

School and Family Literacy Learning:  
Experiences of Children in Two Immigrant Families

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## **Abstract**

The focus of this study was to describe children's literacy learning in multicultural home and school contexts and identify and explore the intersection between the home and school literacy learning environments. Participant families and their teachers described various aspects of home and school literacy learning. Through interviews, photography, and journals, participants answered the following research questions: How do school institutions understand and encourage literacy practices outside the school and how are these practices used to support diverse literacy learners? How do learning experiences within the home and community differ from learning experiences within the school?

Data were collected via semi-structured interviews and researcher observations within the home and school contexts. Additionally, parent participants were asked to capture literacy and learning events through the use of cameras and daily journaling. The qualitative nature of the study allowed the researcher to record participant's literacy experiences and understandings in the authentic environments of the home and school.

This research study reflects the theory of literacy as a socio-cultural phenomenon. This theory recognizes that literacy learning in any environment cannot be separated from its context and recognizes that literacy is more than individual skills, but rather a community resource that is developed through interaction with others. Although all families possess useful knowledge and understandings that allow them to arbitrate their daily lives, unfortunately, as this study demonstrates, literacies are often ranked as more or less legitimate by school institutions. Literacy practices which are in close alignment with the schools are more widely accepted, and those outside the realm of the school may be undervalued or ignored.

Based on this qualitative study, numerous characteristics of home and school literacy were illuminated. School based literacy was more formal and based on measurable goals for each grade, defined by the school, division, and curriculum. Literacy of the school was viewed in a more traditional sense, as a set of skills which could be measured and recorded. Home literacy, in contrast, was more informal and spontaneous and based on the needs and interests of the learner. Learners within the home were apprenticed by their parents in learning practical, hands-on skills which were used to help mediate their daily activities. Additionally, the study highlights the literacy understandings of both the parents and the teachers of the immigrant learners. Both parent and teacher views of literacy and learning were influenced by their prior knowledge and learning experiences. The learning experiences of the parent and teacher participants were in sharp juxtaposition. Parent participants recalled larger social issues in literacy and learning such as poverty, self-sacrifice, and education as a social mobility agent. Teacher participants recalled early learning experiences based on traditional Euro-centric understanding of literacy which emphasized the importance of early skills such as phonics, word recognition, and storybook reading. The teachers did not include larger social issues which affect learning.

The research found that students' authentic home literacy experiences were used in the home and community to aid children to problem solve and mediate every day activities. The literacy activities were purpose driven and had practical applications. In the school context, home literacy experiences were incorporated into oral literacy learning activities and narrative and creative writing assignments such as journal and story writing. Despite the incorporation of home experiences in student assignments, these experiences were not used to inform teaching and learning in the classroom. Teaching methods and evaluation techniques were not regularly adapted to meet the needs of the English as Additional Language (EAL) learners. Students who

struggled to meet the demands of the curriculum were often removed from the classroom setting to work on specific skills or referred to the resource room with learning challenged students. The teachers revealed reasons which they felt impeded them from delivering more culturally responsive programs and teaching methods including time restraints, large class sizes, and inadequate resources.

This study identified several broad issues in literacy practices and understandings. There is an evident disconnect between home and school literacy and their uses. This is partially due to the varied experiences and understanding of parents and teachers. Closing this gap means incorporating educational reform on many levels. Teachers must be aware of student and family backgrounds, experiences, and understandings in order to create a truly inclusive learning program for diverse learners. Culturally responsive teaching means using the wide knowledge bases of all families to inform instruction and evaluation.

Teachers need to be provided with adequate education in preparing them for the realities of today's classroom. Culturally and linguistically diverse modern classroom have challenges which many teachers do not feel prepared. Providing adequate pre-service education on EAL learning and student diversity seeks to prepare teachers. Additionally, in-service education experiences on literacy practices for teaching in the culturally diverse classroom are essential in providing teachers with current information and resources. Furthermore, in examining existing parental engagement strategies, teachers can learn to create engaging opportunities for families to participate in their children's learning. The broadest issue within the study is the multicultural reality for the immigrant and EAL student. The education system needs to move away from multiculturalism as a Canadian catch phrase involving foods and celebrations toward culturally responsive teaching which uses student's linguistic and cultural knowledge to inform learning.

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my mentor and teacher, Angela Ward. Your faith in my ability enabled me to continue my work though some arduous times. I am indebted to you for your wisdom and guidance. Many, many thanks!

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## Chapter One – Prelude to the Study

### Introduction

With approximately 250,000 new immigrants arriving in Canada yearly and 18 per cent of Canadian citizens being foreign-born, Canada has the highest immigration rate of any G-8 country (Canadian Immigration Newsletter, 2007). In Saskatchewan, immigration has risen from 1728 immigrants in 1999 to 4836 immigrants in 2008 (Statistics Canada, 2008). Saskatchewan society is made up of indigenous peoples, descendants of the original settlers, and recent immigrants from all parts of the world. This recent increase of immigration to Canada has resulted in many middle-class immigrant and ethnic enclaves in many cities (Li, 2006, p. 3). Due to this increase, national and local education systems began to realize the need for updated policies and practices in regards to the culturally diverse student populations:

Saskatchewan Education, Training and Employment recognizes cultural and linguistic diversity as a characteristic of our society and as a positive contributor to the social, political and economic life of the province. It acknowledges a responsibility, shared with others, to develop and implement programs and policies that reflect the needs of this increasingly pluralistic population.

<http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/policy/multi/policy.html.waq13102009>

The purpose of this thesis is to study children's literacy learning in multicultural home and school contexts and to identify and explore the intersection between the two.

In addition, the research explores the following questions more specifically:

- How do school institutions understand and encourage literacy practices outside the school and how are these practices used to support diverse literacy learners?
- How do learning experiences within the home and community differ from learning experiences within the school?

At the forefront of education issues for immigrant students and their families is literacy achievement. Li (2006) tells us that literacy learning and teaching are political, dynamic processes that are not static or harmonious, as many tensions are evident in the discourses of literacy learning in the home and school:

In the apprenticeship of new social practices, minority learners have to become complicit with a new set of norms which may not match their initial enculturation and socialization... Their cultural knowledge is often in conflict with the school's way of knowing or mainstream knowledge [academic, social and cultural](p. 20).

Research on minority family literacy practices (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Heath, 1983; Li, 2006) found that literacy practices of the culturally diverse are often very different from the mainstream, in terms of beliefs and practices about instruction and parental involvement which may be in conflict with mainstream teaching models. North American models of teaching and learning tend to be teacher centered and may disregard the autonomy of immigrant students and families in regards to what they are able to contribute to the school and learning. In reality, these families have vast knowledge bases from their homes and communities (Moll, 2004; Moll, Amanti, & Gonzalez, 1992; Moll & Greenburg, 1990).

This study is guided by the understanding that literacy learning is socially constructed, and that knowledge is gained through experience and is an active creation crafted by the

individual. Children's home, school, and community literacy practices shape their knowledge, creating new meaning in their social worlds. Meeting children's needs in today's diverse classrooms suggests the incorporation of practices and policies which recognize these essential family assets, supporting the academic achievement of all children. Cummins (1988, 1994) speaks of the relation of power and the need to move from a teacher centered transmission style models toward a critical thinking, collaborative style environment for students and teachers.

### **Importance of the Study**

Given the fast changing cultural and ethnic landscape of Canadian society, researchers and educators need to ensure that our education system provides equal support and opportunity for all students. Saskatchewan's immigration strategy includes the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program (SINP) which aims to attract skilled labourers and entrepreneurs to address labour force shortages and stimulate economic growth. According to the Saskatchewan Immigration website, in 2008-2009 the number of nominations increased by 72 percent to 2,914 immigrant workers and their families, which equates to 7800 people. Additionally, the Government of Saskatchewan is investing an additional \$2.69 million, which will continue to focus on attracting immigrants to our province ([www.immigration.gov.sk.ca](http://www.immigration.gov.sk.ca)). With immigration rising in our country, the need for current research on the topic of English Additional Language learning (EAL) is important in developing current, effective educational programs and partnerships with families of our diverse student body. Li (2006) explains that there has been much research on immigration and/or minority language and literacy acquisition focusing on the linguistic and cognitive aspects of English learning. She warns that such a narrow focus often ignores the funds of knowledge students may acquire outside school in the home and communities. Denzin and Lincoln (1995) and Fine (1991) use the term "voiced research" to

describe bringing into focus the perspectives of those previously unheard or silenced. This study seeks to provide meaningful dialogue among educators in Saskatchewan as to how we can reframe our teaching practices in accordance to the understandings of our diverse student population.

### **Canadian Multiculturalism – A Glimpse into the Past**

In the late nineteenth century (1867-1895) Canada had lenient policies towards the immigrant flow into Canada and allowed the market flow of supply and demand to determine migration flow into Canada (Manpower and Immigration Canada, 1974, pp. 3-4). The immigration strategy was virtually an open-door policy towards those of European origin, especially Britain and the United States. When volumes remained low, the government encouraged immigrant groups. Those who responded were Mennonite, Scandinavian, and Hungarian immigrants (Trebilcock & Ninette, 1998, pp. 72-77). Despite the “open-door” period of immigration, the government placed severe restrictions on non-white immigrants. By 1885, the Parliament of Canada passed an act to restrict and regulate Chinese immigration and impose a head tax of \$50 on every Chinese person who came to Canada (Li, 1990).

Policy development between the years of 1896-1914 was headed by Clifford Sifton (minister of the land administration and immigration), who was in favour of massive immigration for agricultural settlement, particularly in the Prairie Provinces. When the supply of England and Western European immigrants began to fall behind the demand for workers and settlers, Canada began bringing in Eastern and Southern European immigrants, such as Poles, Hutterites, and Doukhobors.

Asians and other non-whites were considered undesirable because of their racial and cultural differences. By the first decade of the twentieth century, Canada had already established

clear policies for excluding “undesirables”. For example, the head tax placed on the Chinese coming to Canada was raised from \$50 to \$500 in 1903 (Li, 1990). It is during this period that Canada experienced its highest level of immigration in history. The factors that aided this expansion were improved agricultural production, higher staple prices, declining transportation rates, European demand of Canadian produce, and concentrated industrialization (Trebilcock & Ninette, 1998, pp. 111-163).

Canada continued to follow a policy of accepting immigrants for land settlement from 1914 to 1945. British and American citizens were considered the most desirable, followed by North Europeans and the Central Europeans. Southern and Eastern Europeans were endured, while Jewish and non-white immigrants were not welcome at all. The end of the World War II marked the beginning of an age of industrialized growth which ended with the implementation of a universal selection system in 1967.

In 1952, the Government of Canada passed the *Immigration Act*, which determined the framework for managing Canada’s immigration policy and gave power to immigration officers to determine what types of people were admissible. Further changes to immigration regulations in 1967 finally resulted in a universal point system to be applied to all immigrants, regardless of country of origin or racial background (Li, 1990).

The point system adopted in 1976 remained the framework for selecting immigrants until 2001 when new regulations were developed. In 2001, the Parliament of Canada passed (Bill C-11) entitled *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, which replaces the *Immigration Act, 1976*, and over 30 amendments were made to this act. The new act distinguishes between immigrant and refugee protection and outlines the objectives for the immigrant program and its benefits to Canadian society:

Canada needs young, dynamic, well-educated, skilled people. It needs innovation, ideas, and talents. Canadian employers want to take advantage of opportunities offered by the fast-moving pool of skilled workers. The global labour force can benefit Canadians through job creation and the transfer of skills. Immigration legislation must be adapted to enhance Canada's advantage in the global competition for skilled workers (Canadian Legal Services, May 2003, p. 1).

In 1971 Prime Minister Trudeau declared an official policy of multiculturalism in Canada. Due to this policy and its significant support by provincial governments, Canadian educators have been trying to develop and implement multicultural education policies in classrooms across the country.

As is evident from this review, throughout Canada's history the state has played a heavy role in setting immigration policy, as it has used immigration as a means to address such issues as labour shortages and economic development. The Canadian state tailored the immigration policy to meet the economic needs, while balancing the political and ideological needs of the nation (Li, 1990, p. 15). Immigrants are attracted to more highly developed regions of the world such as Canada because of their material affluence and economic prosperity.

### **Defining multiculturalism – A Mosaic or a Muddle?**

In the 1970s, the term multiculturalism emerged in many facets of Canadian culture such as government, science, marketing, popular culture, and education and continues to be used in these many diverse dialogues today. Due to these many facets, multiculturalism has come to have various meanings: "The increased usage of the term multiculturalism in a myriad of discourses and by a variety of actors marks a significant change in semantics; a change of the codes in which society is describing itself" (Vertovec, 1999, p. 224). According to Vertovec,

multiculturalism may have the following meanings: a) “a basic demographic of society”; b) “exotic otherness displayed in lively festivals, spiritual dances, spicy cuisines, and colourful costumes”; c) “a vision of how society should function (towards its immigrant population using tolerance and respect”; d) “public policy aimed at the rights of minorities” (p. 223).

Various publication and polls, such as the Angus Reid Group study in 1991, suggest that Canadians are supportive of a multicultural Canada. In telephone surveys and focus groups, over 95 percent of Canadians agreed when asked if they could be proud of being Canadian and proud of their ancestry at the same time, while 83 percent agreed when asked if multiculturalism was about equality for Canadians of all regions. Despite the high level of support for multiculturalism, Day (2000) suspects that this support is due to many Canadians viewing multiculturalism as an ideal, when in reality, few Canadians are clear on the definition of multiculturalism, its purpose and what it accomplishes. Similarly, Leman (1999) explains that the confusions about multiculturalism and its purpose results from an arbitrary use of the term to a wide range of situations and practices. Canadians pride themselves on living in a country which is more like a mosaic of cultures: “a mosaic of several bounded, nameable, individually homogeneous, and unmeltable minority cultures which are pinned on the backdrop of a majority culture” (Vertovec, 1999, p. 224). Despite the picture of unity Canada tries to portray, some theorists feel that Canadian multiculturalism is no more progressive than other countries and claim there isn't considerable evidence of multicultural progress in local or national initiatives as the policies around multiculturalism “tend to employ ill-defined ideas and implicit notions about multiculturalism” (Vertovec, 1999, p. 222). Academic literature on the subject has brought much attention to the ideological critique of multicultural policies and practice and has begun to analyze multiculturalism as unequal power relations between different racial and ethnic

groups (Day, 2000). Some critics, such as Karl Peter (1981) go so far as to claim that multiculturalism is a myth based on “high sounding liberal ideals, not on the empirical reality of Canadian society” (p. 65). Day (2000) suggests “forms of local autonomy and identity which currently exist (in multicultural Canada) have survived not by virtue of a history of multicultural tolerance, but through the determined resistance (from minority groups) to a dream of a perfectly situated space of social order” (p. 3).

### **The Foundation of the Study**

This study examines the literacy learning of two immigrant families in their home and school contexts. To better understand the challenges these families faced, I felt it important to have knowledge of the Canadian immigration policy and how its exclusionary guidelines through history affected new Canadians, therefore improving my understandings of the lived experience of the participants. Additional understanding and research on the issues surrounding the ideology of multiculturalism encouraged me to challenge the status quo of “the Canadian mosaic ideal” and examine multiculturalism from various perspectives, creating a more comprehensive view. Finally, in researching what multiculturalism means for today’s diverse schools in Canada, I might better understand the challenges facing immigrant students and their families.

Literacy learning within the multicultural context of this study will reflect the tensions and issues resulting from changing patterns of immigration to Canada, changing beliefs about multicultural Canada, and the pendulum between the traditional Euro-centric teaching and the progressive, student centered culturally relevant education. The families in this study are encountering Canadian society, through its schools, for the first time. Their interactions, their understandings, and their experiences will be a window into lived experiences of multiculturalism.

## **Overview of the Thesis**

The framework for this research is literacy as a socio-cultural phenomenon, and therefore seeks to gain insight as to how literacy is learned within the contexts of home and school and how the literacy understandings of teachers, parents, and communities affect learning.

This study describes the experiences and understandings of two families from immigrant backgrounds regarding how their children gain literacy skills both in the home and school setting. Additionally, literacy understandings of the students' teachers and their classroom practices, as well as the classroom and context and school climate are described. Gaining information from both contexts helped me to better understand how literacy is learned and viewed both in the home and school contexts and aided in identifying the intersection between the two contexts.

*Chapter One* provides an introduction to the study, its purpose, and its importance.

*Chapter Two* provides an overview of the literature and the research which has been completed on the following topics pertaining to this study: pluralistic understandings of literacy, the disconnect between community and school literacy learning, and educational issues arising in a multicultural environment.

*Chapter Three* describes the research paradigm (qualitative), research, and data analysis procedures.

*Chapter Four* summarizes data from the participants' interviews and observations and gives voice to participants' stories.

*Chapter Five* interprets the data that are presented in Chapter Four and identifies four themes from the study: Literacy as a socio-cultural practice in the community, literacy within the

institution of school, schooled literacy as cultural capital: the disconnect between the home and school, and the realities of multiculturalism in Canada.

*Chapter Six*, the concluding chapter, draws research conclusions, makes recommendations based on the themes identified in Chapter 5, makes suggestions for further research, and closes with a personal reflection.

## **Chapter Two- Exploring the Literature**

This chapter is divided into three sections: Section One discusses literacy and its dynamic nature, Section Two outlines the disconnect between community and school literacy learning, and the review closes in Section Three with an overview of the realities of multiculturalism in Canada for immigrant students and their families.

### **The Definition of Literacy Evolves**

In the research literature it is increasingly common to find plural designations of the term literacy. The range of “new literacies” substantiates the understanding that competence changes according to contexts, communities, and practices. Literacy does not occur in isolation, but is rather a social and cultural practice into which members of specific social groups are encultured (Hall, 2002). This suggests that literacy is not a skill which individuals possess, but rather a community resource that is developed through social interaction and relationships. Reading and writing are not structured as solitary acts, but rather develop as collaborative efforts in a community of practice. In recent years there has been a re-evaluation of the traditional methods of literacy instruction based on single, autonomous methods, toward multiple literacy perspectives. Moll, et al (1992) suggest educators shift their understanding of literacy learning from individual learners toward a vision of learning as participation in a community of practice. This transformed view places less focus on individuals’ reading and writing skills and more on gaining understanding through social participation through groups and communities (Cairney, 2002, p. 108). This perspective on literacy challenges the individual notion of literacy and pluralizes it, creating the theory of multiple literacies. This literacy perspective includes categories such as New Literacy Studies (NLS) and literacies as social practice (Cairney, 2002).

The paradigm shift from singular to plural definitions of literacy is based on a larger theoretical framework which has been changing over the last century. This shift recognizes that individuals are subject to larger forces of a social system. Purcell-Gates (2000) explains that educational theory and research have moved from “a belief in the autonomy of the individual mind and its ability to understand an objective reality [toward] modern perspectives [which] led us to view individuals as shaped by dominant systems such as economy and religion (p. 2).

Street’s (1993) cross-cultural ethnographic studies were important in the foundation of the notion of new literacy studies (NLS). In Street’s work, he suggested that literacy does not occur in isolation but rather is embedded and practiced within social and cultural settings. He distinguished between autonomous and ideological definitions of literacy:

Autonomous literacy is defined as a unified set of skills which can be applied equally across all contexts, while the ideological definition views literacy as a social practice which is grounded in historical, cultural, and political contexts. Using the latter definition, literacy is viewed as a construct within specific cultural settings for particular purposes and is more than simply acquiring content. Rather, the ideological definition of literacy positions reading and writing within social practices, which give them meaning. (p. 95)

Traditionally, literacy meant the ability to decode text and make meaning in reading and writing activities for functional reasons. However, it must be acknowledged that powerful social and political connections exist which are key factors in becoming literate. Literacy practices are similarly comprised of past and present power relations among those who read and write for certain goals. Street felt that literacies are ranked as more or less legitimate by institutions based on a particular literacy’s capacity to provide its users with material gain and power. Gee (1996)

similarly states that literacy as social practice is historically situated, linked to power relations, and is dependent on cultural understanding. Delgado-Gaitan (1990) explains: “People’s awareness of the socio-political environment, their participation in it, and the meaning they ascribe to it bear significantly on the process of becoming literate” ( p. 41). Gee (1996) proposes that students, teachers, and parents construct their own meanings of literacy, endorse understandings, expectations, and norms as to what it means to be literate for them personally ( p. 107). On the school landscape, parents and teachers have varied beliefs about effective strategies regarding literacy instruction and development. These beliefs may be tied to mainstream discourses, culture, and/or background. As Cairney and Ruge (1997) state: “Teachers, students, and parents construct particular models of literacy and sanction particular meaning norms, expectations and roles of what it means to be literate” (p. 6). Gaining understanding regarding mainstream discourses can aid teachers and researchers in recognizing parental beliefs as an important factor in influencing children’s learning outcomes.

