chose to participate in their particular groups and were approached to participate in the research secondary to group attendance. The transient nature of some families with children attending the centre programs resulted, in some cases, in delayed follow-up post intervention. A number of the families had planned extended visits to family members at a distance and were not reachable for three or four weeks at a time. Others changed their usual group attendance patterns over the summer months.

English language fluency itself was a limitation during other aspects of the data collection as well. One area where this was made clear was in the administration of the questionnaires that formed the attitude and the empowerment scales. The paper and pencil instruments did not pick up the extent of all the participants' knowledge or attitudes. Since families were in a natural setting, in their homes or community setting, their full attention was not always on the task, as they often completed the research tools while still keeping an eye on their young child. While the researcher and Centre staff attempted to provide support in this area, full attention to the research questions was sometimes compromised by the high activity and noise level in the setting. Parents were offered assistance in reading questions but frequently preferred to independently complete the questionnaires, occasionally discussing aspects of the data collection tools with family members. While this desire to complete the questionnaire alone could be considered an indication of self-efficacy, as parents appeared to value the ability to use the English language skills they possessed, they were also embarrassed by their perceived deficiencies. This was voiced several times in the qualitative interviews with mothers. I wonder whether their unwillingness to ask for assistance or clarification is related to past

experience when they were made to feel inferior and intellectually deficient for their limited English language skills, and whether their reluctant communication would be mirrored in other interactions with educational professionals when their children enter school.

Major limitations of this study were the literacy belief and attitude tool and the empowerment measurement tool used. While both tools showed acceptable validity and reliability for their authors, this researcher obtained low reliability scores in the PRBI with this research sample. Part-way through the administration of both the instruments, I became aware, through observation of parents completing the questionnaire that parents were struggling with the interpretation of some of the questions; due to both linguistic difficulties and the literacy level required by the tool. While this was true to some extent with both tools, it was more apparent with the MIPPA. I noticed, as well, while analyzing the data from the MIPPA, that there were randomly missed questions. A major limitation in this study was the literacy level of this empowerment tool. Unfortunately few tools are currently available to measure empowerment and even this author stated that he was no longer researching the tool, preferring instead to concentrate on sustaining empowerment's practices. In private correspondence with the author of the MIPPA, Y. Le Bosse, post intervention, the researcher was cautioned that the tool had been used for research purposes but not for its diagnostic performance requirements, limiting its usefulness in determining empowerment (personal communication, September 21, 2007).

Implications for Research

It is significant to note that although this geographic area is a frequent locale for early years' researchers, those with limited English language skills are usually excluded.

Despite the language difficulties the enthusiasm of the parents to participate and their desire for their views to be heard through the research validated, for me, the need to persevere. Despite the language struggles, I was rewarded by rich dialogue and an interesting record of these individuals' experiences. Future early years' research needs to find ways to ensure that their voices continue to be heard and indeed amplified.

Implications for Policy and Practitioners

As previously mentioned, further work needs to be done to develop a valid, user friendly empowerment tool. The difficulty of obtaining such a tool was surprising to me.

Parents in this study indicate that many times one or more of the literacy tools, as well as time or energy were in short supply. This limited their literacy engagement. For some families the simple act of receiving a children's storybook as a thank you for participating in the literacy research was enough to initiate more frequent reading sessions with their young children. Two of the six mothers who were interviewed made reference to not owning children's books and of making repeated use, with their child, of the incentive book provided by the researcher. In how many other families was this echoed? Fifteen percent of the sixty families who participated in this study indicated that they owned less than 5 books, and forty per cent indicated that they did not regularly use the library. Ready access to books prior to school attendance is an issue with many of these parents. Many parents reported having a library card but not utilizing it. Further research needs to be done to investigate the barriers to library use. Transportation and distance were cited as factors, but so was library material access. Certainly there was recognition and utilization of the Hamilton Public Library's Family Language Literacy Kits by some of the research participants. There was also frustration that these dual

language literacy resources intended for newcomers to Canada weren't readily available in all geographic areas and that systems issues appeared to limit their distribution to underserved areas, despite parents' requests. We, as professionals, encourage multilingual families to read to their children, we entice them with the possibility of resources that would facilitate and enable them to open literacy to their children, and yet when they strive to obtain the best for their child, we monopolize power when we create barriers that deny them access to these resources by allowing systems issues to go unaddressed.