The New Literacy Studies (NLS) perspective challenges the notion of autonomous literacy; rather it acknowledges literacies in various contexts. Gee (1996) discussed this socialization and participation in terms of discourse. Discourse is described as ways of enacting meaningful socially situated identities and activities in which members take on identities when playing their appointed roles within the social practices. Educational researchers and theorists have positioned schooled literacy as a discourse, one of the many discourses in our multicultural, multilingual society. Delpit (1995), Gee (1996), and Giroux (1988) are among the theorists who studied literacy from a perspective of multiple discourses. The multiple literacy perspective recognizes that literacy and language acquisition are more than an understanding of the rules of a language. Rather, a full range of cultural knowledge is essential for participation in that culture.

A culture's dominant language most often shapes the rules for its dominant discourse. A very particular narrow form of Standard English is the discourse that most often dominates schooling, ignoring that there are many discourses and children, and that children are instructed in both mainstream and non-mainstream discourses.

Gee (1996) identified two broad kinds of discourses in his socio-linguistic approach to literacy. Primary discourses are those to which people are apprenticed to early in life in their socio-cultural settings and are our first social identities. Secondary discourses refer to those which people are apprenticed to in various institutions outside the home and peer group socialization. Gee (1990) explained that the acquisition of our primary discourse takes place subconsciously, as experience in the primary discourse is gained from informal teaching, trial and error, and feedback from others. The situation with secondary discourse differs, as the discourse is learned through explicit knowledge, which is referred to as metaknowledge.

The process of literacy learning in the classroom involves the learning of the secondary discourse of the school. The primary discourse of students from mainstream backgrounds, especially those from the middle class, is often similar to that of the school, as their mother language, Standard English, is used by the teacher in instruction. Students are also familiar with the storybook reading which occurs in the classroom, and therefore readily adjust to the secondary discourse quickly and need little time with the acquisition process before learning specific reading and writing skills. Contrastingly, students from diverse backgrounds may have experienced forms of literacy that do not parallel the literacy practices within the school. These students often have a different mother language than the teacher uses in instruction and may not be familiar with the process of "known" answer questioning. Au (1997) explained competence in school climate and culture is a process of enculturation: "Values, beliefs, and behaviours

associated with the Secondary Discourses of the school, may contrast sharply with the values, beliefs, and behaviours associated with students' Primary Discourse" (p. 57). Li (2006) states: "For students from diverse backgrounds, the process of acquiring language and literacies may involve the interaction of multiple cultural values and beliefs and multiple social contexts of socialization" (p. 15).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological view of child development outlines this intersection of values and beliefs in terms of macro systems and meso systems. Under this framework, macro systems are described as daily settings in which children participate with different adults and peers. Settings include the home, extended home, school, and church. Meso systems refer to the belief systems, attitudes, and relationships among learners within the various settings. The better connections children can make among settings, the easier the transition is from one setting to the next. When attitudes and belief systems across settings are similar, children adapt better in both settings. Without these similarities, transition from one setting to the next is more difficult. Daily literacy practices are a topic which has gained importance in educational theory and research as everyday literacy events are increasingly being documented and studied. These everyday literacies have come to be known as local literacy, literacy practices, and literacy events (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanic, 2000; Purcell-Gates, 2006). Literacy events and practices became keys to understanding literacy as a social phenomenon. This form of literacy was termed local or vernacular literacy by Barton and Hamilton (1998). Barton and Hamilton describe literacy events as observable episodes which arise from practices and are shaped by them. This view of literacy events emphasizes the situated nature of literacy, which always exists in social context. Shirley Brice Heath's work with local literacy practices in the small communities of Trackton, Roadville, and Maintown in her study *Ways with Words* (1983)

describes literacy events as a tool for examining the forms and functions of language, both oral and written, and deemed any activity in which literacy has a role as a literacy event (p. 93).

Researchers such as Moll, Amanti, and Gonzalez (1992) believe literacy mediates individuals' interactions with the world and relates to making sense of lived experience. Every day literacy practices address a wide range of needs, including understanding of health and nutrition, legal issues, child rearing, personal identity, and spiritual guidance. Daily literacy practices which address these needs are documented and studied to learn more about the socio-cultural aspects of learning. Daily activities in which individuals used literacy to manage their households included reading grocery fliers, food labels, and recipes, paying bills, writing cheques, and extracting pertinent information from bus schedules and newspapers are of interest. Local literacy is also used to help individuals communicate, as in the writing of letters, memos, greeting cards, as well as used as a form of relaxation, as individuals' complete crossword puzzles, word searches and read from magazines, newspapers, and novels.

As vernacular literacy became highlighted in educational theory and research, so did interest in how children use these literacies to enhance their in-school learning experiences. As a result of experiences with non-academic literacy, vernacular literacy began to be viewed as a way of understanding and answering how these resources converge into school literacy learning (Purcell-Gates, 2000). Probing questions regarding the equity of language learning and teaching practices for all rose to the surface. Situated literacy acknowledges that students are active participants who choose to react to meaningful tasks (Bourdieu, Passerson and Nice, 1977). In contrast, school literacy is the type of literacy and instruction promoted in the education system and tends to be comprised of skills taught outside the actual real world contexts of reading and writing. School literacy privileges certain discourses, and ways of speaking and talking, over

others. Current literacy learning research (Gee, 1996; Street, 1993; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Cairney & Ruge, 1997; Cairney, 2002) challenge the traditional notion of autonomous literacy and have moved toward pluralistic definitions which understand literacy as a dynamic, social, and cultural process and emphasize the situated nature of literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Heath, 1983; Moll, et al, 1992). Under these pluralistic definitions, it is understood that literacy has multiple discourses which are similarly influenced by society and culture. Researchers now recognize that literacy learners who are not of the dominant culture may be disadvantaged due to the differences in language and cultural practices which exist in the primary and secondary discourses of the school.

### **Schooled Literacy meets Community Literacy**

Creating and sustaining connections between the home and community are foundational in a child's literacy learning. High levels of parental engagement have been shown to correspond to improvement in academic performance and test scores, as well as creating positive attitudes toward school, increasing homework completion rates, in addition to lowering special education placements, drop-out, and suspension rates (Christenson and Hurley, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1995).

Parent relationships with teachers have evolved throughout the twentieth century. Although the early twentieth century education system showed little concern for diversity in students' gender, race, or class, transformation began to occur through social movements, such as the civil rights movement, which challenged segregation; the women's movement, which granted opportunities for women in the work force and changed the traditional notion of family; and the school reforms of the 1960s, which helped to create more open and innovative classrooms with parents and community involvement (Laureau, 1987).

The rich literacy practices which permeate the home and community were coined Family Literacy in 1983 by Taylor (Cairney, 2002, p. 100). It is a term that has come to be very broad; having several meanings due to the number of related and overlapping terms, including parent literacy, parent involvement, intergenerational literacy, and community literacy. Family Literacy is meant to support the skills of the emergent reader through collaborations of school, family, and community, and therefore requires an understanding of the family education process (McCaleb, 1994). Research on Family Literacy has tended to focus on partnerships which will improve school literacy. Such improvements are inclined to be measured in test scores rather than considered from perspectives such as social inclusion, diversity of teaching methods, and authentic involvement for parents. The programs usually include parents in endeavours which reflect the goals of the school and lack acceptance and appreciation of language and cultural diversity. Pushor (2001) speaks to this using the term “protectorate” to describe the standard approach in which schooling of the past and present has subsisted. Pushor (2001) explains:

Educators, as holders of expert knowledge of teaching and learning, enter a community, claim the ground which is labeled ‘school,’ and design and enact policies, procedures, programs, schedules and routines for the children of the community. They often do this in isolation of parents and community members, using their professional education, knowledge and experience, as a rationale for their claimed position as decision-makers in the school. (p. 46)

Pushor and Ruitenberg’s (1995) concern with existing models of parent involvement “is that they maintain the hierarchical structure of schools, where school personnel maintain power and authority, and the focus remains on what parents can do for the school” (p. 12). Pushor and Ruitenberg propose a new model termed parental engagement and leadership in which parents

procure a place in their children's schooling: "With parent engagement, possibilities are created for the structure of schooling to be flattened, power and authority to be shared by educators and parents, and the agenda being served to be mutually determined and mutually beneficial" (p. 13). Despite the use of the educational knowledge backing the family literacy programs, few actually have empowered communities (Cairney, 2002, p. 102) to explore issues which affect literacy and learning rates such as childcare, employment, environment, immigration, family histories and background (Auerbach, 1990) to create an education system more responsible for its diverse learners.

Much twentieth century research on children's learning reflected a deficit hypothesis, stereotyping underprivileged and culturally diverse families as less able than middle class parents (Neito, 1994, 2000; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990). The theory that minority, working class families failed their children by not providing them with middle class language and values has been a prevailing cultural notion. This continuing perspective of a child's development in the home may affect the school's view of the child and parents, as well as the communication between the school and the home. The deficit hypothesis has attributed the learning difficulties of working class and minority group children to biological, cultural, or economic factors (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990, p. 44). Deficit perspectives fail to give a holistic understanding of family and give context-bound definitions of language and literacy which do not address the barriers challenging parents from diverse backgrounds (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990, p. 45). Common assumptions which occur in family literacy programs where parents have low levels of English skills include: absence of literacy practices in the home; unsupportive and uninterested parents; and poor parenting skills. Pushor and Ruitenberg's (2005) study on Parental Engagement suggests that school staff look inward to examine these assumptions and beliefs to build trust and relationships with families.

Building trust and relationships with parents and community members is about more than traditional institutional interactions, such as Meet the Teacher and Parent/Teacher interviews, but rather about creating a shared, meaningful space for students, parents, and community.

Bourdieu, et al (1977) use the term cultural capital to suggest that educators often draw unequally upon the social and cultural resources of the family and community. The theory of cultural capital proposes that schools favour certain language structures and codes of conduct which are not neutral to all children. Parental involvement as understood by the school is more accessible to those with high levels of cultural capital. Mainstream parents do not necessarily have more interest in their child's education, but have better resources to mediate the school system to help their children. These resources may include education, income, status, and social network (Cairney & Munsie, 1992). Despite the inequity of resources, schools tend to ask for very similar types of behaviour from all parents, although resources are not equally available (Lareau, 2000, p. 8). The assignment of blame tends to shift away from the school institution and towards the individual for their "inadequacies". The feelings and shame associated with lack of resources can often restrict parents from school involvement. Adopting a more holistic view of family and their resources is essential in building effective partnerships (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992, p. 54).

Cummins (1988) questions the distribution of power existing within our society. A central tenet of Cummins' framework is that minority students are disempowered educationally in much the same way as their communities are disempowered by broader interactions with societal institutions. Power and status relations existing between minority and majority groups have shown to exert a major influence on school performance. Conversely, minority students will succeed educationally to the extent that the patterns of interaction in the school reverse those

that prevail in society at large. The theory of structural inequality investigates cultural mismatches between the home and school, and focuses on inequities in the broader political, social, and economic areas (Cairney, 2002, p. 115). This theory examines relationships between groups and argues that the education system only functions to maintain the status quo.

Most experts agree that although the school system attempts to meet the needs of all children; educators may be sending mainstream messages about values, views and ideals, rather than creating inclusion and drawing on strengths within the diverse classroom. Education is most often grounded in mainstream culture; teachers often filter curriculum through their own mainstream cultural backgrounds and teach the way they were taught. For white, middle-class children this learning style is compatible, as it is an extension of the literacy patterns which exist in the home. Students from other cultures must shift from one form of literacy to another when going from home to school (Au, 1993). It has been suggested by some researchers that learning difficulties in minority students may be a result of pedagogical mismatches, as minority students who are often deemed “at risk” receive instruction which places them in a passive role. This dominant instructional model in most Western industrial societies has been termed a transmission model of teaching (Cummins, 1988). This can be contrasted with a joint interaction model known as transactional teaching. This teaching model incorporates understanding about the relation between language and learning made by a variety of researchers, most notably psycholinguistic approaches to reading (Smith, 1975), and to the emphasis on expressive writing in the early grades (Chomsky, 1981). Pedagogical approaches that empower students encourage students to assume greater responsibility over their own learning and collaborate with others in achieving their educational goals.

Looking beyond the deficit perspective, New Literacy Research (NLS) shows diversity of literacy experiences which exist within the homes of children of all classes and cultures (McCaleb, 1994; Auerbach, 1991; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Moll, 2000; Heath, 1983).

Heath (1983) reported that although storybook reading was absent in some diverse settings, she found nearly all children were engaged in a wide variety of literacy events within their daily lives. As her study *Ways with Words* illuminates, all children are involved in literacy events, such as non-narrative language activities. Regrettably, these skills may not be given validation as they often do not reflect the school's mainstream discourse.

Empowerment for parents and communities has been explored through the initiative termed "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al, 1992). "Funds of knowledge refer to "historically developed and accumulated strategies (skills, abilities, ideas, practices or bodies of knowledge) which are essential to a household's functioning and well-being" (Gonzalez, et al, 1993, p. 8). Funds of knowledge exist in all communities and all members possess some type of funds. In examining families as part of a larger social and economic scene, Gonzalez, et al (1993) showed that the families in the study had important resources which remained constant even during difficult times (p. 66). Knowledge fields were vast and curricular connections could be made to many areas such as agronomy and animal husbandry, construction, and financial and trade matters. By doing so, students are then able to draw from their prior knowledge.

### Summary

Research illuminates the benefits of parental involvement in children's learning. Despite improvements, parental engagement continues to place emphasis on the goals of the school (Pushor, 2001; Epstein, 1995; Cairney, 2002) and therefore lacks true involvement and acceptance of all families and serves to maintain the status quo relationship of teachers as experts

and parents as support persons. Prevailing deficit perspectives of culturally diverse families are a result of unequal power and status relationships which reflect education through mainstream lenses. Authentic engagement for families results only when schools and teachers examine their assumptions and beliefs about language, learning, family, and culture, and work to incorporate the experiences and knowledge of their diverse student population.

### **Oh Canada! The Legitimacy of Multiculturalism**

Multiculturalism in Canada is a term that summarizes the social changes that have occurred in Canada, an increasingly diverse country in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, and sexuality. As a model, multiculturalism proposes that this diversity is a positive progression and that the appropriate policy response is to “accommodate difference” in our country. From its emergence in Canada in the 1970s, the policy of multiculturalism has sought to protect and guarantee every Canadian citizen’s right to maintain their cultural and/or religious heritage. Multiculturalism remains at the centre of what it means to be Canadian, as it has been accepted as an essential Canadian value (Troper & Weinfeld, 1999). The word ‘multiculturalism’ is therefore not only a reference to an official government policy for the defence and support of cultural difference, but also a description of a particular philosophy that has come to define how many Canadians think about their country. The policy on multiculturalism distinguishes Canada from many other nations by ensuring the preservation of one’s group identity and the freedom to celebrate it openly. It encourages the observance of diverse ancestry, religion, and ethnic heritage (Bibby, 1990).

In 1971 Prime Minister Trudeau declared an official policy of multiculturalism in Canada.

...the Government of Canada recognizes the diversity of Canadians...as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society and is committed to a policy of multiculturalism designed to preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians while working to achieve the equality of all Canadians in the economic, social, cultural and political life of Canada. (Leman, 1999)

The government urged that a new model of citizen participation in the larger society be adopted; a model that addressed the pluralism of ethnic groups that were part of the “Canadian family”. They offered a blueprint for a Canadian identity based on public acceptance of difference and support of cultural pluralism. Despite the more liberal “mosaic model” of multiculturalism, Canada’s policy has been criticized for its emphasis on the mere “song and dance” aspect of cultural pluralism which fails to improve the living conditions of many new immigrants and promotes a fragmented rather than a common vision of values for all Canadians (Bissoondath, 1994). Although many urban school boards in Canada since the mid-1970s have set up work groups to develop policies which focused on multicultural education, to many observers it appears that by the time multicultural education reaches the classroom, the policies are no more than holidays and festivals celebrated by mainstream Canadians with the presence of some visible minorities in textbooks and curriculum materials. Many fear that the advent of multicultural education has not given rise to any drastic changes between educators and students and in classrooms. The hidden curriculum (some of the outcomes or by-products of school or non-school settings, particularly those which are learned but not openly intended) still conforms to the Anglo-majority (Cummins, 1988, p. 126).

### **Reflecting on the Research Evidence**

In order to answer the research questions of this study, literature from educational research on several interrelated literacy topics were studied. The chapter began broadly with the examination of the pluralistic understanding of literacy, as this study is grounded in the understanding of literacy as social practice. The research explores the changing definitions of literacy and how societal and institutional beliefs and assumptions about literacy influence literacy learning. The research question specifically focused on the connections or disconnections between the home and school learning contexts, therefore the relationship between the home and the school were examined next. The research revealed unequal power distribution and deficit perspectives in school institutions and how these views place culturally diverse students and their families at a disadvantage as education is often filtered through mainstream understandings. Lastly, the review examined the multicultural realities for the Canadian students and their families in this study. Multicultural policies at the national, provincial, and local levels seek to address unequal treatment of the culturally diverse. The literature has revealed that multicultural policies and practices tend to become insipid in the institutional environment of the school, resulting in multiculturalism being more of a showcase of multicultural food and folklore.

## **Chapter Three – Research Methodology**

### **Synopsis of Methodology**

Through my course work as a graduate student, I became increasingly interested in language and literacy learning and how language acquisition in a new country is challenging for both children and their parents. I merged these interests to form my study. I wanted my study to be based on the views of families and educators; therefore, I used a qualitative research methodology.

### **Description of the Qualitative Research Paradigm**

Qualitative research can be defined as a situated activity which locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. The practices are transformational in that they turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to self (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). Qualitative studies emphasize the study and collection of various materials such as personal experiences, life stories, interviews, artefacts, cultural texts and productions, along with historical and/or visual texts helping the researcher gain understanding in individuals' lives (p. 3).

The wide range of interconnected, interpretive practices helps the researcher to obtain a multi-lensed view of the subject matter. The multiple roles of a qualitative researcher have been characterized as those of a bricoleur. Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg (1992) explain the term bricoleur as a “jack of all trades” or a professional do-it-yourself person. The interpretive bricoleur produces a bricolage; a pieced together set of representations fitted to the specifics of a complex situation. Educational research is changing the focus from problem solving to question asking and critical examination. This emphasis on process has been especially beneficial in

giving voice to those who may not have been formerly recognized, valued, or represented, “The qualitative emphasis on understanding perspective of all participants at a site challenges what has been call the hierarchy of credibility; the notion that the view of those in power are worth more than those who are not” (Becker, 1970). Issues such as the latter encouraged me to examine “the school” as a whole and its effectiveness. Further, I realized that qualitative data would reveal families’ stories in and out of the school context as I sought to understand more about the relationships between the home and school in terms of literacy. My own experiences as a classroom teacher had often been well intentioned, but “teacher knows best” in terms of literacy and learning. I needed to be cognizant of my own biases accrued from my own upbringing and educational background, as researchers often hold misconceptions about participants’ values, understandings, and practices based on influences including assumed cultural knowledge (Moll, et al, 1993; Delgado-Gaitan, 2000; Heath, 1983). Researchers have particular understandings of what it means to be literate based partially on our past experiences, which clearly is not applicable for all children and all parents: “White, middle class parents engage children in discourse and literacy practices that are compatible with those of mainstream school and thus valued by mainstream teachers” (Au, 1997, p. 8). As educators and researchers, we must be wary of imposing a “correct” way of learning based on our own beliefs and experiences.

### **Selecting Participants**

The research was qualitative in nature and was conducted using several methods of data collection. The methods employed were semi-structured interviews, observation in both the home and school contexts, and photography. Each participant engaged in one to two semi-structured interviews of approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour in length. The study’s participants were three students, their two families, and teachers. The participants were recruited

with the help of the principal in the participating school, along with my academic advisor. An invitation letter was drafted for students and parents from grades one to grades five. The differing ages gave the research a broader range of information as to literacy development and attitudes toward literacy over time. The families chosen were representative of the multicultural context of the school. I felt the diversity would help to gain understanding of literacy information from varied perspectives. The administrator was able to find suitable candidates for the study without having to canvas the school. The families in the study immigrated from China and Indonesia and were at differing stages in their English language proficiency.

### **Designing the Interview Format**

My first interviews with participants enabled trust building while providing the participants the opportunity to speak of their background experiences. Specific topics with my family participants included memories of learning, personal learning styles, family involvement in education, and expectations in learning. The second interview was an extension of the first interview. The interview addressed areas such as parental roles in the home and school, knowledge gained from the home and community, and differences between home and school learning. During this interview we also explored intersections between the home and school and added any information about previous topics that arose through our conversations.

The interviews with teachers were single interviews that lasted approximately 45 minutes. I sent the questions to the participants electronically prior to the interview in order to save time. I felt the interviews with the teachers were more formal than the parental meetings, as they were in the school setting, in a scheduled time frame.

### **Conducting a Pilot Interview**

The appropriateness of the interview questions was explored using a pilot interview. Researchers use pilot interviews to assist in identifying logistical problems which may arise, such as technical aspects of recording (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Using Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein's (1997) analysis of interviewing skills, I examined my interview technique. Chiser-Strater and Sunstein (1997) remind us that "although most people think the key to a good interview is asking a set of good questions, the real key to interviewing is being a good listener" (p. 237). The pilot was effective in gaining understandings for proficient listening skills, such as wait time for participant answers, encouraging participant feedback, and additionally, maintaining participant authentic voice throughout my study. From the pilot study, original questions were modified, as was my approach to interviewing. I was conscious of being a better listener, not interrupting participants, or seeking "correct" answers from them. I was more comfortable with deviation from the interview questions, which invited authentic and useful dialogue and experiences to emerge.

Upon the completion of the first interview, I asked parents to use disposable cameras to capture literacy activities that occur in the home. I felt that the use of photographs would give insight into the literacy development of the children through social contexts. Understandings of literacy in the family and community context through photographs can provide a general sense of background and supplement the other qualitative data used in the study, as they can reveal what is normally taken for granted (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007, p. 145). Research by Pahl (2001) reminds us that children activate meaning in a different way in the home environment than at school and suggests that there are unanswered questions as to how children make use of the tools available to them through the school. Meaning-making activities, such as drawing, stories, and activities that occur at home, often go unnoticed at the school level. Pahl used disposable

cameras to build a rich picture of how children made meaning, represent meaning and transform meaning, in different settings (p. 120). I supplied both families cameras in which they could take pictures of their children engaged in learning activities. I provided parents examples of things they may want to take pictures of: conversation around the supper table, baking or cooking, playing or learning a sport, grocery shopping, playing board games, playing an instrument, and puzzle building. During the interview with both of my families, I explained the importance of their views of learning. We discussed the different ways children and adults learn and what types of learners they thought their children were. We spoke about learning within the home and community, and those who influence children's learning. Through these discussions, I wanted parents to reveal (through photographs) the learning which exists within the home and community and the great importance of parents as teachers. However, parents struggled with "what to do" with the camera as recorded in my observation notes:

*<sup>1</sup>Mrs. Bunjam<sup>2</sup> was reluctant to give the camera back and needed more time to take more pictures while Mr. Taras mostly took pictures of a variety of things unrelated to the task, such as landscape pictures. When Mrs. Bunjam's pictures were developed, all the photos were of her girls engaged in very traditional activities such as working on the computer, reading, or sitting at the dinner table doing homework. Upon looking at the pictures together, she asked me if she had taken the "right" kind of pictures. Similarly, Mr. Taras*

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<sup>1</sup> Indented, italicized print throughout the document indicates observational data.

<sup>2</sup> The family name Bunjam is a pseudonym, as are all participant names in this study

*expressed confusion over “what to do” with the camera. When asked to explain the photographs he had taken and how they related to his son’s language learning, he was unsure.*

I was disappointed with this aspect of the research, as I thought the photographs would shed light into the daily learning events in the lives of my immigrant families. Although I believed the instructions to be clear, the task was not completed as I had hoped. Perhaps I should have included visual examples of photography, rather than oral examples.

In addition to the interviews and photographs, I observed the literary practices in the school and home. According to Frank (1999) using observation helps the researcher to see the world from the perspectives of its members, giving one different ‘angles’ of vision (preface). Observation protocol included recording situated literacy events such as book reading and student’s choice writing, interactions with students during writing events, children’s engagement with parents during authentic literacy events such as drawing, invented spelling or problem solving.

Two interviews were done with each family, the length being approximately one hour each. Additionally, families were given cameras and journals to capture learning experiences that occurred naturally in the home and the community. Anecdotal records were also taken on each visit to the homes to help me capture the richness of each visit. The sights, sounds, and aromas of each visit remained in my memory longer as I re-read my notes. I interviewed the students’ teachers regarding their understandings about literacy and learning, English as an additional Language learning (EAL) and the particular students in my study. The interview with the teachers was approximately forty five minutes long. In addition to the interview, I observed the teacher and the students in the classroom. I noted the classroom climate, the teacher’s

relationship with the students, the number of EAL learners and the adaptation of class material and teaching strategies for their needs.

When the study had been approved by the Behavioural Ethics Committee of the University of Saskatchewan, I submitted an application to the local school division to conduct research in one of their schools. Due to the inclusion of photography in the study, the school division was hesitant to pass the study without extra measures to ensure anonymity for the participants. As I awaited the decision, I visited the potential school site to share my intentions with the principal. We agreed that my volunteering in the school would allow me to “get a feel” for the school as well as become familiar with the staff and students. I began volunteering that afternoon in the kindergarten classroom. The children were multicultural, multilingual, bright, and eager. I worked with English additional language children in areas such as reading, writing and phonemic awareness.

Upon being granted approval from the school division, I contacted the administrator of the school to begin my study. The principal had already chosen two families and had information about the members of their families and contact phone numbers as to where I could reach them. We spoke briefly about the families and why they were selected. Both families expressed interest in my study as they had members who had similarly completed and placed value on higher education. Additionally, the families noted they would like to see my work used to help others who immigrate to Canada. Upon studying the family names, I learned that the Taras were in my study. I had been working with Bo Taras in the kindergarten class for some time and had gained his trust. He was bright and active, but often displayed frustration during large group instruction as he could not understand large portions of what was being said. The other family in my study was the Bunjams. Mrs. Bunjam was an Educational Assistant in the

school in which the study was to be conducted. I learned through the principal that Mrs. Bunjam was a teacher in her home country of Indonesia. Her children were in grades five and six and English was their children's first language.

I anxiously waited to speak to my participants. As I waited for teachers and administrators to find suitable times to meet, I found an interpreter for the Taras family. Meeting times proved to be somewhat problematic since their schedules were very busy and only were available for weekend appointments. I enlisted the services of an international graduate student who was available to interpret on the weekends. The following is an excerpt from my first meeting with one of my families:

*I arrived at the school at 7:15 for the Conversation Circle. The Open Door Society has weekly meetings at the school for new immigrant families and their children. I explained to the group leaders that I was conducting a study regarding immigrant families and literacy learning and asked permission to join their session. Mr. Taras and I are to meet after the session to arrange a meeting time. However, no one at the meeting is wearing their nametags, so I am unsure who he is! The Circle begins and the leader speaks about the Victoria Day holiday. What is Victoria Day and what is its significance to Canadians? The leaders speak of the practical implications for Canadians such as bus routes and grocery stores being open. The group then has a round table discussion about meaningful photographs they brought to share with the group, and lastly, we break into small groups of three to discuss our summer. The evening goes by quickly. After the meeting ends, I see Bo Taras coming out of the children's class. He is waving a craft and speaking excitedly about the evening's events to his father. I introduced*

*myself to his father and explained who I am. We have a bit of a language barrier, but Mr. Taras revealed that he was excited to help me with my study. As we tried to find a date to meet, I quickly learned that the Taras are a very busy family, dedicated to language classes nearly every day of the week. We agreed to meet on the weekend, and I explained that I would bring an interpreter to make the interviews and forms easier for everyone. We left our meeting with Mr. Taras saying, "Yes, so now we are friends."*

### **Analyzing the Research Data**

Data were analyzed once interviews, observations, journal entries, and transcripts were completed. I began my analysis by reading all observation and transcripts in full and compiled all photographs in a bulletin board style. From the data I compiled a list of significant concepts and repetitive phrases and key words. During this process, broad categories relating to literacy learning were identified within the following areas: literacy as a socio-cultural phenomenon, literacy practices of the home, literacy practices of the school or schooled literacy, literacy as cultural capital, varied literacy understandings of parents and teachers, disconnect between home and school literacy practices, literacy needs of the culturally and linguistically diverse, and inclusion and multiculturalism. As I analyzed the information in each category, I became cognizant of how these data related specifically to my research questions which focus on home and school literacy understandings and practices. Upon doing so, I realized that my categories could be amalgamated into three themes. The categories merged into the following themes: pluralistic understandings of literacy, the disconnect between community and schooled literacy, and the realities of a multicultural Canada. To answer my research questions wholly, all data was re-read and studied to ensure each theme was accurate.

### **Summary of Research Methodology**

The research format for this study was qualitative in nature, as it emphasized the personal “lived stories” of the participants. Methods of photography, observations, and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. All methods were employed in participants home and school contexts to gain understanding of authentic literacy practices which occurred in each context.

## **Chapter Four – Learning From Participants**

Chapter Four is an account of my interactions with the participants. The participants included three students from two families who varied in age from kindergarten to grade seven, their families, and teachers. All participants had immigrated to Canada from Asian countries (Indonesia and China). The two families were at differing stages in their English proficiency and ability to draw on cultural capital.

The data were collected in both the school and home contexts to enable me to gain varied literacy perspectives. Additionally, authentic literacy of the home could not be captured unless it was witnessed within the home as lived experiences of literate activities in everyday life vary in many ways. Literacy understandings depend on the context of the situation, the purpose of the literacy event, and the needs and desires of the participants in the event. Several home visits were important in learning about the family's culture, as well as the family's understanding of home and school literacy.

For the sake of convenience, the interviews with the educators were conducted within the school context. The interview format tended to be more formal and professional, as both teachers had prepared for the interview by examining the questions before the interview. Answers therefore, tended to be less spontaneous. I found that the answers from the teachers gave me insight into their views on literacy and language, particularly in English additional language environments.

The Bunjams had been in Canada for nearly ten years. They viewed Canada as a place where they wanted to live permanently with their family. The Bunjams understood the literacy of school and its expectations. The children experienced success in school, in part due to their parent's ability to draw on their own educational experiences (their mother being a teacher and

their father being a researcher). Both parents readily used their resources to help their children meet their educational needs.

The Taras family had little experience with Canadian schooling, as they had been in Canada less than six months. The family's inability to draw on the cultural capital of Canadian societal and schooling expectations was evident in the ways both parents expressed feelings of isolations and loneliness due to language barriers. Bo's mother took him to and from school daily, but failed to make connections with parents and teachers, as her limited English ability left her feeling awkward and uncomfortable in social situations. Bo's father viewed English as a "working language" which would enable him and his family to be successful in higher education. The Taras expressed the desire to take their knowledge of English back to China. Unlike the Bunjams, the Taras family had had less time to develop community resources, as they had arrived in Canada only six months prior. However, the family had begun to develop cultural capital by enlisting the services of the local outreach program for immigrants, the local Lutheran Church, and co-workers.

The interviews with families and educators provided me with data regarding literacy practices at home and school. The context of literacy learning is essential in understanding its development. Researchers argue that literacy is not static, but ever changing and situation specific. Literacy occurs in diverse forms and serves various purposes for different societies (Wason-Ellam & Blunt, 1995). Through studying literacy in various contexts during the study, I was able to better appreciate how the participants understood literacy. Participant interactions were divided into two categories: literacy of the school (schooled literacy) and literacy of the home (literacy of daily life).

### **Schooled Literacy – Stay Within the Lines, Please!**

Schools are organizations which reflect societal views, and as such, schools are sites with a twofold curriculum, both overt and covert. Language and learning is therefore entrenched in these transactions between teachers and students (Giroux, 1983). The research of Brian Street (1984) argues that all literacy events carry ideological meanings. In other words, the literacy taught in schools does not simply teach the cognitive skills of reading and writing but favours certain types of literacies such as fill in the blank activities, sustained silent reading and comprehension questions, all of which contribute to society's vision of literacy. This definition is generated by "those who have the power to create, endorse, promote, and institute particular brands of literacy" (Li, 1996). Wason-Elam and Blunt (1995) indicate that "there is general tendency by schools to define literacy narrowly as a series of skill acts that can be transmitted to learners, then tested and recorded as mastered" (p. 14 ). In the defence of the education system and schools, autonomous literacy is a form of literacy which has identifiable stages which can be measured, making progress monitoring and reporting efficient. Situated literacy (reading and communication in actual practice) is more difficult to assess as it depends on many factors such as economics, politics, and culture (Collins & Bolt, 2003). Although teachers may be aware of the insights that multiple literacies (NLS) have to offer their students, they may feel compelled to teach within the narrow constraint of the school system which often give precedent to certain forms of literacy (Kim, 2003).

"Schooled literacy" was witnessed in this study through both educator's understandings and attitudes toward literacy learning as well as literacy practices within the classroom. Specific examples of institutional uses of literacy within the study included transmissional teaching strategies, teacher-led discussions, and the use of rote learning activities such as worksheets and

Dolsch readers. The literate behaviour and its uses within a culture and the types of functions which we are accustomed to (school culture, pen and paper tasks) are not necessarily the signs of literate behaviour of all cultures.

**May 1, 2007**

*Mrs. Keep (the school principal) introduces me to the kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Marvin, who sits on a chair in the Quiet Corner. The children busily play amongst the room. Mrs. Keep introduces me and explains I am from "The University" and will be volunteering in her room for the next several months. As I observe the classroom setting, I notice that it is filled with toys, boxes, and miscellaneous materials such as student booklets, piles of paper, and ongoing student projects. The room is print rich as there are oversized posters depicting various Western Canadian scenes such as the Royal Mounted Police in a parade, a family with a dog, and an outdoor scene with flowers and other greenery each labelled with vocabulary words, which the children had learned about. This, I learned, is part of a literacy initiative being implemented by the school division. Other print in the room includes activities in the Quiet Corner such as the Morning Bulletin Board. The message has cloze model activities in which the children have to finish the sentences of the message:*

*Today is \_\_\_\_\_. Tomorrow will be \_\_\_\_\_.*

*I noticed that the room had less interactive print materials such as flannel board stories, books for free time use, center time games, a listening center, and a comfortable place to use these materials such as a rug area. Open-ended, creative toys and activities in the room included a kitchen center, blocks, and Lego, all of which children took part in during free play. I wondered if additional literacy centers were incorporate to explore*

*literacy in creative dimensions, such as writing centers. Perhaps centers were rotated or periodically introduced or possibly literacy events and activities were less structured in centers and activities but resulted from free play with provided materials.*

*About three quarters of the class are Canadian born, English speaking children, while about one quarter of the class are English Additional Language (EAL) speakers. The EAL speaking children's English abilities range from very basic to intermediate. There are two children who have been in Canada for three months. These children are very bright and are learning quickly. I notice that during large group instructions, the new English language learners tend sometimes struggle to maintain focus, as the language barrier makes comprehension difficult. When I work individually with each student, they can complete tasks. We often use pictures and gestures to help communicate. There are two children I work with consistently, as they have been in Canada a short time: Bo and Chan. Bo has kept his Chinese name; Chan has kept her Chinese name, and added a Canadian name, Monica.*

***May 2, 2007***

*Today I am observing the cultural diversity of the school – its staff and community. I arrive to the neighbourhood early. I slowly drive my car down the quiet street and see the towering trees line the neat sidewalks. I observe the large, well-kept yards of the neighbourhood, several of which are being tended to by diligent gardeners and landscape enthusiasts. As I near the school zone, cars slow to a crawl and parents walk along side their children before the lunch break comes to an end. I find a parking spot near the end of the street, which is typical, as the street is usually lined with mini-vans and sedans of an array of colors.*

*As I gather my daily materials, I glance at the block of apartments across the street from the school. Children are coming back to school from lunch. Many of the immigrant families which make the composition of Birch Lane School so unique live in this block of apartments. They are slated for demolition to make way for new condominiums. How will this change the school landscape?*

*As I cross the street I greet several parents. I enter the school and make my way toward “my” classroom. Although the school itself is over forty years old, it is well maintained and respected by the students and staff. Displays are non-commercial and display curricular and thematic work. Informational bulletin boards for parents can also be found throughout the school.*

*Similar to several of the schools I have taught in, the majority of the staff is women, ranging from their mid twenties to mid fifties. The staff, besides two women of Asian descent, are all white. I contemplate what the lack of diversity means for the parents and children from diverse backgrounds. How can their cultures be represented without any cultural diversity among the staff? Perhaps this is an issue which should be addressed in the College of Education.*

**May 9, 2007**

*I arrive and Mrs. Marvin explains that the class has been involved in a thematic unit on Pets and will be visiting a pet store in the near future. The children have compiled their memories about their pets into simple sentences containing sight words such as look, see, I, play, etc. The teacher has these stories compiled into a bound book called My Pet Stories Collection. The children are excited about reading the compilation as it reveals*

*their own personal experiences about whether or not they have animals in their home. In addition, children learn basic print functions such as directionality, sentence structure, and punctuation.*

*I read in the hall with each of the children. They come armed with a marker to point at each of the words. Some of the children have gained fluency from repetition; others point aimlessly at the words, not yet understanding the notion of directionality, and others say to me, "I don't know this story," as though I hold the magic gift of reading that they wish me to bestow upon them. The EAL children who have recently immigrated are eager to read in English as well. They understand the notion of directionality and can pick out the words such as "cats" and "look." But as with many of the other children I read with, comprehension after reading is difficult. I read and track the story with Bo and Chan and they listen to the language, but not yet do they understand the meaning of the story.*

**June 1, 2007**

*I arrive and take my usual spot behind the row of small green metal chairs in the Quiet Corner. Some children sit on the chairs, other sit on the floor, trying to place their shoes on the correct feet. Their faces are reddened from the sun and their hair clings damply to their tiny foreheads. Mrs. Marvin sits in her chair by the easel. Today we are discussing our trip to the dinosaur museum. The group activity continues with the children listing out things they saw on the field trip. The English first language children are waving their hands with zest and fervour to share their answer. "I know I know. Mrs. Marvin, Mrs. Marvin." They are standing tall beside their chairs to be chosen. One student says with excitement, "I saw a Tyrannosaurus Rex, and it was just his bones, and he was so tall, that he was taller than this class." The students look at me and nod, as if to say, "Yes, his story is really true." The comments continue like this, one after another, and Mrs. Marvin records them on the chart paper. No English additional language students are volunteering so Mrs. Marvin encourages the EAL students to share their thoughts. She asks Chan, "What did you see at the museum?" Chan replies, "Is dinosaur!! RAAAAAH!" When Mrs. Marvin asks Bo what he saw he simply nods his head and says "Yeah." She gently probes Bo for more information, asking him if he saw an egg, or a fish, or a dinosaur, all to which he replied, "Yeah." Mrs. Marvin thanks Bo for his contribution.*

*The lesson continues with Mrs. Marvin explaining that the students will be making their very own dinosaurs. She has drawn a dinosaur, a Tyrannosaurus Rex to be exact. The activity is not only an art activity, but a lesson on following directions.*