We also have not adequately informed families of the importance of the maintenance and promotion of home languages. Current literature identifies the value of immersion in multiple languages at a very early age. Individuals exposed to two languages in the first seven to eight months of life will have little difficulty mastering the two languages; neurons that respond to sound develop sensitivity to the sounds of different languages in early life making it easier to differentiate the sounds and develop the neurological pathways necessary for capability with multiple languages. (McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007). This message needs to be clearly articulated to parents like those involved in this study who are struggling to read to their children only in English.

Similarly, we encourage families to participate in early identification of developmental lags that would impede school readiness, but how do we support parents who encounter problem? Mothers in this study overwhelmingly proclaimed that "every parent wants what's best for their kids" and yet when one sought help when she perceived a delay, she was left to feel helpless, with a depressed sense of personal efficacy. How devastating for a mother to openly state "You were not a good mother...I felt that" because she had recognized her child's speech delay when she should be empowered and celebrated for

taking steps to identify and address these concerns before her child began school. This same mother, a few months before, related at a school readiness session how she wanted so much to help her four year old son prepare for school that she gave him lessons to complete each night after supper and had him sit at the kitchen table until he fell asleep.

Conclusion

Despite the barriers encountered there were concrete signs of empowerment in the stories told by the six mothers interviewed. Parents are breaching the barriers and are taking action. The blind father who “reads from his heart” is using his competencies to strengthen his family’s functioning. The young pregnant mother, who, although tired and ill, helped her son memorize one of only two storybooks they possess, is taking action to develop skills with her son. The Somali mother who observed the power of dialogic reading during a group story-time session is empowered to continue to open the doors of literacy for her family. Today she and her son joyously discover the wonderful world of Dr. Seuss at their local library. The single mother who makes daily trips through her neighbourhood to introduce her very young child to environmental literacy is gaining control of her world and is ready to share her knowledge and experience with others.

The suggestion that there was a reduction in parental empowerment after attendance at the prescriptive interventionist type early literacy group mirrors Elsa Robert Auerbach’s (1995) contention that many family literacy programs focus on transmitting the culture of school literacy to the family, rather than empowering family members to participate. In reality though, many of the parents who attended the program had specific desires to obtain knowledge about school processes too. While Auerbach’s concerns are heard, this program probably falls somewhere along a continuum between a Prescriptive

Interventionalist model and a Participatory Empowering model. The suggested drop in empowerment level in the Prescriptive group is a concern however and the question is whether this will be mirrored in parents in other School Readiness programs. The Ontario government has recently launched Early Learning and Literacy Centres in schools in vulnerable geographic areas. If children and parents from the population addressed in this study experienced a reduction in empowerment after attending a short term program in a school setting, how will they fare in the school based Centres? If parents are to benefit and become involved in Early Learning and Literacy Centres would it not be better instead to move these Centres out of schools to neighbourhood Ontario Early Years Centres where parents and children are learning and where empowerment is thriving? Parents in this study regularly attended Ontario Early Years centers with their children. Parents in this research identified positive interactions between staff, children and parents occurring there and most importantly were empowered.

Researchers have built an understanding of how addresses in poverty stricken neighbourhoods adversely impact children living there (Zigler & Styfco, 2004). The notion that we could take children who have lived their whole lives in poverty, provide them with a few weeks of intervention and forever change their developmental trajectory is now considered absurd (Zigler, 2004). Instead we need to effect change by working with families early, while the child's windows of opportunity are open, and continue through his developing years and the way to do so is by empowering parents to become not only their child's first teacher, but his most important and long-lasting.

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Appendix A - Principles for a Theory of Empowerment

- Empowerment is a multilevel construct that takes place over time and across several settings including individuals, groups, organizations, communities and social policies. It is concerned with the study of relationships within and between these settings.
- Empowerment is not just the study of individuals. Understanding persons, settings or policies requires multiple measures from different points of view and different levels of analysis. The impact of one level on the others is important.
- The historical context in which a person, program or policy operates has an important influence on the outcomes of the program. It is important to understand the conditions occurring before and after implementation.
- Cultural context matters. The match or mismatch between person and setting is of consequence, meaning that a diversity of settings and programs with a variety of styles, attitudes and goals is needed.
- The study of people, organizations, and policies over time (longitudinal research) is desirable in order to understand empowerment.
- Empowerment is a world view theory. Those who hold this view do so because they have values, goals, attitudes, beliefs, and intentions that they need to share. The people of concern are to be treated as collaborators and the researcher as a participant; the choice of language used is important in what it communicates to other researchers, policy makers and people being studied.
- The conditions of participation in a setting will have an impact on the empowerment of the members. Those who participate in decisions and activities that are meaningful to them are more likely to be empowered. Settings with more opportunities for participation are more likely to be empowering settings. The history and culture of both the person and setting will mediate the impact of the intervention.
- All other things being equal, an organization that holds an empowering ideology will be better at finding and developing resources than one with a helper-helpee

ideology, where resources will be seen as relatively scarce and dependent on professionals.