*Mrs. Marvin poises the chartreuse marker in her hand and says, “Alright now, a light bulb for his body, like this...” (The correct body type is demonstrated). As the instructions continue, Bo looks out the window, blowing bubbles with his saliva and then softly deflates the bubbles with his fingertips.*

*Mrs. Marvin continues: “An oval for his head...watch now, look at how I make the mouth... see? We mustn’t draw the mouth on the wrong side, what kind of dinosaur would that be?” The children who are attending to the demonstration agree that it would look silly if the dinosaur had a deformed mouth. Those with limited English proficiency did not catch this joke.*

*The children experiment with different colors and sizes of markers to create their dinosaurs. I worked with a small group of students with emerging English skills, including Bo and Chan. It was evident from their drawings that they did not understand many of the directions Mrs. Marvin had shared with the class. My group’s dinosaurs did not resemble the dinosaurs of the children who fluently spoke English, as my students creations had round (not oval) heads with mouths on the wrong sides. The legs and arms resembled sticks rather than bulging masses of flesh.*

*To help the students better understand the multi- stepped process, I used chart paper to outline each step and used one word for each. Head. Mouth. Eye. Legs. Claws. This approach seems to be less overwhelming. Upon completion of the step-by step dinosaur, Chan shouts out with pride, “Is dinosaur!”*

*June 14, 2007*

*I arrive in the grade five classroom a few moments after the students have settled in their desks. Ms. Haley is explaining to them who I am as I take my place at the back of the room. The room buzzes with laughter and pre-adolescent giddiness. The room is tidy and crowded. As twenty six bodies crowd into five tight rows, I am glad for the breeze blowing through the north-facing windows. Upon first glance, I notice the walls are covered with posters, curricular material and student work. The windows are lined with pop bottle terrariums in hopes of new plant growth. Ms. Haley's desk is a small writing table pushed tightly into the wall; it is stacked with papers and looks as though it is used more for storage than anything else. A three tiered bookshelf containing fictional books is tucked next to the teacher's desk; along the back of the room are library books and educational games on shelving.*

*As I examine the classroom more closely, I see many of the posters are motivational, "Wake up to Success" and "Team work." The back section of the room is covered with maps of the world, Canada, and Saskatchewan. There are symbols of Saskatchewan and pictures of these symbols. The Current Events bulletin board is the only board containing student work. This display contains newspaper clippings locally, nationally, and internationally which students have chose to speak about. Students paraphrase the article and have it stamped for participation. Some of the captions from the display read "2008 Olympics", "Enemy Antelope," and "Stolen Girl."*

*The class has begun to share their news for current events. I watch the children as "Current Events" begins. They are a diverse group of students. There are twenty six children, twelve who speak English as an additional language, two of whom have special*

*needs. As the first student, Amy, reads her news about a fire-pit bylaw, most students appear to listen. Upon completion of her news, the teacher comments about her piece stating that she does not agree with the bylaw as spending time in the backyard around her fire pit is among her favourite things to do. The teacher and the students engage in a discussion about who would sell and enforce such permits and bylaws in cities and towns and whether the law is good one.*

*Topics were diverse and each student told their news with zest. The topics ranged from a suing of a dry-cleaning company over lost pants to the key components for longevity. Students sometimes asked questions about the articles, but often made comments which helped to relate the news to their life in a personal way. Some were engaging in the conversation, with waving arms and eye contact. Others, such as Julie and Alishia comment about the presentations to each other quietly. Darrey, a tall, dark boy of First Nation ancestry appears uninterested in the conversation, as he dismantles the pencil eraser on the top of his pencil.*

*Many of the students are eager to share their “news” today, which made the session go on for approximately thirty minutes. Towards the end of the session, several students are becoming restless. Darrey has successfully extracted the blinking light from his pencil topper and is flipping it from finger to finger. Sam, a special needs student, has an outburst and has been asked to leave the room to cool down, and Carly, who sits half-way back in the third row, is creating some sort of creature out of straws. She becomes bored with this and places her water bottle in her mouth and shakes it vehemently back and forth. Julie, who is sitting next to me, asks me about my writing, “How much papers are you writing?”*

*Those who are disengaged are relieved by the sound of the bell: “Time for science!” The children slowly find their duo-tangs, pens, and highlighters. The majority of the students follow the instructions to place their names on the right hand side, the date on the left. Several do not. The student’s role is to listen to the information and highlight the important information with a highlighter. The teacher speaks: “The forest is a highly complex, constantly changing environment...” As the teacher reads the text and Darrey plays with his flashing chip, Malcolm draws an intricate blue snake on his arm, and Daniel examines the contents of his nail beds. The information read is related to a large poster of the forest and discussed in terms of students’ personal experiences. Discussion about cabin and cottage season begins. This is a meaningful exercise to encourage students to connect science concepts to areas of their lives. Most of the children will be able to draw some connections, but I fear the connection will be more difficult for immigrant students who are not familiar with what “summer in Saskatchewan” means to them.*

As socio-cultural understandings of literacy have shown, culture permeates learning; schools and teachers need to examine issues concerning the social and cultural dimensions of literacy learning in the classroom, including specific learning needs, preferences and styles of culturally diverse learners (Branch, 1997; Bork, 1990). The classroom, like any social institution is not a neutral site. Like society in general, power is often distributed unequally in schools. Issues of power which are enacted in schools have been studied by researchers such as Cummins (1988, 1995) and Delpit (1988, 1995) who found that there are certain codes (also known as cultural capital) for participating in schools which can appear in linguistic forms, communication styles, and interaction strategies. The classroom practices within this study demonstrated these

understandings. Although unknowingly, the teachers in this study filtered learning through their Euro-centric eyes as learning materials, class discussions, teaching strategies, and understandings about learning were well suited to those from the dominant culture.

Research supports that there is recognition of important differences among literacy learners, but despite this recognition, uniformity continues to shape school practices. N. Cantor (1946/1972) observed that "the public elementary and high schools, and colleges, generally project what they consider to be the proper way of learning which is uniform for all students" (p. 102). Both teachers in the study were keenly aware of provincially mandated curricular expectations for the students and worked hard to meet the literacy goals set before them at the local and provincial level. The teachers were aware that not all of their students could meet these goals, but expressed frustration as to how to best support their diverse students. The observational data in this study reveals that teaching in today's classroom is a demanding profession, as there are many facets to being successful as a teacher. Not only do teachers serve in the traditional role as the provider of information, they have many other roles which may include but are not limited to role model, manager, assessor, event coordinator, bookkeeper, first aid giver, and counsellor. With all of these roles to fill, the teachers in the study felt that time constraints were impeding them from meeting the needs of all students.

### **Church, Cuisine and Castles – Insight into Home/Community Literacy**

Literacy practices take place in many formats and activities. Literacy learning is embedded in a social and cultural atmosphere which dictates the form and meaning for children (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Children are active in their environments and learn through interactions with others. Literacy as a social and cultural process could be observed in participants' activities in work, recreation, church, and home contexts. Specific observed

examples included cooking and recipe following, television viewing, drawing and writing at home, and oral reading of the religious material. These literacy activities tend to be taken for granted by society as academic events such as reading and writing in school settings: “These activities (lived experiences of literate activities in daily life) may not be those most valued by schools or by the self appointed arbiters of what people “should” be reading and writing” (Taylor, 1997, p. 42).

**April 15, 2007**

*During my meeting with the school administrator, I received some very basic information about my participants. Family One is from Indonesia. Mr. and Mrs. Bunjam both work in the field of education. Mr. Bunjam is a researcher at the University and his wife is an educational assistant at the same school the children attend. Both parents have good oral English skills although the mother wishes to learn to write more proficiently. The Bunjams have two children in grades six and seven, both of whom were born in Canada. The family has been in Canada approximately ten years.*

*Family Two is from China. Mr. and Mrs. Taras have one child name Bo who is five years old and in kindergarten. Mr. Taras works at the National Research Council completing his PhD in Genetics. His oral English skills are steadily improving, and he is able to communicate with coworkers and friends to meet his needs. The Taras have been in Canada since January, 2007.*

**April 26, 2007**

*It is the first interview of my study. I park near the Bunjams’ small, quaint house. The home is close to the school and nestled amongst homes similar in size and age. As I gather my materials and walk toward the house, I notice the flowerbeds have been tilled*

*and the grass raked. Upon entering the backyard, I notice strategically placed potted flowers, a perennial garden overflowing with herbs and flowers of an array of sizes and shades all nestled alongside a sitting space made up of a stone table and chairs. I later learn that gardening and yard work are family activities.*

*My knock on the door is met warmly by Mrs. Bunjam. "Cari is here. Come, come. We all must meet her," she calls to her family. She calls her children to come and greet me. They clamber up the basement steps and acknowledge me politely. I comment on the home's delicious aroma. Mr. Bunjam tells me the smell is Indonesian spices; his wife is making Indonesian Chicken.*

*The family leads me to the sitting room which has a piano and an electric guitar (each of the children play an instrument) as well as large overstuffed brown leather furniture. Before we begin the interview, Mr. Bunjam and I discuss our work at the University. He explains to me his journey to eventually gaining his PhD and working for the National Research Council. I feel this is important, as it helps me to understand the work ethic of both him and his wife. Due to their experience in education, both express a keen interest in my study, as well a great interest in the education of their children. They stressed triumph over adversity, hard work and dedication, and using education to change their fate. I noted a sense of satisfaction with the quality of schooling their children were receiving in Canada as it was less strict, related more to personal experience and more discovery-based. Both parents recall a militant education system which regularly ridiculed students who could not immediately produce answers. The style of teaching was described by Mrs. Bunjam as pure memorization of facts. She recalled*

*that at no time in her schooling was she asked to really question her answers or make connections to other areas of study.*

*As I asked the Bunjams questions, they would often answer several of the questions at once and lead me into different questions about their cultural upbringing, experiences, and understandings regarding knowledge. The experiences of Mr. and Mrs. Bunjam varied, but both viewed literacy learning and schooling in terms of their lived experience.*

*From our interview, parental involvement was understood in terms of helping their children to understand material that was sent home (meeting the school's needs) rather than in terms of parents as significant players or equals in the schooling process.*

*Upon the conclusion of our interview, the family insisted I leave with the gift of food. They filled a large container with Indonesian Chicken, instructing me to eat it with rice as soon as I arrived home. There was a symphony of goodbyes and I was on my way. I left the home with such a warm feeling of family connectedness. This was a family who worked very hard with their children to ensure their success. As I drove home, I began to consider the measurement of success. Was success the reproduction of an institution's values and criteria or the teaching of traditional values and family traditions, or could it be a combination of both?*

***June 2, 2007***

*I am finally going to meet with Mr. and Mrs. Taras (Bo's Mom and Dad). I am excited as it was difficult to find a time to meet. They are a very busy family as they take language classes nearly every day of the week. I have arranged for an international student, to come along with me as an interpreter. I am hoping this will break the ice.*

**June 3, 2007**

*The Taras' apartment was modest, small by Canadian standards, having only one bedroom for the family. Bo's bed was in the corner of the living room and he actively bounced and played on it throughout our time there. There were a few pieces of furniture such as a couch and end tables which Bo used to play with his toys and a small table in which a lap top computer was set up. As our interview began, Mr. Taras expressed his interest in my study and how his family values education.*

*Tonight's meeting at the Taras was more of an evening of Chinese culture than an ordinary interview. The family had made us sweet pork dumplings, along with rice and traditional Chinese tea. For dessert, Bo handed out the popsicles. Jane (the interpreter) and Mrs. Taras spoke in Mandarin as we sipped our tea. The women spoke of issues such as homesickness and isolation in a new country, marriage, and raising children. Mrs. Taras looked so happy to speak her mother tongue. Mr. Taras and I looked at family photos on the computer. He proudly showed me the village he is from and where his parents still reside. There are many pictures of the family together in many activities, the highlight of them being the vacation to the Berlin Wall. As I interview Mr. Taras about his ideas about education, his answers were full of insight. He believes strongly in the power of education, along with family ties and strong work ethic. As I leave the Taras that night, I feel as though I have made new friends rather than just met new participants in a study.*

***June 17, 2007***

*I arrive at Taras' at 7:00. Mrs. Taras has prepared me rice wine soup. She tells me it is good for me and will ward off illness. I ate most of it and reminded myself not to eat before I come. Mr. Taras apologized about the smell in the apartment. The families had gone fishing and were drying fish in a laundry basket with tulle around it.*

*Today we mostly talk about how things are improving for the Taras. I notice marked improvement in Mrs. Tara's speech, as she is using more phrases and simple sentences, rather than one word answers and non verbal responses. She appears more comfortable speaking in English on this visit, although she says she is very shy and still doesn't like to answer the phone. Mr. Taras talks to me about his work and the family's activities in leisure time and then tells me about the pictures he has taken for me. He gets great pleasure when showing me Bo in his many activities (swimming, soccer, studying, building Lego, and playing with Mom).*

### **Home/Community Literacies Review**

#### **The Taras**

The Taras Family began language instruction at 7:00 every morning as Bo watches English television to learn words and pronunciation. Following this, at 9:00 a.m. Bo and his mother learn mathematics; he is already learning double digit addition and subtraction and easily understands math concepts beyond the grade one realm. The Taras were surprised at the simplicity of the mathematics curriculum for kindergarten and continue to challenge their son to achieve Chinese standards in math. Bo's father explained that although the math concepts come very easily to his son, the challenge lies in understanding the directions and verbalizing an

answer at school: “These mathematical are very easy for Bo. He knows all the answers but does not know how to pronounce it.”

Bo and his mother go to the library to find books and use the language resources available to them such as the Open Door Society, religious groups, and sports teams. The Taras also use the computer in learning English and encourage their son to do so. Following his morning studies, Bo eats lunch and walks with his mother to school. When Mr. Taras arrives home after work, he further helps Bo with tasks his mother is unable to complete. They participate in activities such as the telling of English stories, help with pronunciation of English words and sentences, and aid with any work which has come home from school.

I observed many instances of situated literacy as I watched Bo at play. Barton (1994) argues that literacy is a complex set of social practices; therefore, its uses and meaning are derived from the context. Examples of situated literacy occurring in the Taras home included Bo’s elaborate drawings of castles, swords, and dragons, all of which Bo wrote his name on, asking for help with the letters when printing the date. His well-developed fine motor skills could also be observed in the Meccano-style toys he built. The toys he constructed were cars, trucks, and boats. They were intricately designed without instructions, attesting to Bo’s problem solving skills. Additionally, situated literacy occurred daily in traditional Chinese events such as cooking. Bo’s parents were teaching their son about traditions from China, while integrating English into the conversation. In the cases where neither parent knew the English word, they would rely on the English/Chinese tutorial which was installed on their computer. During my visits, Bo served me traditional Chinese food and drink and used English phrases such as “For you,” “It’s good,” and “Thank you.” The preparation and serving of traditional meals revealed to

me their desire for their son to learn to respect both the medicinal and customary properties of Chinese culture, while incorporating English language learning into the task.

Part of Bo's "school time" at home was completing pages in workbooks to aid his reading and math skills. The math workbook is one the family brought from China and has many types of math problems such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. The workbooks for work on English skills are a combination of material the family has received from the school and commercially created workbooks. The activities within the books are matching, coloring, and cutting activities with beginning sounds and basic sight words. Bo's mother has him complete a certain number of pages each day, which she (or her husband) corrects. The Taras tell me that at home, they allocate time each day to communicate with their son in English in the hopes that Bo's pronunciation will improve. Research has found that Chinese parents are reported to favor traditional, skill-based approaches over holistic principles of literacy learning (Anderson, 1995; Li, 2004, 2005). They may be more concerned with basic literacy skills, monitoring, and correcting performance and believe that teaching a child to print and write properly, spell correctly, and checking for understanding of what a child has read are the most important things they can do to help with their child's literacy learning. In terms of mathematics education, Chinese parents prefer more didactic methods and ask their children to spend more time practicing skills than do middle-class American parents (Huntsinger, Jose, & Larson, 1998).

The authentic literacy practices which I observed in the Taras home were embedded within the daily life and language was being learned through a combination of explicit instruction and lived experience. Some of the literacy practices observed consisted of spontaneous and informal activities such as learning at play with toys, computer games, and imitating the English phrases heard at home. Bo's parents encouraged him to express himself through open-ended activities such as drawing, building, or role-playing. I did notice, however,

the presence of schooled literacy, which can be defined as literacy and instruction promoted in the school system (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990) in even the open-ended activities. Schooled literacy was embedded in home literacy activities such as the recitation of words and stories Bo created, the regular use of the library for books about beginning sounds and letters, the rote memorization of letters and words from Bo's "school time" workbooks, as well as the family's use of Biblical material to aid reading fluency.

### The Bunjams

The Bunjams were far more advanced in their English skills, as they had been in Canada for over a decade. Both children were born in Canada and spoke English as their first language. The literacy practices of the home are a combination of English and Indonesian traditions. Mary and Chora (the Bunjam children) can understand spoken Indonesian but cannot comprehend the language in print. In order for the children to see formal written Indonesian Mrs. Bunjam asks her family in Indonesia to send Indonesian storybooks for the family to read together. The children often ask about the translation during the sharing of these books, wondering how to say certain phrases in English. Mrs. Bunjam says the children hear Indonesian every day as she and her husband communicate in their first language at home. Additionally, during mealtimes or informal events around the home, both parents will insert Indonesian words into the conversation: "Sometimes I give instructions in Indonesian, like, will you pass the salt?"

From my observations and conversations with the Bunjams, I inferred they are very family-focused individuals who incorporate authentic learning tasks which elicit personal responses among the family. When asked about the learning which occurs at home, both parents emphasized the importance of talk within the family: "We always have breakfast together and supper...talking. We make time for breakfast and supper because we miss lunch (together). At

supper, we can ask everything.” The role of talk was present in many family activities. Mrs. Bunjam explained to me that many of the household “chores “are learning events. She has both girls learn the traditional cooking methods of Indonesia, explaining that in doing so they are also practicing essential math skills as well as the ability to follow directions and maintain sequence. Additionally, the family all participate in gardening, both flower and vegetable. During gardening activities, the parents ask about upcoming projects and events as well as discuss the social aspects of their schooling. Mr. Bunjam often asks his children to translate the names of vegetables and flowers from English to Indonesian. Mrs. Bunjam explains that children learn the value of things when they have to grow them on their own. For example, how much does a bag of potatoes cost or a bouquet of flowers? How much does it cost when we grow them in the garden?

In addition to schoolwork and household chores, both children practiced playing their musical instruments daily. This dedication revealed the value placed on continued practice to gain a certain set of skills. Daily practice was an expectation and included the examination of musical rudiments (the notes or chords, the timing and the dynamics) to develop skills. The Bunjams wanted their children to have the opportunity to learn to play an instrument but also stressed the responsibility that comes with it.

The Bunjam family’s literacy practices are a blend of modern Indonesian cultural understandings and mainstream Canadian understandings. The family encouraged the use of their first language at home providing their children with Indonesian books and print, and regular occasions to use the language orally and in print, such as regular letter writing and phone calls to family in Indonesia and daily use of the language. The Bunjam children were aided by their parents in using Indonesian for engaging activities such as creating locker tags and invitations for

their friends at school. The Bunjam's revealed to me that they wanted a different schooling experience than they received as children and therefore supported creative thinking and exploration in their children's learning and encouraged self-expression. Although they provided direction, they allowed their children freedom and choice in their learning and tried to make their children's learning experiential and relevant to their lives: "I am trying to position myself to let my children explore. I give them some direction, or rather a picture, but I let them choose". Both parents expressed their desire for a different experience for their children, as the education they experienced in Indonesia wasn't engaging or democratic: "Back home it was really kind of harsh, semi-military in some form. They are quite heavy in memorization. But here, the system is quite different. I look at my daughters, the way they learn, they enjoy." Interestingly, although both parents expressed their wishes for their children to have the opportunity to be creative in their learning, many literacy activities captured by the family on camera were schooled literacy based (activities such as silent reading, computer internet searches, and completing homework). The influence of schooled literacy is in part due to the educational background of the parents as Mrs. Bunjam was a teacher in her home country and came from a family of teachers and Mr. Bunjam was a researcher who paid for his education through marking and research assistant work.