- Locally developed solutions are more empowering than single solutions applied in a general way, and applied in the form of pre-packaged interventions.
- The size of the setting matters. Settings that are small enough to provide meaningful roles for all members, yet large enough to obtain resources are more likely to create conditions that lead to empowerment.
- Empowerment is not a scarce resource which gets used-up; once adopted as an ideology, empowerment tends to expand resources.

Rappaport, J. (1987). Terms of empowerment/ exemplars of prevention: Towards a theory for Community Psychology. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 15, 121-148.

Appendix B
Research Ethics Board Approval

DATE: March 15, 2007
 FROM: Linda Rose-Krasnor, Chair Research Ethics Board (REB)
 TO: Marini Zopito, Child and Youth Studies
 Dianne Busser
 FILE: 06-188 BUSSER

TITLE: Learning to be literate: Parental empowerment in Early Literacy interventions

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.

DECISION: Accepted as clarified.

This project has received ethics clearance for the period of March 15, 2007 to December 31, 2007 subject to full REB ratification at the Research Ethics Board's next scheduled meeting. The clearance period may be extended upon request. *The study may now proceed.*

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and cleared by the REB. During the course of research no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment, or consent form may be initiated without prior written clearance from the REB. The Board must provide clearance for any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to

<http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/forms> to complete the appropriate form

Revision or Modification to an Ongoing Application.

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored. A Final Report is required for all projects upon completion of the project. Researchers

with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research Services will contact you when this form *Continuing Review/Final Report* is required.

Appendix C - Parent Information

Please tell us a little about you and your habits by answering these short questions.

Home Postal Code? _____
(First three digits only)

Main Language spoken at home? _____

Age of child? _____

Do you read to your child? _____

How often? _____
(More than once a day, each day, a couple of times a week, not too often)

Do you have a regular reading time? _____
(Morning, Nap time, afternoon, evening, bedtime)

Who takes an active part in the reading? _____
(Asking questions, pointing to pictures, retelling the story, acting out the story)

What do you do after you read the story?

About how many books does your family have? _____

At what age did you first read to your child? _____

Do you go to the Library and take out books? _____

Do you attend an Ontario Early Years Centre? _____

Appendix D - Weekly Literacy Diary

Parent: _____

Child: _____

Week Dates: _____

Each time you do an activity please put a ✓ in the box

Positive Behaviour Demonstrated		Number of times in week	Who was involved
1	Gives book to child "to read"		
2	Reads story book to child		
3	Reads to child in animated or funny voice		
4	Names pictures in book		
5	Asks child questions about pictures, what was read, what comes next		
6	Encourages child to ask questions and talks with child about book		
7	Tells a story to child		
8	Child tells a story or finishes parents story		
9	Taught or sang song with child		
10	Taught or said nursery rhyme with child		
11	Does a finger-play activity with child		
12	Plays a singing game with child		
13	Makes a grocery list together with child		
14	Reads a newspaper or magazine with child		
15	Labels common household items with child		
16	Visits the Library with child		
17	Takes out three or more books from the Library for child		
18	Other- tell us about this activity here: _____		

Weekly Total: _____

Appendix E - Parent Reading Belief Inventory

Please read the sentence and circle the number that says what you think about reading and your child.

	No	Almost No	Almost Yes	Yes
I find it boring or difficult to read to my child.	1	2	3	4
Reading aloud is a special time we love to share.	1	2	3	4
When we read, I want my child to help me tell the story.	1	2	3	4
When we read, we talk about the pictures as much as we tell the story.	1	2	3	4
Even if I would like to, I'm just too busy and too tired to read to my child.	1	2	3	4
I don't read to my child because there is no room and no quiet place in the house.	1	2	3	4
As a parent, I play an important role in my child's development.	1	2	3	4
When my child goes to school, the teacher will teach my child everything my child needs to know so I don't need to worry.	1	2	3	4
Reading helps children learn about things they never see in real life.	1	2	3	4
My child learns lessons and morals from the stories we read.	1	2	3	4
Some children are natural talkers, others are silent. Parents do not have much influence over this.	1	2	3	4
Children inherit their language ability from their parents, it's in their genes.	1	2	3	4
Schools are responsible for teaching children, not parents	1	2	3	4
I read to my child so he/she will learn the letters and how to read simple sentences.	1	2	3	4
My child is too young to learn about reading.	1	2	3	4

Adapted from DeBaryshe, B., & Binder, J. (1994). Development of an instrument for measuring parental belief about reading aloud to young children. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 78, 1303-1311.