The Bunjams incorporated both situated and autonomous literacy practices within their home environment. The blended practices engaged the children in spontaneous, daily literacy events and provided them with more structured tasks which the parents viewed as important for learning. The Bunjams' cultural capital granted them access into the world of schooled literacy and aided them in blending Indonesian cultural understandings and situated learning to create literacy learning which met the needs of their children. The teacher of the Bunjam children

praised their parents for their “hands-on” role as parents. In my observations, I thought the Tarans were as equally involved with their son, but did not have the same amount of cultural capital to display their dedication to learning.

### **Abridgement of Home and School Literacy Events- A Disconnect or Intersect?**

At times, the literacy events which were witnessed within the home and school differed in terms of instruction and content as literacy events and tasks within the school setting tended to be skill based, hierarchical and favour those who were familiar with the unwritten rules of the school and culture (turn taking, direction following, and overall obedience). However, in some cases, the learnings of the home and school intersected, as home observations revealed the children in “schooled literacy” tasks similar to those in the classroom.

Literacy within the home tended to be based on cultural norms and traditions and was a combination of formal and informal literacy events. The families engaged in tasks such as cooking, grocery shopping, first language instruction, and participation in extra-curricular activities which served as informal literacy lessons. Formal literacy events were also witnessed within the home such as silent and oral reading, completion of tasks in workbooks, and recitation of learning material.

The observational data gained from the children’s home and school environments legitimized the understanding of literacy as a socio-cultural practice. It was through this observation that I truly understood the manner in which literacy evolves with situational and cultural contexts. As an educator, I was reminded of the significance of endorsing a pluralistic understanding of literacy which included literacies which may not align with schooled literacy. Cherland & Harper (2007) remind us that situated literacy has vast potential to connect the

private to the public. Situated literacy studies reveal the value of the social and cultural aspects of literacy and reveals that literacy means different things to different people. “By deepening our understanding of other people’s literacy practices, [it] makes us stop and think and reflect on the way we do things...It can help mainstream education see their own privileges, to see how literacy instruction serves their interests, and not the interests of the marginalized” (p. 128).

## **Chapter Five- What does it all Mean?**

### **Interpreting the Data**

The purpose of this thesis is to study children's literacy learning in a multicultural home and school context and identify and explore the intersection between the home and school literacy learning environment. In addition, the research explores more specifically:

- How do school institutions understand and encourage literacy practices outside the school and how are these practices used to support diverse literacy learners?
- How do learning experiences within the home and community differ from learning experiences within the school?

This chapter answers the research questions on a macro level, in terms of school, family, and community, and at the micro level, in terms of specifically observed teacher, student, and family experiences.

Participant interviews and observational data were compiled and studied for commonalities. These commonalities within the study were identified as threads that continually emerged throughout the study. The themes identified within the study are inter-related, as the study of literacy has many facets, many of which overlap. Although separate, the themes flow into one another. The broad themes emerging from the data are as follows: literacy as a socio-cultural phenomenon in the community, literacy understandings within the institution of school, and schooled literacy as cultural capital.

This thesis illuminates the local and contextualized experiences of two immigrant families on their literacy learning journeys. The experiences took place within the learners' homes and classroom contexts. The research takes a socio-cultural view of literacy, therefore the research conducted within the homes and classrooms of the participants in this study was

important in understanding how each context shaped the literacy learners' understandings. Due to the socially constructed nature of literacy, issues of power and cultural domination come into play. The cultural diversity which exists in society is reproduced within the school setting and tends to be based on a hierarchy of power, with the transmission of the dominant culture at the top of the hierarchy. Bordieu, Passeron and Nice (1977) view education as cultural reproduction: "The process by which a cultural arbitrary is historically reproduced...the equivalent in the cultural order of transmission of genetic capital in the biological order" (p. 32). This structural hierarchy is evident in the structure of classical languages, philosophy, and literature which permeate the education system. Bordieu, et al (1977) state: "Power which manages to impose meanings and impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force" ( p. 4).

Cultural, linguistic, and social differences among learners, along with the influx of varied perspectives of literacy, means the nature of literacy pedagogy is rapidly changing. A traditional and autonomous view of literacy is viewed as a system of rules for mastering sound-letter correspondence. This view assumes that the learner and teacher can discern and describe the "correct" usage. In contrast, multi-literacies describe learning in a broader focus than language alone. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) explain that "multi-literacies create a different kind of pedagogy: one in which language and other modes of meaning are dynamic, representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes" (p. 5). Li (2006) tells us that within this emergent literacy perspective, children are seen as constructors of their own literacy; a cultural practice in which learners are

social negotiators who explore the power of literacy as a social mediator (Dyson, 1993).

Similarly, Cairney (1990) tells us that the meanings individuals construct through literacy reflect personal experiences; things the learner knows about language and the world.

### **Literacy as Socio-Cultural Practice – Is C for Confucius, Canada, or Computer?**

*To acquire literacy is more than to psychologically and mechanically dominate reading and writing techniques. It is to dominate those techniques in terms of consciousness; to understand what one reads and to write what one understands: it is to communicate graphically. Acquiring literacy does not involve memorizing sentences, words or syllables - lifeless objects unconnected to an existential universe - but rather an attitude of creation and re-creation, a self-transformation producing a stance of intervention in one's context.*

Paulo Freire, 1973

As I conducted this study, interviews and observations with participants helped me gain insight into each participant's unique understandings of literacy and learning, which are based on, in part, their prior experiences. The socio-cultural perspective acknowledges that literacy practices are similarly comprised of past and present power relations among those who read and write for certain goals and are historically situated, linked to power relations and are dependent on cultural understanding (Gee, 1996). Research shows that recently arrived immigrants may struggle with involvement in educational practices in their new educational setting due to the differences in beliefs about the education system as well as language and cultural obstacles (Teramoto Pedrotti, <http://social.jrank.org/pages/43/Asian-American-Children.html#ixzz0gVlgPYKU>). Anderson and Gundersen (1997) explain that parents who come to North America from other countries often have differing views about teaching and learning as their own experiences often do not parallel Canadian teaching and learning practices. The educational experiences of the immigrant parent participants within the study displayed these divergent understandings of learning and schooling.

The participants in this study had emigrated from Asia: the Bunjams from Indonesia and the Taras from China. Chinese, Korean, and Southeast Asian cultures have been predominantly influenced by the principles and philosophies of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, also known as the three teachings. The three teachings have evolved into a system of blended beliefs which have influenced the traditional shared values that are common to the various Asian cultures. Unlike other religions, Confucianism evolved more into loose individual practices and belief in the code of conduct, rather than a well-organized community religion, or way of life or social movement. The predominant Asian values pertaining to family, harmony, education, and selected virtues offer important guidelines for living. Virtues such as patience, perseverance, self-sacrifice, maintenance of inner strength, self-restraint, modesty, and humility are each considered examples of dignity that maintain the group well being (Chan & Lee, 2004). Both sets of parents in the study expressed their belief in these traits. Mr. Taras states, “When I was young, I realized I have to work hard to change my fate. Once I realized this, my life changed.” Similarly, when asked about immigrating to a new country and learning a new language, Mrs. Bunjam said: “I think it is not hard because if you have something, to offer something, like a skill, you can do it.” Her husband agreed saying that self-sacrifice and perseverance were worth becoming educated. “Those with good knowledge and good education will have a better life.”

Asian-Canadian educational achievement can be linked to cultural and family values, as most Asian-Canadian parents teach their children to value educational achievement, respect authority, feel responsibility for relatives, and show self control. The strong role of family is a common theme in Asian cultures, and Asian parents are often seen as sacrificing their own needs for the needs of their children (Terrimoto Petrolla, <http://social.jrank.org/pages/43/Asian-American-Children.html#ixzz0gVlgPYKU>). The basic principle behind Confucian education is

that with hard work, endurance, and suffering as a young person you will reap rewards later in life. To the families in this study, academic learning was viewed as a tool which could eliminate the devastating cycles of poverty and hardship. Literacy learning became essential in gaining social mobility and achieving a better life for oneself and one's children. Mr. Taras, Bo's father and a recent immigrant from a small village in China, recalls his early learning experiences:

*I was born in a very small village, and because my parents had to work, they had no time for home schooling. They don't know many words themselves, so they cannot teach me words and numbers. What I remember well was, when I was my son's age (five years old), asking for my brothers to teach me to write numbers, 1...2...3...we wrote on large stones. Because we were poor, I went to school with no shoes, only bare feet, and the temperature could be minus (freezing) sometimes. I went to senior school, and six of my toes were frozen. When I was young, I had to work hard to change my fate.*

Teachers in Asian culture are held in high regard. Under Confucianism, teachers and scholars are regarded as unquestioned authorities. They have traditionally been held in high esteem and their power and control has been regarded as almost absolute (Chan & Lee, 2004). This was evident in my study as Mrs. Bunjam described teachers as "very wise and respected." When Mr. Taras was asked about his son's education in Canada, he assured me that his son's teacher was very knowledgeable and knew the best way for his son to learn English. The view regarding parental engagement with the teacher and school was that the teacher's knowledge and ways were not to be questioned as her knowledge of English school and learning were far greater than his. He states, "In some degree I cannot communicate with others" and that "the school helps Bo."

The educational experiences of the teachers within the study were in sharp juxtaposition with the parents' educational experiences. The teachers' experiences consisted of traditional North American understandings of what early education within the home means. Pre-school and early learning experiences included families engaging in storybook reading and traditional school-based home literacy activities such as early phonemic awareness activities. The teachers viewed their early learning experiences as indicators of their educational success. Unlike the immigrant parents' early educational experiences, teachers did not speak of larger social issues which affected their learning, such as poverty and sacrifice. Ms. Haley, a young teacher within the study, recalls a very different set of early learning experiences:

*My mom was a teacher, so when I was growing up, I remember numbers and letters all over the house. A is for apple, B is for ball and all of those things. Both of us (me and my brother) could read before we went to school. We knew all of our colors and did all that kind of stuff because we had someone at home who taught us all those things and knew that it was important to know so many things before we went to school so we could feel successful.*

These very different experiences of literacy learning affect how the participants understood and viewed literacy learning. According to Fu (1995), understanding the past experience of our immigrant students and families will help educators to better understand their behaviours. Li (2002) explains the importance of understanding immigration experiences:

Generally speaking, the process of uprooting is always an uncertain and difficult journey. Compared to European immigrants, visible minority immigrants have to endure a more tempestuous acculturative process because they are at risk of many potential stressors, such as racial stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination (p. 3).

Parental expectations of immigrant parents are based on their own experiences as their expectations are derived from social, cultural, and family circumstances (Li, 2002). As educators, we must take caution not to ignore children's out of school learning experiences, even though they may be entirely different from those we value. Student (and family) experiences should be acknowledged, valued, and built upon (Anderson & Gunderson, 1997, p. 49).

The families in this study came from different cultural backgrounds, and in turn, had different learning styles. Their understandings about literacy learning were evident when the families were asked to capture literacy learning on film and explain the activities within a journal. The Bunjams' photographs were in line with schooled literacy practices, as many literacy events were photographed such as traditional reading and writing activities. The school-oriented learning style was indicative of the family's background. Mrs. Bunjam explained to me, "At home, my mom is a teacher and my dad is a teacher. I still remember dad and mom read the books and stories to me at home." The school-based learning style is evident as photographs included students engaged in reading, writing, and researching school assignments. Students were almost always in formal seating areas (such as a desk or table) completing their work. The Bunjam children have blended educational understandings as they have been in Canada for a longer period of time.

In contrast, when the Taras family captured literacy events on film, they were generally more global and community-based. Photographs portrayed learning events which were more spontaneous and less formal but also included some literacy tasks which were traditional. Learning events included play and socializing with classmates, swimming lessons, the construction of multi-level toys (such as K'Nex or Lego), as well as computer games and television watching. Mr. Taras believed that his son should learn through participation. He and his

wife provided their son with opportunities within the home and community to practice his language skills. Mr. Taras explains, “I always encourage him to learn things by himself. I will teach him some things but because my pronunciation isn’t that good, I encourage him to listen to the radio or watch TV.” By placing their son in extra-curricular programs, such as swimming, the Taras’ felt that Bo would hear English and could learn from his instructors and peers. In addition to swimming, Bo was enrolled in language classes, led by a local immigrant outreach organization. Other immigrant children attended classes and they learned English as they completed crafts and played games. Bo and his mother also improved their literacy skills though using the city transit system and city library. Although these “every day” activities were often daunting for Mrs. Tara, she regularly took Bo on outings to the library and church. The combination of traditional, schooled literacy and situated literacy within the home may be a result of traditional, Chinese understandings of learning, coupled with the knowledge that Bo’s English would best improve through practice and interactions with peers who were proficient in English. Li’s (2003) findings support the idea that there are cultures of learning, implying that students from different nations and educational backgrounds will approach their learning differently.

Some of the literacy practices which I observed in the Taras home were embedded within daily life; language was being learned not just through explicit instruction but also through lived experience. The literacy practices observed consisted of spontaneous and informal activities. Bo learned through family events and informal excursions such as fishing, grocery shopping, going to the library, and taking the bus. Researchers (Moll, Amanti, & Gonzalez, 1992) believe literacy mediates individual’s interactions with the world and relates to making sense of lived experience.

Every day literacy practices address a wide range of needs, including understanding of health and nutrition, legal issues, child rearing, personal identity, and spiritual guidance.

However, during my observations and interviews, the Taras' revealed that they set aside a specified time each day for "school time." "School time" consisted of more traditional, school-based literacy tasks such as rote reading of words and stories and workbook activities in both alphabet and math activities. "School time" may be a reflection of the cultural emphasis placed on memorization and work ethic (Li, 2003).

The Bunjam family's literacy practices are a blend of modern Indonesian cultural understandings and mainstream Canadian understandings. Although the parents promote the use of their first language at home, many other literacy activities captured by the family on camera were school literacy based. Activities such as silent reading, computer internet searches, and completing homework were recorded as literacy events. The family's cultural capital enabled them to gain teacher praise for their "hands-on" role as parents, as they were parents who partook in learning styles which reflect the goals of the school. The teacher of the Bunjam children states, "They are so self-motivated and they just happen to have a great family on top of it; very supportive parents. If I think of other families ESL I find it's very difficult to make the connections..."

Common to both families was the importance of education in their family's lives. Upon meeting both families, they stressed the value of education in achieving a better life for themselves and their children. Research has illuminated that Asian students overwhelmingly believe in the power of hard work, diligence and effort (2003). Both families demonstrated keen interest in my study and felt it was important for other immigrant families. They were interested in my educational background and how I came to want to study immigrant issues in learning.

They also related to conducting research, as the fathers in both families were currently in Ph. D programs. The families opened their homes to me and helped me to understand their past and present literacy learning experiences. Their honest, open communication was invaluable in challenging my own assumptions and beliefs about literacy learning. My home visits to each family shaped my study immensely, as they provided a clearer understanding of the “lived experiences” of the families in the study.

Although the families had different forms of cultural capital which they used in various ways, both parents believed that the role of the family and parent was to support the teacher and school in their children’s learning. Both sets of parents explained that parents are not partners in their children’s educational experience, but rather there to support the views of the teacher and school. The families respected the educational background of the teacher and assumed that the teacher and school understood best as to how their children should learn. When asked about the parents’ role in their children’s education and how the school enlists their support, Mr. Taras explained to me that he and his wife were very inexperienced with Canadian learning and culture and felt the teacher would help their son with his formal learning: “Everything is new to us. Bo and his mother do schooling, but they feel very nervous and uncomfortable, especially my wife, she is nervous...My English is not good. I will work so I can master English.” Similarly, the Bunjams told me that they felt confident in the teacher’s and school’s learning philosophies and were relieved that schooling was far less militant than in their home country of Indonesia. The family had deep respect for teachers and felt that they were very wise, as Mrs. Bunjam described teachers as “the holders of much knowledge.”

Both immigrant families within the study viewed literacy and education as tools for conquering poverty, essentially creating a better future for themselves and their families. Both

families believed that through self-sacrifice and determination, learning English would position them and their families for a better life. When asked about obstacles which posed difficulty in the learning of a new language and culture, Mr. Taras said, “I put my attention toward my studies. English is a work language. In fact, I really hope to master the skills of English. If we can master English skills, then he (his son Bo) can learn more easily in the future.”

The compensation for becoming literate has taken on “mythic” qualities which focus on literacy learning as solutions to large-scale societal issues such as poverty, unemployment, and social mobility. Street (1995) and Gee (1996) both suggest that this “literacy myth” entails dismal circumstances for those who aren’t literate and false expectations for those who are. Literacy learning, in the autonomous view, sees learning as an individual responsibility; therefore, those who don’t acquire this ability are blamed for their failures. This view of literacy enables the public to shift their attention from large-scale societal problems to the deficiencies of the individual learner. Gee (1990) explains that the societies through history and various cultures claim the great influence and power of literacy:

Literate people, it is widely believed, are more intelligent, more modern, and more moral. Countries with high literacy rates are (thought to be) better developed and better behaved. Literacy leads to logical, analytical, critical, and rational thinking (as well as) economic development, wealth, productivity, and political stability. (p. 50)

These myths or false beliefs often go unrecognized in society, yet wield a powerful force on cultural beliefs and understandings about literacy. The “literacy myth” is foundational to how society makes sense of the reality of literacy learning, despite the fact that it may not be an accurate reflection of reality nor will it lead to a more just world (Gee, 1990). Literacy as a

mobility agent, whether correct or incorrect, permeates our society, which includes our school systems.

### **Schooled Literacy – Curriculum, Culture, and the Classroom**

*And when we consider the first use to which writing was put, it would seem clear that it was first and foremost connected with power: it was used for inventories, catalogues, censuses, and instructions; in all instances, whether the aim was to keep a check on material possessions or human beings, it was the evidence of the power exercised by some men over other men.*

Claude Levis-Straus, 1961

The second theme that emerged in the study was literacy understandings within the institution of school. Although there has been a paradigm shift from the traditional, singular view of literacy, toward more pluralistic forms, it is important to understand the literacy which is valued within the school setting and the perceptions that society holds about literacy. In recent years, demands for educational reform have called for increased standards and accountability in schools. “It is assumed that school is the agency which is solely responsible for the nation’s level of literacy, and that if schools did their jobs more skilfully and resolutely, the literacy problem would be solved” (Resnick & Resnick, 1977, p. 117). Measures of literacy have become increasingly important in the field of education as teachers rely on literacy data for feedback on how well programs are providing the skills considered requisite for participation in the social, economic, and political arenas. Policy makers rely on this data to determine where, and to what extent, educational resources are needed to promote literacy (Wiley, 1988). These attempts to measure literacy, however, have drawbacks. The ability to measure literacy across large, diverse populations is limited by a lack of resources assigned to measuring literacy, the instruments of assessment, and by the accepted wisdom of what it means to be literate. In the process of assessing literacy we run the risk of imposing "elite" standards (Resnick & Resnick, 1977) on the

population as a whole and of stigmatizing those who fail to meet these standards (Wiley, 1988). Despite the fact that traditional definitions of literacy and school success represent only one type of literacy understanding, “schooled literacy” represents a particular set of social practices and a particular kind of language use that are considered the “legitimate” form of literacy in schools (Street, 1995). Margaret Meek (1992) explains that “the great divide in literacy is not between those who can read and write and those who can not . . . it is between those who have discovered what kind of literacy society values and learned how to dramatize their competences in ways that earn recognition and those who haven't (p. 9).

The technical view of school literacy is coined as autonomous literacy by Street (1995) and posits that in such traditional definitions of literacy, where the learner is seen as independent from the social contexts, literacy becomes associated with consequences which have no relation to the social situation in which literacy is embedded. Gee (1996) echoes this view and reminds us that the autonomous view of literacy masks the connection between literacy, power and social identity, and privileges certain types of literacy and people. Gee (1990) called literacy a socially contested term whose traditional meaning (the ability to read and write) appears relatively simple and unproblematic and researchers such as Delpit (1988) recognize that the traditional definition of literacy is the one which carries the most political and ideological weight in mainstream cultures and Western nations.

As in society in general, power is often distributed unequally in schools. Issues of power which are enacted in schools have been studied by researchers such as Cummins (1995) and Delpit (1995), who found that there are certain codes (also known as cultural capital) for participating in schools which can appear in linguistic forms, communication styles, and interaction strategies. Most of these codes reflect the rules of the dominant culture which

explains why children from the dominant culture tend to do better than their minority peers. Schools therefore have an estranging effect on many students and reproduce unequal power structures, as these codes are meaningless or irrelevant to students outside the dominant culture.

Within this study, it was evident that culture played a large role in teaching in the classroom setting. Both teachers were white middle class women whose educational experiences paralleled the traditional Western view of teaching and learning. Michael Apple (1979) explains the Western ideology of learning as a theoretical tradition in which teaching and transmission are considered to be primary and prior to learning. In sum, what is transmitted is assumed to be received in an unproblematic fashion (p. 19). The problem with this tradition is that it fails to understand that if parents of culturally diverse children were members of the dominant group and understood the rules and the codes of this culture, they would transmit this knowledge to their children (Delpit, 1995). When children begin formal schooling, they begin with groundwork that is laid by the nature of parent and child interaction, by literacy uses valued by a particular culture, by print in the environment, and by the child's own activity in literacy events. Such differences in language use with culturally diverse student bodies often result in differential access to literacy experiences and educators often unknowingly exclude or reduce the time minority students participate in literacy activities because features of their discourse do not conform to teachers' expectations or match their speaking style (Li, 2006).

The teachers in this study faced many issues in the creation of quality literacy programming and instruction for their diverse student bodies. The teachers both attested to the use of the curricular and division guidelines in determining their choices. I had a sense that both teachers felt the pressure of accountability to the mandated curriculum in designing and delivering their programs.

Goodlad and Su (1992) define curriculum as a plan that consists of learning opportunities for a specific time frame and place, a tool that aims to bring about behaviour changes in students as a result of planned activities and includes all learning experiences received by students with the guidance of the school. Curriculum includes both explicit and implicit learnings. The explicit learnings are the courses and objectives that students are expected to learn in a set amount of time. This curriculum is determined by local school boards, provincial Ministries of Education, and national school consortiums. The English Language Arts - A Curriculum Guide for the Elementary Level (2002) puts forward the following purpose and aims of the English language arts curriculum:

The purpose (is to) guide the continuous growth and development of students' thinking and language abilities from kindergarten to grade 12. The study of English language arts enables students to understand and appreciate language, and to use it in a variety of situations for communication, personal satisfaction, and learning. Competent language users, equipped with communication skills, will have greater ability and increased confidence to function in today's world. The aim of the English language arts curriculum, K-12, is to graduate literate individuals who are competent and confident in using language for both functional and aesthetic purposes.

Along with the explicit curriculum, there exists an aspect of the curriculum termed the implicit curriculum, also known as the hidden curriculum (Wren, 1993). This aspect of the curriculum refers to messages communicated by the school and staff separate from the official school mission and subject area curriculum guidelines. The hidden curriculum usually transmits messages which deal with attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviour. Wren (1993) reiterates this,

reminding us that the overt curriculum, which consists of course objectives and learning objectives, is not the only curriculum students are subject to. Additionally, students experience an unwritten curriculum characterized by informality and lack of conscious planning: "All students must internalize a specific program of social norms for training in order to function effectively as members of a smaller society, the school, and later on as productive citizens of the larger society" (p. 3). Apple (1971) explains that the messages conveyed through the hidden curriculum were once explicit in establishing social order in educational curriculum in the early 1900s. Learners were expected to display appropriate behaviour through traits such as punctuality, passivity, and respect for authority. These teachings became taken for granted as natural by the twentieth century and therefore became implicit or hidden. However, those who are new to North American schools are expected to adapt to these unwritten codes of conduct. Due to this, the hidden curriculum helps to maintain the status quo of the dominant culture. Apple states:

What schools do not teach may be as important as what they do teach. Ignorance is not simply a neutral void; it has important effects on the kinds of options one is able to consider, the alternatives that one can examine, and the perspectives from which one can view a situation or problems. The absence of a set of considerations or perspectives or the inability to use certain processes for appraising a context biases the evidence one is able to take into account. A parochial perspective or simplistic analysis is the inevitable progeny of ignorance (1971, p. 96-97).

Socio-cultural research shows that the values and practices of the dominant culture are reflected in school practice, as schools have historically been seen as a reproduction of larger society. Anderson and Gunderson (1997) remind us that schools and teachers are in many

respects the instruments by which governments both nationally and locally impart to their citizens a set of beliefs which are deemed correct and appropriate. The multiple literacy perspective recognizes that literacy and language acquisition are more than an understanding of the rules of a language. Rather, a full range of cultural knowledge is essential for the participation in that culture. A culture's dominant language most often shapes the rules for its dominant discourse. A very particular narrow form of Standard English is the discourse that most often dominates schooling, ignoring that there are many discourses and children and that children are instructed in both mainstream and non-mainstream discourses. The process of literacy learning in the classroom involves the learning of the secondary discourse of the school. The primary discourse of students from mainstream backgrounds is often similar to that of the school, as their mother language (English) is used by the teacher in instruction. Students are also familiar with the storybook reading which occurs in the classroom, and therefore readily adjust to the secondary discourse faster and need less time with the acquisition process before learning specific reading and writing skills. Contrastingly, students from diverse backgrounds may have experienced forms of literacy which do not parallel the literacy practices within the school. These students often have a different mother language than the teacher uses in instruction and may not be familiar with process of "known" answer questioning (Au, 1997).

In this study, it was evident that both teachers had keen awareness of the literacy standards of their school and division. Both teachers articulated their knowledge of the English Language Arts curriculum guide and how they used it to inform their teaching. In addition, they were dedicated in the implementation of local literacy initiatives and spoke of the literacy in-services they had attended and the various modes of implementation of their initiatives in their classrooms, explaining various projects that they were currently working on and the time frames

needed to achieve these goals. Both teachers displayed competence in their teaching ability and expressed great understanding of the content they were teaching. Both were very concerned as to how to reach all students and help them accomplish their learning goals within the school year. Through our discussions and my classroom observations, I concluded that both teachers had much awareness about the multiple definitions of literacy. Despite this knowledge, they appeared to be experiencing difficulty deciding which of these practices would help their students reach the expected standards by the end of the year. Due to this dilemma, the activities I observed in the classroom were not always culturally or linguistically appropriate for the EAL learners in the classroom. Tasks in Mrs. Marvin's kindergarten classroom tended to be teacher led and skill based (e.g. phonics pages or step-by-step art projects). Story writing and journaling activities were meant to incorporate student experience but the pre-determined topics were often more appropriate for white middle class students. In oral language activities, the same children eagerly shared their knowledge, while those from the minority cultures remained silent. Class discussions in both classrooms seemed suited to the dominant culture as topics were related to Euro-centric experiences such as camping and owning pets. Communication tended to be teacher-centered, which may unknowingly send students the message that they are to play passive role as the recipient of the message. The teacher-centered classroom is not a new phenomenon, as Goodland's 1984 study of the hidden curriculum in schools found: "A lot of teacher talk and a lot of student listening...almost invariably closed and factual questions...and predominantly total class instruction configurations around traditional activities" (p. 29).

When discussing curriculum, teachers spoke solely of the core curriculum (explicit curriculum). However, I did not guide the teachers into discussion on various aspects of the curriculum, such as the hidden curriculum. From our discussion, the teachers explained the

enormity of curriculum implementation in a diverse classroom which consumed their curricular efforts, which is likely why they spoke only to the explicit curriculum in relation to EAL learners.

The hidden curriculum is always present, however, and could be witnessed in the status quo values and attitudes associated with Western understandings of literacy and learning. Specific examples include knowing what a “good listener” looks like, which included proper sitting technique and hand position; the notion of turn taking, such as walking in line ups, raising your hand, and only speaking when called upon, as well as social cues, which include facial expressions, and proximity. My observation and discussion notes with the kindergarten students displayed this:

*Several of the children eagerly tell me the “rules” when I arrive. Rules such as:*

*“You have to sit on your bum if you’re on the floor.”*

*“You need a date on this paper here ‘cause then we know when we did it.”*

*All rules were followed by ‘Mrs. Marvin says.’”*

Western understandings of literacy learning were also evident in the teachers’ role and attitudes toward literacy learning and the classroom interactions which resulted. Literacy was largely viewed in terms which reflected the needs of the school, likely due to increased focus on accountability and grade standards in today’s public schools; the literacy of school tends to be a reflection of these standards. Unknowingly, the importance of family literacy remained misunderstood or undervalued. It is important to note that as teachers, we teach as we have been taught. Our values and beliefs about language and learning come from our prior social and cultural experiences. Mrs. Marvin’s experiences can be seen as she shares her insights on the importance of story book reading in early literacy learning: *“I think that kids learn to read before*

*or when they come to school because they have been read to by their parents and they are aware; curious and ready to do more.”*

In viewing the teacher’s roles within the school setting, the study illuminates the cultural norms of power within the classroom. The structure of the classroom activities and interactions in the classroom (whole group and small group instruction) posits teachers as expert, and students as demonstrator of knowledge (Hall, 2002). This can be viewed through the control of the literacy tasks, the roles of the students within the tasks, and the culturally accepted aspects of the classroom. The chosen literacy tasks privileged those who were familiar with the cultural aspect of decoding and using other phonetic practices. The teachers, as “literacy experts,” maintain control over students’ roles through unwritten cultural norms such as the “correct” way to complete tasks. Students in this study were very eager to replicate teacher examples and became uncomfortable with any diversion from the “correct” procedure. These unwritten rules of “correctness” can be viewed as I volunteered with several EAL students in a cut and paste phonics activity:

*Researcher: Tell me three of these things that are ‘S’ words.*

*Chan: No, six words.*

*Bo: Yeah*

*Blade: Teacher says to count and find six that start with S.*

*Researcher: Okay.... but today maybe I’ll help you by playing a game together. We could draw some pictures of s words (I show a marker and the letter S for the children who speak little English)*

*Blade: (Reluctantly) Ummmmmmmm...okay?*

Literacy within the classroom was based on principles which favoured prior knowledge. Those who were familiar with the principles achieved well within the daily activities such as cloze model procedures and phonetic worksheet assignments, and sight word recognition because they had completed similar tasks such as story book reading, alphabet and number recognition, and the introduction of sound letter relationships at home, prior to school entry. That literacy tasks build on prior knowledge can be witnessed during one of my informal meetings with kindergarten students:

*My task today was to work with those experiencing challenges with letter sounds. I was given a bag with various items, and the children had to place them in an F or V pile. Although the activity was engaging for the children, it proved difficult as their vocabulary was still in the beginning stages of development. The children were able to place easily identifiable articles such as fish and flower in the “f” pile; however common items to Canadian children such as Valentine and vase are not easily identifiable to a five year old child who had arrived in Canada three months ago. Although well intentioned, this activity did not help the children with all letter sounds as they had limited prior knowledge to connect the sound to the obscure pictures. To culminate the activity, Mrs. Marvin sent three EAL children who are struggling with the sound-letter concept to me in the hall with “cut and paste” activity booklets. The booklets had been photocopied from phonics workbooks and contained sound-letter activities which matched the letter with the correct picture. The problem with this activity was that not all of the pictures were in the EAL student’s new language vocabulary- for example, “S” is for salamander.*

Research (Delpit, 1988; Heath, 1983; Au, 1997) has shown that traditional skill-based school programs tend to be more successful with middle class students from the dominant

cultural group because these children have been taught the prerequisite information about literacy learning (such as alphabet knowledge, story book reading and responding to questioning) prior to school entry and therefore display this knowledge once they enter school. Children with a different cultural background may not share this knowledge and therefore are at a disadvantage. Shirley Brice Heath (1983) explains that power and authority in the Western classroom are evident in teachers' interactions with students, as the teacher in her study often used "masked commands" such as 'is this where the scissors go?' and 'you want to do your best don't you?' (p. 280). This type of questioning was present in Mrs. Marvin's classroom: "You mustn't draw a mouth on that side. What kind of dinosaur would that be?" As teachers, we may use these question-like commands (Ie: "Is that what a good listener looks like?") with the assumption that children know the answers. Similarly, we may give children choices (you may choose to do your work quietly or leave the classroom) assuming that children "know" the correct choice.

When addressing adaptations to the curriculum to meet the learning needs of the EAL students in the classroom, both teachers expressed frustration about the lack of time and resources to plan for the different linguistic levels of the students. When parental communication was discussed, both teachers felt that in time the EAL families would learn the language and "adjust" to the expectations of the school. Mrs. Marvin, Bo's kindergarten teacher, acknowledged that Bo's parents seemed to be very interested in their son's schooling but were not providing him with enough interaction with English friends and may be hindering his development by speaking to him in his mother language. She noted that Bo's mother was very reluctant to volunteer for class activities and outings and understood this was due to the pressures associated with being a new Canadian citizen. Ms. Haley felt that communication with EAL

families was very strained and that “nothing changed” even after several attempts of trying to explain issues related to behaviour and academics. She understood the challenges facing the EAL learners and their families, but did not know how to make the process of communication better.

Crucial differences between home and school language practices, mismatches between teachers’ and students’ learning practices, and classroom and school norms which remain implicit are all learning obstacles which are evident within this study. “Unwritten” cultural norms such as turn taking, obedience, and student and teacher interaction can be witnessed within the classroom setting. Observations within the classroom revealed cultural norms and expectations which represent North American mainstream understandings about learning and culture such as displaying knowledge through turn taking procedures such as hand raising and not talking out of turn and cued questions from the teacher. Student-teacher interaction was limited to student responses from teacher led discussions. Although questions appear to be open-ended, there often seemed to be a preferred answer. Students from the mainstream culture appeared to be familiar with the “unwritten” cultural norms, as they may have been similar to the norms represented by their families and community therefore these children responded to the classroom expectations with ease. The norms and expectations within the classroom posed more challenging for the diverse student body, as language and cultural norms of their home and community may be on very different from the norms within the classroom. I observed the student-teacher interactions during “sharing time” in the kindergarten classroom:

*I watch the children interact with the teacher during the opening exercises routine. The teacher is seated in front of the students on a chair. The students sit in rows on the floor in front of her. The conversation about the day’s events is led by the teacher, with interjections allowed from students who raise their hands to speak. After several minutes,*

*I notice that two of the EAL children in the class have become totally disengaged. They sit quietly, but their body language tells me they are not part of this exercise. Mrs.*

*Marvin asks one of the children a question which he is unable to respond to. The little girl sitting next to me whispers to me, "He doesn't understand English. He just came here from far away. We tell him the rules but sometimes he doesn't listen."*

### **Schooled Literacy as Cultural Capital – Assumptions, Adaptations, and Authority**

*How amidst the differences in any one classroom, do we as educators allow "the child" a place of integrity in the curricular landscape? How do we keep from reducing children into categories based on race, ethnicity, gender, or worse, rendering great sweeps of children "at risk" deviants from an imagined norm?*  
Anne Haas Dyson, 1997

The third theme that emerged from the study related to school literacy being understood in terms of cultural capital and how this capital resulted in disconnects between the home and school learning environments. Research has shown that literacy differs in different cultures, communities, and times, and plays a role in shaping those times and places. Therefore, context and motivation play a role in examining literacy practices and it is important to associate these practices within the larger purpose and aim of reading and writing (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000).

Scholars have highlighted critical differences between home and school language and literacy practices, as well as mismatches between teacher and student language practices. Many researchers suspect that this disconnect between school literacy and home/community literacies is holding back literacy development for children, particularly those whose home literacies are undervalued and ignored by the schools (Dewey, 1956; Dyson, 1993). A prominent explanation for the biased representation of certain groups performing well or poorly in school was said to be due to cognitive, social, and linguistic deficits among the unsuccessful student population

(Bereiter & Engelmann, 1966; Jenson, 1969). Researchers in the past have suggested that some students did poorly because they were ill-prepared before entering school and therefore the problem lay with lack of knowledge, social stimulation, and linguistic skills among certain groups of the population. Teachers' credence about preferred parenting and ways of teaching children before they arrive at school could be witnessed within the study. Ms. Haley shares her perception about the learning which occurs before children enter school:

*And these kids were coming to school not knowing how to read a single word, not even having letter recognition, and I was thinking about how rich I felt or better I felt that I actually had that. I find that one of my "beefs" lately is that these kids come to school with nothing, a very high majority, and not just ESL kids; you know with TV raising you and video games raising you and they're (students) coming with no literacy; no communication. I've always thought back on that. Why did I become a teacher? Probably because I wanted to teach kids the same... Whereas nowadays, in my opinion, is that the parents really don't understand school culture, and they think back to their own experience...but they're not in here, they're not in the classrooms to see how their kids are learning. They're at work all day and "I'll send my kid to school and let them ...be.*

Mrs. Marvin shares her views on mother language use in the home:

*Some of the ESL children don't want to lose their mother tongues so they don't use English at home. I told them (the parents) that their boy was getting confused by directions because the only English he receives is here. They have to work with him at home. She (the mother) asked to take home the Dick and Jane books [a classroom*

*reading program] and I told her if she wants to take them home she has to do them EVERY day.*

Recent socio-linguistic research questions assumptions about non-mainstream students and reminds us that students who do not speak English (or the mainstream language) still have a language, and that cultural groups outside the mainstream still have meaningful cultures and believe that children's differences do not have to condemn them to failure (Neito,1994).

Nieto (1994) calls assumptions "walking sets of deficits" and believes that some of the evidence that students are deficit (such as language and culture) needs to be seriously reconsidered.

Research has explored the cultural mismatch that occurs with schools and found that schools reproduce existing social inequalities of their own societies. Goodlad (1984) explains:

Dominant groups, institutions, and representatives of those institutions (e.g. teachers) require that subordinated groups deny their cultural identity as a necessary condition for the success in the mainstream society where the gatekeepers are invariably representatives of the dominant cultural groups (p. 46).

The concept of social reproduction, as articulated in the work of Bordieu (1977, 1984, 1990) is useful in gaining understanding of how race and class influence the transmission of educational inequality. Bordieu explains educational inequality as school systems being a place of unequal exchange in language and pedagogy, material, and symbolic resources. Cummins (1995) comments on social reproduction stating: "Educators' role definition reflects their vision of society, and implicated in that societal vision are their own identities and those of the students with whom they interact" (p. 54).

The students within the study were adapting to the cultural and language learning expectations of the school and teachers. I was interested to gain understanding into ways in

which the educators were adapting instruction and resources in order to create more meaningful learning experiences for their diverse students. What the teachers revealed to me was that instruction adaptation was very challenging. The teachers blamed time constraints and lack of additional resources, such as educational assistants to aid in this task. I learned from both teachers that students who were experiencing difficulty in language tasks may receive help outside the classroom setting (known as “pull-out” programming) to receive additional help from either the resource room teacher or from parent or educational assistants. There were some classroom adaptations in terms of reducing the amount of student work and different expectations in term of prior knowledge of certain course materials to meet the language and learning needs of the diverse learner. However, in some cases students were remediated with lower level activities in a resource program due to time and resource constraints faced by teachers. I appreciated the honesty and concerns the teachers expressed about creating quality programs for the EAL students:

*Researcher: Do you find that you have to adapt your program to meet different needs for different children?*

*Mrs. Haley: I find I do have to. Do I always do it? No, and the reasons for that are selfish; time and the amount of work to put into that. How do I adapt and what do I do? Kids that are needing extra help they go to the resource room teacher and I always plan all those sorts of things but they don't always get followed through.*

*Similarly, Mrs. Marvin explains her classroom adaptations:*

*Mrs. Marvin: At the beginning of the year, I start very basic and then continue adding on. Rather than adapting, I think the thing that makes the difference is the on-on- one attention (children receive) both before they come to school and during school.*

Students who are EAL being placed in special education or pull-out programs is quite common according to data from several countries surveyed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and The Center for Educational Research and Innovation (ERI). The research indicates that there are a disproportionate number of EAL children placed in special education classes and notes that their placements are not due to developmental delays but rather because the students are unable to follow the regular streamed program due to language barriers (1987, p. 33). Cummins (1995) expresses concern about these placements saying:

It is not a viable option for the amount of time that a student may need support in mastering the academic aspects of English. Thus, it is likely that all teachers in schools will be required to address the learning needs of the second language students by individualizing their instruction. (p. 41)

Traditional theories of culture and cultural transmission have been based on the supposition that families of different social classes in institutions (such as schools) are working together in agreement to transmit cultural knowledge and understandings which are considered to be the property of society as a whole (Bourdieu, 1990). Research has challenged traditional views of cultural transmission of schooling as a “mobility agent” which has the capability to promote or demote learners based on talent or effort. Bourdieu et al (1977) states:

Inheritance of cultural wealth which has been accumulated and bequeathed by previous generations only really belongs (although it is theoretically offered to everyone) to those endowed with the means of appropriating it for themselves. Possession of cultural goods as symbolic goods are possible only for those who hold the code, making it possible to decipher them. (p. 73)

In my observations of the classroom settings within the study, I noted that the children who came from mainstream backgrounds were at a considerable advantage, as the language, cultural and social expectations, as well as the school structure paralleled the learning of their homes and communities. Children were familiar with the forms of questioning, un-written codes of conduct of acceptable behaviour, and in many cases, exhibited prior knowledge about curricular material.