Appendix F - Measurement of Empowerment

Capacity to Act (MIPPA)

Here are a number of statements related to your experience as a parent
Put an **X** in the box with the number that corresponds to your level of agreement with each statement.

1= Strongly disagree

2= Disagree

3= Agree

4= Strongly agree

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree
1) This year, I want to do more activities with my child and/or other parents.				
2) I like to be involved in all kinds of different activities.				
3) In the next year I want to help organize activities for parents and young children.				
4) If I could be useful I would very much like to help a neighbourhood group that works with parents and children.				
5) I can travel to meet parents (by foot, by car, by bus, by subway).				
6) I have time to do things with other parents.				
7) I know how to get information on the activities offered to toddlers and parents.				
8) I can welcome parents to visit at my house.				
9) I have enough money to do some activities with parents.				
10) In a group I can look after the organization and sharing of tasks that need to be done.				
11) If I get involved with other parents in my neighbourhood we could improve the quality of life for young children.				
12) If I get involved with other parents we could in some way get the government to improve their programs.				

13) Doing things with other parents is a good way to share my feelings?				
14) A child who takes part in lots of activities is more content and well adjusted.				
15) Helping to set up an activity is a good way to learn lots of things.				
16) Doing things with other people is a good way not to dwell on my own problems.				
17) Whatever the conditions in which he lives, a good parent can always be patient with his child.				
18) Without support, a single parent who is isolated can hardly respond to all the needs of his child.				
19) When we have a hard time budgeting at the end of the month, it is normal that we are less able to pay attention to our children.				
20) When one is raising a child alone, it is more difficult to respond to all his needs.				
21) If society supported the family more, there would be fewer parents in poverty.				
22) Perhaps if more relief was offered to parents there would be fewer neglected children.				
23) The more a parent is preoccupied (with money problems or relationships) the more difficulty he has in looking after his child.				
24) As long as we do not have any laws that support the family, we will never be able to improve living conditions for parents and children.				
25) We do not need to put more money into services to really improve the lives of parents and children.				
26) No matter the situation, a good parent is always able to meet the needs of his child.				

Adapted from. Le Bosse', Y., Dufort, F. & Vandette, L. (2004). L'évaluation de l'empowerment des personnes : Développement d'une mesure d'indices psychosociologiques du pouvoir d'agir (MIPPA). *Revue Canadienne De Santé Mentale Communautaire*, 23. (1), p.91-114.

Appendix G

Qualitative Interview

Today I would like to talk to you about your involvement in activities at home and in the community related to your young child. A short while ago you participated in a research study at (*name of Ontario Early Years Centre/Parenting Group*). You consented to having me contact you again, after the group finished. I'd like to learn more about your thoughts and feelings about literacy development and your role as a parent of a young child under the age of six.

Is this a good time and place to talk?

Learning to read is an activity that is often linked with going to school, but some people feel that what happens before a child enters school is also important for a young child to learn skills to prepare for reading. This is called early literacy development.

When do you think most young children begin to learn skills to prepare for reading?

Is there too early an age or too late an age for a child to develop literacy skills?

What stops young children from learning to enjoy reading?

Who or what do you feel is most responsible for helping a young child learn to develop reading skills?

What role do you feel parents should play?

What activities do you do that work to develop your child's language or reading skills? Please explain.

You attended a community group at (*name of centre or group*) can you tell me why you first went to the group?

Is there anything you do differently at home because you attended the group?

Tell me more about this.

How has your participation in this group changed how you interact with your child?

Do you feel differently about your child or his/her development since attending the group?

How has your participation in this group changed how you feel about yourself?

Do you feel different about yourself since attending the group?

How has your participation in this group changed how you feel about the community?

What do parents want from groups like the one you attended?

What do they want from group leaders?

What suggestions would you like to share with group leaders?

Would you participate again in a literacy development program that works with you and your child to develop his language and reading skills?

Why or why not?

What final thoughts would you like to share?