As educators, it is important to be aware that all children and their families possess important cultural knowledge (cultural capital). Cultural capital refers to a collection of non-economic forces such as family background, social class, and different resources which influence learning. The theory suggests that “cultural habits and dispositions inherited from the family are fundamentally important to school success” (Bourdieu, Passeron, & Nice, 1977, p. 14); however, capital is unequally distributed, thereby creating opportunities for “exclusive advantages.” The cultural capital possessed by the Bunjam family was valued more by the school, as it was in line with the cultural and academic expectations of the school. Both parents worked in the field of education; Mrs. Bunjam as a teacher in her home country of Indonesia, and Mr. Bunjam as an academic. Mrs. Bunjam capitalized on her teaching background by working as an educational assistant within the same school her children attended. Her employment within the school gave her access to information such as cultural and academic expectations that other parents do not have. She stated the benefits of working within the school environment:

*I started to volunteer in the school when the girls start school. I think it is good for me to learn something. It is really helpful for people from another country to learn while helping the class. You can see the teacher teach the class and you learn too.*

The well-developed English skills of both the parents and children gave the additional cultural capital in terms of their communication skills with school personnel. The language barrier was not an issue for communicating with teacher and school staff, as it was with the Taras family.

The Taras family's cultural capital, although rich and diverse, was not in line with the expectations of the school. The family, as very recent immigrants to Canada, did not possess the cultural or language knowledge that the Bunjam family had acquired over the decade of living in Canada. Although Mr. Taras was also an academic, studying at the University of Saskatchewan in the Ph.D. program, his language skills did not allow for fluent conversations or interactions with school staff. His wife had even more limited English proficiency, and lacked confidence in speaking with her son's teachers. The Taras' relied on the educational decisions of their son's teacher and attempted to support the school and their son's learning in any way they could from the home by using technological resources and community resources. They built their cultural capital as they attended regular language learning classes run by a local immigrant support society, used public transit and the public library system regularly, joined a religious group to aid in their English proficiency, and used electronic devices such as computer programs and dictionaries to better help themselves and their son with their English skills. In addition to these activities, the family also engaged in many household activities which preserved their cultural identity. Traditional Chinese cooking was a large part of daily life. Mrs. Taras taught her son the importance of hospitality and generosity through food preparation. The cultural capital which was present in the Taras home was less noticed by the school because it was capital which did not coincide with the North American philosophies of language learning. Delpit (1995) says that "the culture of power is the culture of the mainstream, the values, knowledge, and behaviours that everyone must come to terms with in order to navigate mainstream institutions and relations" and

asserts that in order for all students to experience success “students must be taught the codes needed to participate fully in the mainstream of life...they must also be helped to learn the arbitrariness of those codes and about the power relationships they represent” ( p. 45).

Consequently, the educational systems of modern societies tend to channel individuals towards class destinations that largely (but not wholly) mirror their class origins.

Cummins (1988) suggests that previous attempts at educational reform to increase opportunities for diverse students have proven unsuccessful due to the inadequate consideration of the relationships between teachers and students and schools and community, which he argues have gone virtually unchanged. I spoke with the teachers within the study about the relationships between parents and teachers. I was curious to know how teachers made connections with the families of EAL children. Ms. Haley expressed frustration about making meaningful connections with parents from diverse cultures. She did not understand the disconnect, as she maintained the school in which she worked had excellent administration and was conscious of the learning needs of diverse learners and dedicated to creating an inviting atmosphere for diverse students and families. Despite support from administration, she felt parent and teacher relationships remain strained:

*If I think of other families ESL I find it's very difficult to make the connections. Even if I communicate, for example, if I have a problem with one of the students (school wise) I find it really hard to relay it to the parents because of the language barrier. When I relay it, I feel nothing changes. I was feeling really upset about this, this year in particular. But communication with parents is always difficult. And at this school we are really supported by administration, Open-Door Society (local agency which aids immigrants*

*and their families), we've really been growing that way. Other schools wouldn't be as advanced as we are right now.*

To reverse the pattern of student failure in non-mainstream students, Cummins (1995) suggests a redefinition of teacher and student relationships, school and community relationships, and power relationships in society as a whole. Research studying home and school literacy practices has made important contributions to knowledge about the variability among families and cultures and has helped to illuminate the rich contexts of learning that families provide, which children in turn bring to the school learning environment. Many argue that schools can draw on the social and cognitive contributions that parents can make to their children's academic learning. Moll and his colleagues (1992) studied household and classroom practices within working class Mexican communities and discovered that all households have accumulated bodies of knowledge. Household knowledge provides information about practices and resources useful in ensuring the well-being of the households. This knowledge is understood in broad and diverse terms and includes information that is associated with occupations, trade, and business (Moll & Greenberg, 1990). Each household is a place where expertise in a particular domain can be accessed and used; examples of domains include repair of vehicles and appliances, plumbing, knowledge of education, herbal medicine, and first aid. Together, the households form a cluster for the exchange of information and resources. This exchange of knowledge has been coined funds of knowledge by Moll, et al (2001) and refers to historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning or well being.

Funds of knowledge in both families within the study were diverse. Families created settings in which children carry out the tasks and chores in the multiple domains of their

households. The children's activities had intellectual importance as they observed, questioned, and assisted adults as various tasks were done. Learning within both homes was flexible and adaptive and motivated by the child's interest and questions.

### **Multicultural Reality- Symbolic or Authentic Acceptance of Diversity?**

*If we are to achieve a richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human potentialities, and so weave a less arbitrary social fabric, one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place*

Margaret Mead, 1935

The final emerging theme of this study was The Reality of Multiculturalism in Canada. Despite the fact that Canadian schools and teachers have made a commitment to celebrating the diversity in their schools, how does this translate for the students from diverse backgrounds? Although theories of multiculturalism are well meaning and aimed at the promotion of diversity and respect for individual cultures, there seems to be a missing link in connecting the rhetoric to the reality.

The theory of multiculturalism promotes understanding people from all cultures, despite differences in language, religious beliefs, political and social views, or national origins. It does not require people to cast off their own values and beliefs, in order to accept one another. Instead, multiculturalism acknowledges there are many ways in which the world can be viewed and inhabited. Multiculturalism essentially promotes respect for people's distinct cultural identity, while ensuring that common Canadian values are upheld. However, during the policy's first decade there remained those who argued that when converted from promises into programs, it was slanted more towards support of group cultural celebration than such issues as fighting discrimination (Troper & Weinfeld, 1999).

In the first decade of multiculturalism, the policy became something of a Canadian cliché for many to distinguish between American and Canadian societies in multicultural terms. The United States was characterized as a “melting pot” and Canada as a multicultural “mosaic.” This generalization suggested that the United States offered an environment in which ethnic and racial differences must be abandoned to form a more singular and unifying American identity. In Canada, contrastingly, citizens were supposedly encouraged to maintain their distinct ethno-cultural identities to whatever degree they might wish. In the process, it was said that Canadians developed a tolerance and appreciation for the cultural uniqueness of others (Bibby, 1990). As the mosaic versus melting pot cliché took hold, it also had an impact on the popular understanding of Canadian history. It was commonly assumed that this distinction was true of an earlier era as well. In a quick reworking of Canadian historical fact, the multicultural policy was retrospectively read into the past to declare that Canada had always cherished multicultural values and as a result had always been a more welcoming, more open, and more tolerant society than the United States. However false, this “invention” of a multicultural past helped solidify support behind the policy (Burnet, 1979).

Critics of multiculturalism have identified many problems with it, although this is sometimes due to confusion among the various meanings and uses of the term. It has been argued that multiculturalism claims to help preserve cultures and languages, but this has not had the effect of uniting Canadians or of bringing them together. Rather, it has helped keep people apart and has been one of the factors responsible for contributing to "cultural group solidarity at the expense of broader social participation" (Bibby, 1990). Additionally, multiculturalism may hinder participation, prevent equal education and opportunity, and maintain exploitation and inequality (Fleras, 1992). By limiting the emphasis on overcoming barriers, and by refusing to

deal with the inherent structural inequalities in society, the policies end up being irrelevant or regressive. Further, the legitimate claims of minority ethnic groups may be ignored or sidetracked by those who claim that there is equality and harmony.

The policy may be symbolic in expressing good ideas, but in practice can be limited and lack substance. Resources devoted to multiculturalism may be largely devoted to symbolic aspects of culture, such as ethnic lifestyles, while ignoring the real problems of racism, discrimination, and inequality faced by people in minority cultures. Ms. Haley explained to me that her school was very inviting to all parents. She felt that the school staff and administration did a good job in making all parents feel welcome. She felt that the incorporation of various festivals and school events which highlighted diversity were helpful in making parents feel as though the school was a place for all cultural groups:

*Of course it's an open invitation, but it's hard to get a lot of those people (ESL) to come in because of their previous school experiences, but I do know it's a lot better because we used to do a lot of things to invite them like just for lunch or a dance or a pow-pow, stuff like that to get people to come in, so I think that's changing.*

Bibby makes the argument that this emphasis on diversity means that there is limited group identity, no group vision, no national goals or dreams, nothing in the value system that marks it as Canadian (1990). A multicultural view of a society as a mosaic does not mend the organization of our society, which still privileges the dominant culture with political, social, and economic power. Multicultural education aims to promote sensitivity to cultural differences and interchange between people perceived as different. In their efforts to recognize diversity, schools have revised their calendars, adding ethnic celebrations and special events. I observed the school's climate, in terms of school and classroom displays presented information for parents

and community members, and found that the school had much information posted about upcoming cultural events, language classes, and general information about school and community programs. The walls of the hallways were adorned with student work which reflected student learning. The displays appeared to be thematic in nature and did not highlight the upcoming North American celebration of Easter. The community bulletin board outlined upcoming evening language classes for parents and children, as well as the upcoming monthly “multicultural potluck.” There was obviously a conscious effort on the part of the staff and administration to maintain “culturally correct” school environment, aimed at inclusion of all cultures. Although the school climate appeared warm and inviting, I could not help but wonder how teachers could use the wall displays and upcoming cultural events to translate the information into teaching and curricular practices which recognized multiculturalism beyond the superficial level of food and festivals? The culinary approach was witnessed in the informal conversation with a staff member regarding how the diverse school population is encouraged to keep their culture. Immediately, he mentioned the success of the monthly multicultural potluck held in the school and how he loved the exchange of the many cultural recipes. He praised Mrs. Bunjam, an educational assistant within the school from Indonesia, for her wonderful Indonesian Chicken recipe and said that it really helped him gain appreciation for different types of ethnic food. Although the staff and administration were very well meaning in the incorporation of multicultural celebration, in emphasizing the importance of customs, food, and costume there was a limited and insubstantial perspective on their school community. The school was explaining multiculturalism through symbolic aspects of culture, such as ethnic lifestyle, without disrupting the hierarchies and power issues which affect the culturally diverse. The real problems of racism, discrimination, and inequality faced by people in minority cultures are not

addressed through the culinary and festival view of multiculturalism. Heritage has little to do with superficial things such as food, dance or music, author Neil Bissoondath (1994). reminds us. He claims Canada's focus on multiculturalism is nothing more than a bunch of festivals with traditional music, traditional dancing, traditional food at distinctly untraditional prices.

It is important for school staff and administration to understand that school is not a racially neutral site and, therefore, much work needs to be done through curricular and teaching methods to address the power relations which exist in society and how they are reproduced in schools. Capitalism and class are the central features of our society, and the inequalities that result from this cannot be dealt with by a superficial “tourist gaze” of multiculturalism. When schools and educators speak about multiculturalism and “tolerance” of difference, they need to talk about racism and anti-racism. Essentially, this means talking about power: who has it, how it is exercised and how it is perpetuated as oppression operates through a much broader set of social processes and institutional practices, often so normalized that they are invisible.

This study explores the literacy learning experiences of diverse students and their families in a Canadian context. The research describes the importance of family and community learning experiences and how they can be used to enrich learning within the classroom and reflects the dynamic and ever-changing nature of literacy. Additionally, the study illuminates larger social issues which affect the learning of the student, family, and teacher.

## **Chapter 6 - Data Implications**

In this final chapter, the research questions are answered, implications, and future research based on this study are described. A personal reflection regarding the research brings this thesis to a close.

### **Purpose and Importance**

The purpose of this research was to gain insight into the multiple literacy perspectives which permeate modern literacy and educational research. More specifically, my interest was in better understanding how educators and families constructed their personal views of literacy based on their social and cultural values, and in turn, how these literacy perspectives affect learning within the home and school contexts. As a researcher, I was interested to examine the similarities and differences in the literacy understandings of each context to learn how literacy in each context was bridged to create a stronger combined literacy journey for the child.

### **Research Conclusions**

The research conducted in this study illuminates the impact of family and community on literacy practices. A wide variety of researchers including Vygotsky, Moll, Cummins, and Bordieu stress the value and importance of family and cultural knowledge in children's learning. Families and communities possess funds of knowledge, which consist of learning experiences that are rich and varied. These funds allow families and students to transfer learning into various contexts which relate to their lives. In addition to families' funds of knowledge, all families possess cultural capital. Cultural capital refers to resources which help parents mediate their children's learning experiences. Some examples of cultural capital are education, income, and social network. Unfortunately, the resources families have are often not equal and school environments tend to favour families who understand and readily use dominant language and

codes of conduct. Students from minority and underprivileged backgrounds may be viewed by the education system in terms of a deficit perspective. Works by Au (1993, 1997) and Heath (1983) highlight how students' ways of thinking and learning are connected to their cultural roots. Additionally, their research illuminated the understanding that there are accepted "ways of learning" within given cultures. They also highlight the important differences between characteristic school literacies and those integral to wider social practice. The differences help to explain why learners demonstrate competence in diverse social practices, yet fail in terms of school literacy. Many students may simply fail in terms of school literacies on account of the gap that often exists between school practices and "real life" experience in their larger lives. These "real life" practices are typically a long way removed from the literacy within the school setting. Viewing literacy from a socio-cultural perspective helps researchers and educators better understand the divide which exists between the literacy of school and literacy experienced in "real world" experiences.

### **Answering the Research Questions**

My research questions focused on parents' and educators' understandings of literacy learning and how these learning were used to aid the student. I was specifically interested in gaining knowledge about the use and implementation of literacy understandings gained in the home and community and how these were used in the school setting. The purpose of this thesis was to study literacy learning in a multicultural home and school context and identify and explore the intersection between the home and school literacy learning environment.

In addition, the research explores more specifically:

- How do society and school institutions understand and encourage multiple literacy perspectives and their uses to support diverse literacy learners?

- How are family experiences used in the home and school to aid the literacy learner?

Within this study, children's home literacy experiences were interactive and often based on authentic or "real life" situations which were often guided by their interests. In the Taras family, Bo's parents encouraged his artistic and mathematical abilities through open-ended activities in which their son was encouraged to write and speak using his English skills. In the Bunjam family, the children were encouraged to explore their interests of their mother language of Indonesian by informal conversations and letter writing with their parents and grandparents.

Both families in the study displayed knowledge and understandings in many different areas which were practical in the mediation of daily activities. Funds of knowledge in the Taras family included extensive understandings of cooking, agronomy, mathematics, and technological literacy. The Bunjam family's funds included music, cooking, botany, technological literacy, and cross-cultural language learning.

Despite the richness of learning within both families and funds of knowledge that they possessed, the Bunjams appeared to be more successful than the Taras and other EAL families within the school in the eyes of their children's educators. Socio-cultural understandings of literacy can explain the disparities in student success, as literacy learning is a social phenomenon influenced by power and cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, Passeron, and Nice, 1977). Although research has revealed pluralistic understandings of literacy, the traditional understanding of literacy (as a series of skills to be mastered, tested, and recorded) is the literacy that continues to be valued and favoured by school institutions. Literacies that fall outside the traditional understandings tend to be undervalued and dismissed by the education system (Taylor, 1997).

Literacy within the school setting (schooled literacy) often reflects the understandings of language and learning of the dominant culture. In the case of this study, the dominant culture was

white and middle class. Schooled literacy often promotes skill based, hierarchical learning structures, and methods that are based on prior knowledge of certain language, instruction, and culture.

Although there have been attempts made to bridge the literacy learnings between the home and school and elicit positive collaborations between schools and families, most programs have failed to acknowledge the powerful social and cultural connections involved in learning and fail to explore the factors which impede student learning (Cairney 1997, 2002). This disconnect between home and school literacy learning was observed in the study as parents and teachers had varied beliefs and understandings about literacy and learning which were largely based on their prior knowledge and experiences. The teachers in the study viewed literacy learning in terms of skills. In order to achieve success in school, it was essential that students build upon their prior knowledge. The teachers, due to their cultural understanding of literacy, sometimes assumed that all students possessed similar understandings and experiences regarding literacy learning prior to coming to school. The students in the study from diverse backgrounds did not achieve the same level of success as their mainstream peers if their prior knowledge and understandings differed from that of the schools.

The parents in the study greatly respected the educational background and knowledge of their children's teachers. The educational views and recommendations of the teacher were readily accepted by the parents. Both sets of parents strove to help their children in the areas that the teachers suggested. The parents viewed the teacher as the "expert" and did not question her decisions in the classroom.

My first specific research question asked, "How do society and school institutions understand and encourage multiple literacy perspectives and their uses to support diverse literacy

learners? In order to answer this question, I first observed the overall climate of the school. My observations found that the school offered much information to parents regarding school and community resources for language learning and provided pertinent school information about important policies and procedures. The school administration and staff prided themselves on being part of a diverse, inclusive school. This inclusion and diversity were showcased in the school's classroom displays of student work. Displays reflected the emphasis on diversity by showcasing unique learning projects and deemphasizing North American celebrations such as Christmas and Easter. Regular assemblies were held for students and their families, as were community multicultural potluck lunches. The school itself seemed to embrace the cultural diversity of those who attended it. However, the commitment to diversity seemed less strong within the individual classrooms of the school. Teachers, although very aware of the cultural diversity that existed within the classrooms, felt overwhelmed to meet their diverse student body's needs. Teachers outlined several obstacles which they felt were impeding their abilities to deal with student diversity, some of these obstacles being time, resources, and large class numbers. The teachers within the study followed the curriculum standards for English Language Arts for their grade levels closely, and were diligent in implementing the mandatory literacy initiatives of their school division. However, less attention was devoted to the range of student experiences and learning needs. Rather, literacy learning was largely viewed in terms of goals and skills which needed to be mastered and evaluated so the student would be adequately prepared for the next year of schooling. Attempts at home and school collaborations reflected the needs and goals of the school, which emphasised the teacher's commitment to the curriculum. However, in focusing on only the curricular goals of the school, teachers missed the unique learning experiences and understandings of the EAL students and their families.

The second specific question which guided my research was, “How are family experiences used in the home and school to aid the literacy learner?”

Within the home environment, literacy learning was often based on authentic situations and was propelled by the interests of the child. The parents encouraged their children to think for themselves and solve their own learning problems. The home learning environment was an apprenticeship between children and their parents in which learning was scaffolded. Family learning experiences such as cooking, botany, and construction allowed the children to blend their personal and cultural understandings with the new experiences and understandings of Canadian culture and life. However, schooled literacy was present in the observational and photographic data. The amalgamation of situated and schooled literacy forms can be explained by the families blending Asian cultural understandings of literacy and learning (which tend to be aligned with schooled literacy) with a situated perspective, which allows their children to learn through experience and experimentation (Li, 2003, 2006).

Within the school environment, students’ personal experiences were observed in daily journal and story writing activities, along with daily “show and share” oral speaking exercises. However, my observations did not reveal that student experience informed learning goals for the students or resulted in varied methods of instruction and evaluation at school. In large, family experiences and understandings remained detached from the learning that was valued within the school.

The lack of true incorporation of learning experiences of students from diverse cultures in schools may have several causes. The first is the difference that exists between the educator’s understandings of literacy and learning and parental understandings. Despite the growing diversity in Canadian and Saskatchewan schools, the teaching profession remains predominantly

white, middle class, and female. The diversity of the student population should be reflected in the teaching and support staff within our schools. The second cause may be an issue of resources, in terms of pre-service education and in-service education to ensure that teachers are equipped with the knowledge they need to meet the demands to today's classroom. Resources encourage teachers to develop and use more appropriate methods when teaching students from diverse backgrounds. Thirdly, the divide between the home and school is due, in part, to a disconnect between teachers and parents. Examining existing parental engagement models within schools and seeking authentic parental partnerships can have immense benefits for students, parents, and teachers. Lastly, although some teachers may have the resources and knowledge they need to successfully teach in today's diverse classroom, they still need to be able to understand the difference between the rhetoric of educational theories and the realities that face them in the classroom. With the aid of appropriate resources, education and inservices, and parental partners, teachers are better equipped to create a culturally responsive curriculum based on student needs.

### **Recommendations**

According to Clandinin and Connelly (1995) the best-known epistemological dilemma in education is defined through the relationship between theory and practice. Practice is defined as personal practical knowledge at work, while theory encompasses the sorted outcomes of inquiry. Educators are situated on a continuum which joins together the theoretical and practical aspects of teaching. At one end of the continuum, teachers are expected to produce theoretical knowledge, on the other end of the continuum, they are expected to be skilled in the practical knowledge of teaching. The dilemma therefore exists because the pendulum swings too far one way or the other on the continuum and knowledge can become displaced from its origins and become abstract.

Prior to entering the workforce, pre-service students in education are expected to know how to apply research-based knowledge to the problems of everyday practice, often with little understanding about how to participate in and evaluate research and with relatively few opportunities for supportive, reflective research-based experiences in the field. Craig and Olson (1995) eloquently describe the dilemma:

As a teacher, I live in two different professional places. One is the relational world inside the classroom where I co-construct meaning with my students. The other is the abstract world where I live with everyone outside my classroom, a world where I meet with all the other aspects of the educational enterprise such as philosophies, the techniques, the materials, and the expectations that I will enact certain educational practice. While each of these places is distinctive, neither is totally self-contained. (p. 16)

The teachers within the study experienced frustration in meeting the demands of both ends of the continuum or the swinging pendulum between theory and practice in their professional knowledge landscapes. The diverse student bodies within the teachers' classrooms presented unique teaching challenges, such as increased workload, the need for additional resources, and the need for varied teaching strategies. In order to deal with these challenges, the teachers relied on their personal understandings and practical knowledge to guide them in choosing the best methods and practices for their EAL learners. Teachers within the study relied on skill based instruction for the EAL students as well as enlisting the help of resource specialists for extra assistance. Teachers combined their practical understandings with theoretical frameworks such as the use of the English Language Arts curriculum and the use of various teaching strategies. The teachers' understandings were largely based on a North American, Euro-

centered conception of learning, as the teachers in the study were both white and middle-class professionals. Although the teachers both spoke of literacy initiatives that were being implemented by the school division and the regular in-services that enabled teachers to receive assistance in effective implementation of these programs, neither teacher felt they had adequate resources to deal with the diverse student bodies of their classrooms. The literacy practices that were being initiated did not meet the needs of all students, especially not those of the immigrant children who spoke little English. The teachers used their existing knowledge of literacy learning, along with the school division's new initiatives to create their literacy curriculum. The EAL students who could not meet the standards of the curriculum were provided with resource room time or extra materials which focused on basic skills.

### **Resources and Education for Today's Educators**

The Saskatchewan provincial government has outlined the need for school divisions within the province to develop English Additional Language procedural guidelines which acknowledge the diversity of student needs within the province. Saskatchewan Association for Multicultural Education (1989) tells us that the school system has the responsibility to provide educational services to all learners. Supports are required in order that English language learners can develop proficiency in English, recognizing the five to seven year period required by some learners to achieve positive results in their language learning. Successful outcomes for children and youth come from inclusive integration processes, effective school practices, and effective school practices.

The local school division in this study had responded to the increased need for EAL resources for teachers and students as the influx of immigrant students to Saskatchewan continues to rise. Prior to 2009, EAL students from all over the division in the study were bussed

to predetermined EAL school sites, where qualified EAL teachers would deliver instruction. The division has since understood the importance of inclusion of instruction within the students' own school and therefore has qualified EAL instructors being itinerant to many schools within the division. Under the revamped EAL program, students and teachers will be supported and given instruction without having to be removed from their schools.

### **Pre-Service and In-service Education**

The implementation of inclusive practices in today's diverse classroom begins with effective pre-service education. Mora-Kerper and Grisham (2001) conducted an analysis of teacher candidates' responses to literacy courses, which emphasized cross-linguistic and language proficiency with EAL students, and learned that the majority of teacher candidates in undergraduate programs are monolingual, European descent, middle class, and female. Many pre-service teachers have little experience working with students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Furthermore, pre-service teachers within the study approached instruction of second language speakers with the same body of assumptions with which they planned instruction for native speakers. Mora-Kerper and Grisham (2001) indicate that learning activities with diverse learners within pre-service education was effective in increasing teacher candidates' knowledge and problem solving abilities for literacy in the multicultural classrooms (p. 63). Additionally, in-service education for practicing teachers is essential in creating school and classroom environments which reflect the needs of all learners. By encouraging teachers to collaborate with each other, they gain insight and validity to the issues they are faced in the modern day classroom.

### **Creating Authentic Parental Partnerships**

This study illuminated the interconnected nature of the home and school learning environments. An important understanding which guided this research is that literacy learning is a

socio-cultural process; a process that differs based on a learner's experience. As Pushor and Ruitenberg (2005) tell us: "there is much more to attend to both within and outside of the boundaries of the school's agenda of student achievement" ( p. 14). Equipped with this knowledge, educators can build on student and family experiences to boost learning outcomes, as research indicates that involving parents in their children's education is a process which surpasses gender, socio-economic status, and race.

Traditionally, parental involvement in education has included home-based activities (such as helping with homework, encouraging reading at home, encouraging student attendance), and school-based activities (such as attending parent-teacher conferences and concerts, raising money for various school projects, and volunteering at school during the day). Epstein's (1995) framework of parent involvement outlines six types of parental involvement which include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. The school in this study (like many schools) had parents involved mostly in the parenting, communicating, and volunteering domains as opposed to the decision making and collaborating with the community domains.

In building partnerships with families, it is important to understand the obstacles which impede families from being involved at school. Some of these factors include time and economic pressures, language barriers, and negative experiences in their own schooling:

A growing number of parents do not speak or read English well enough to communicate with teachers and administrators. Because of cultural differences, many parents are not familiar with the expectations of their children's schools and don't understand how to go about getting involved, even if they want to. Some parents lack the educational background or skills they feel they need to interact

with teachers and staff. For others, their own negative experiences as students make them uncomfortable going to the school (Aronson, 1996, p. 58).

Due to these factors, it is important for schools to offer different forms of parent involvement; no one form of involvement is necessarily right for every family. True partnerships are a collaborative effort in which both parties' ideas and input are symmetrical. Within this study, the incorporation of parents into the learning process could have enhanced cultural understandings of learning and the richness and complexity of authentic literacy events of the home and community.

### **Curriculum and Practice Based on Student Needs**

By using the information gained in pre-service and in-service education, teachers can work together to create positive classroom climates for all students by incorporating inclusive teaching practices such as culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive teaching is based on the socio-cultural understandings of learning. Socio-cultural perspectives of learning see learning as participation, relational, and interactive, and ask educators to relate the practices of school to practices which exist within the wider community (Hall, 2002). By using culturally responsive methods of teaching, educators are encouraged to examine their own understandings about learning and culture, which may be biased. Understandings such as the official structure of the classroom, student teacher interaction, lesson transmission, and curriculum and hidden curriculum content which exists within the classroom: "In culturally responsive teaching, knowledge is viewed passionately and critically, and all biases are unmasked for what they are and are open for discussion" (Quirocho & Ulanof, 2009, p. 9).

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

This study describes the home and school literacy experiences of two immigrant Western Canadian families. The findings from this study suggest additional possibilities for further educational research.

This study reflected the learning within a urban Canadian context. It would be intriguing to complete a similar study with participants from other parts of Canada, both rural and urban, as well as with international participants.

This study took place over a two year time period (from 2007-2009). Since the beginning of the study, many school divisions in Saskatchewan have introduced EAL programs and supports for students and teachers. A follow up study in the next five years could compare results to determine if the additional resources have been successful in bridging home and school literacy practices.

The focus of this study was to examine literacy learning in participants' home and school contexts and to identify intersections between the two. Further examination of administrator and school leadership practices is necessary to determine how these practices affect student literacy practices.

This study illuminated several obstacles teachers face when developing educational programming for their diverse classrooms. Further studies could be conducted to determine the affect of mentorship and professional learning communities on literacy learning within schools.

Additional studies regarding social inclusion and anti racist education could help determine if schools are penetrating beyond the tokenism of multiculturalism to address fundamental issues which affect multicultural learners.

This study revealed the majority of teacher participants to be white, middle class females with Eurocentric views of literacy learning. It would be noteworthy to conduct a study about ways to create a more diverse teaching profession.

### **Personal Research Journey**

I end this thesis with a personal reflection about my journey as a learner and researcher. As I began my study, I was overwhelmed by the vast amount of research which has been conducted and continues to be conducted on the topic of literacy and learning. I found that even specific topics relating to my work including multiple literacy perspectives, parental engagement, and English Second Language Learning provided extensive data. Maintaining focus on my research questions was challenging, as I acquired much rich information which often led me in many directions.

I was surprised to discover how even a well thought out research plan isn't without dilemmas. My decision to include photographs to enhance my work proved to be problematic. My research proposal to the prospective school division was delayed several times due to the inclusion of photography. Once passed, the photography addition to my work was poorly understood by my participants. Although examples were given, participants struggled with "what to take pictures of."

My own literacy learning understandings were illuminated as I conducted the study. My understandings of valued literacy practices and parental assumptions were challenged as I learned more about the social and cultural dynamics of literacy. Particularly enlightening were my experiences with my immigrant participants, whose views helped me to have a pluralistic definition of literacy and learning. Their experiences gave me insight into understandings about family and community, current school practices regarding literacy and learning, multiculturalism

and power dynamics in society. My research made me examine my own teaching practice. As a teacher, my educational background and research into the topic of literacy made me feel like an “expert” of sorts in my professional learning community. I felt I had the “gift of literacy” to share with my students and their families. My ignorant, naive view of literacy and learning did not account for the vast knowledge bases, both cultural and social, of my students and their families. I believed that my education and experiences had provided me with the “best” way to help children attain their literacy goals. From my interviews with other educators in this study, I learned that many white, middle class teachers share these views which may undervalue the learning potential which exists beyond the school walls. The families within my study helped me understand that my cultural understandings and ways of knowing do not define the “best practices” for all students. My narrow view of literacy was only acceptable for students and parents who had the knowledge base that I did. This view did not fit with the multicultural and multilingual experiences of today’s diverse learning communities. In examining my naiveté, I realized that broadening teacher understanding of literacy and learning must be a priority for universities, school divisions, and researchers. My deepest thanks go out to the participants of this study who made this journey possible. Their stories provided me with deeper insight into educational issues which need to be addressed.

This thesis was intended to enhance culture-specific knowledge. I challenge those who read this study to examine his or her cultural values, assumptions, and biases. It is my hope that, through education and research, teachers in our diverse society will demonstrate flexibility, versatility, and sensitivity in responding to their diverse student bodies, their immigrant histories, life experiences, and funds of knowledge.

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## **Appendix A – Letter of Consent Form for Families**

I am inviting you to take part in a project about your learning experiences at home and at school. I am doing the study to understand the types of important learning that happens in homes, just like yours. Please read the following rules with your parents so you can take part in the study.

The work we do together in the study will not make a difference to your school marks at all.

For the next several weeks, your parents will watch your learning activities at home. Activities which are commonly done in your home. Some examples are: cooking together, reading or telling stories together (in first or second language), family discussions, games and activities, writing or artwork in your first or second language and computer learning. Your Mom and/or Dad will take pictures of you and your family doing these things. Your parents may ask to use some of the work that you complete over the next few weeks at home to help me monitor your home learning.

Any photographs, drawings, writings, or other work which you have made will be kept in a safe place for five years. Your teachers, friends, and principal cannot see your work.

I can't promise the study will help you, but I hope that the stories I get from you will help school and families understand how important your learning at home is. By sharing your work, you will help others see how important it is to do activities with your family. Sharing your home experiences with me won't put you in any danger.

I will never use your real name in my thesis. Your real name will be protected through the use of a pretend name – you may choose it if you like. When the study is complete, it will be



## **Appendix B – Letter of Consent Form for Teachers**

I am inviting you to take part in a project about your learning experiences at home and at school. I am doing the study to understand the types of important learning that occurs in each environment.

Please read and acknowledge the following:

For the next several weeks, I will be observing learning activities within the classroom setting. Observed activities will be recorded and used as data in my Master's in Education thesis.

Any drawings, writings, or other work which is shared with me will be kept in a safe place for five years.

I can't promise the benefits of the study, but I hope that the information obtained from you will help school and families better understand literacy learning across contexts.

I will never use your real name in my thesis. Your real name will be protected through the use of a pseudonym – you may choose it if you like.

You will be asked to sign a Letter of Consent for Release of Transcripts

If you have any questions about the study, you may call the Ethics Office at the University of Saskatchewan, 966-2084, or me, Cari Roberts, 979-0549, or the senior researcher, Dr. Angela Ward, Department of Curriculum Studies, 966-7585.

I understand that this research project has been approved by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Board (2007) and I agree to take part. I understand the study, what is expected of me and that I can leave the study at any time. A copy of this form has been given to me for my records and at the end of the study they will receive a copy of the study.

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Date:

Participant Signature

Researcher's Signature

## **Appendix C– Letter of Invitation for Participation for Families**

Dear Participant:

It is through this letter that I invite you to be part of my research, which will enable me to complete my requirements for a Masters of Education degree in Curriculum Studies at the University of Saskatchewan.

I am basing my research on interviews and observations of children and parents. By participating in this study, you will be asked to discuss literacy, observe and record your children in literacy activities over the next month, and share your personal understandings of literacy. I am very eager to have the opportunity to collaborate with you on this project.

It is my intention to interview you twice. Each interview will be approximately one hour in length and will be audio taped. The interviews are semi-structured which means that although questions are prepared the interview may appear to be much like a conversation. You have the option to only answer the questions you feel comfortable with and the questioning process may stop at any time. The interview will take place in your home in order to gather information about your home environments. Between the interviews, I will ask you to observe your children in literacy activities in your home. These activities can be anything that you feel aids your child in their literacy growth. Journals and disposable cameras will be given you to record children's activities.

Journal entries are to occur daily and include features of literacy which occur in your home. The journal should include dated work samples from your children, observations of activities which occur during the day and your thoughts about learning. I am interested in the genuine experiences which occur naturally at home and in the community.

The cameras intend to capture the unexpected moments of learning. What types of things should you capture on film? Anything you view as a genuine learning moment. I'd like to see learning in situational situations such as games, puzzles, baking, drawing, and learning from others which often occur in the home. Don't forget to take the camera on outings to the park, grocery store, or daily walk. These events are always full of learning, as learning takes place everywhere we go. You will have approximately two weeks to use the disposable film. Upon its completion, I will collect it and develop it. We will then discuss it at our next interview.

Upon completion of the interviews, tapes will be transcribed by a professional. The information provided during the interviews, along with the data collected during the project, as well as your identity, will remain anonymous. This means that pseudonyms (false names) will be used whenever you or the information you provide is referred to. Any information which could reveal your identity, such as photographs, will not be used within the thesis or at presentations to secure your rights. After my research is complete, you will be given the opportunity to review it for accuracy and make changes and/or deletions before it is printed.

Once the thesis is printed, the document will be available as a resource in the following locations: The Education Library, College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan and in the Stewart Resource Center, Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation. In addition, this information may be used at various conferences and presentations.

I believe that parent voices are very important in building a learning community. It would be an honour to include your valuable perspectives as an active component of my research. I look forward to our collaborations. Although I cannot guarantee the benefits of the findings, the expectation is that the benefits of sharing your lived experience will be benefiting

the wider community in developing understandings regarding parent / school collaboration and literacy programs. There are minimal risks associated with participation in this study.

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Cari Roberts

Student Researcher

(306) 979-0549

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Dr. Angela Ward

Thesis Supervisor, Senior Researcher

(306) 966-7585

## **Appendix D- Letter of Invitation to Participate for Teachers**

Thank you for your interest in my research study which focuses home and school contexts of literacy learning. This study will explore the ways in which children acquire literacy in authentic situations at home and at school. In order to protect the interests of the participants I will adhere to the following guidelines:

The researcher will interview you once to discuss literacy acquisition from an educator's standpoint. Follow-up information can be obtained through a phone conversation made by the researcher one week after the interview.

You will be interviewed once for approximately one hour and the interview will be audio-recorded. You have the option to only answer the questions you feel comfortable with. You may ask for the tape recorder to be turned off at any time. The researcher acknowledges that you can withdraw at any time during the study without penalty. If you withdraw, the data collected from the interview and tape recordings will be destroyed.

The tape will be transcribed and analyzed to discover the patterns and themes discussed. You will be given a smoothed narrative version of the transcripts with false starts, repetitions, and paralinguistic utterances removed to make it more readable. Later the researcher will check with you about your responses in the transcriptions. You can add, delete, or change information to reflect what you want to say.

You will be asked to sign a Letter of Consent for Release of Transcripts. You will be able to receive a copy of the transcripts after the discussion.

The data collected from you will be kept in a secure place and will be held at the University of Saskatchewan with my academic advisor, Dr. Angela Ward, for five years

according to the University of Saskatchewan guidelines, and will be destroyed at the end of the study.

The results of the study will be used for a MEd thesis, and for journal articles and conference presentations. Your confidentiality and anonymity will be protected through the use of pseudonyms.

If you have any questions about your participation or your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Ethics Office at the University of Saskatchewan (966-2084) or you can contact me Cari Rothenburger, at 979-0549 or my instructor, Dr. Angela Ward, Department of Curriculum Studies, (966-7585).

I understand that this research project has been approved by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Board and I agree to participate. I am aware of the nature of the study and understand what is expected of me and I also understand that I am free to withdraw at any time throughout the study. A copy of this form has been given to me for my records and at the end of the study I will receive a copy of the study.

---

Date:                      Participant Signature:                      Researcher's Signature:

## **Appendix E: Release of Transcript Form**

I appreciate your participation in my research study. I am returning the transcripts of your audio taped interviews for you to examine, as well as the release of confidential information. I will follow the following guidelines which are designed for confidentiality and interests in the study.

Would you please read and recheck the transcripts for truth of information. You may add to or clarify the transcripts (to say what you intended to mean or include additional comments that will be your words). You may also delete any information that you may not want to be quoted in the study.

The understandings from this study will be used only in a thesis document and literacy presentations. Except for the researcher(s) in the study, your participation will remain private. Your name or anything which could identify you (such as photographs) will not be used in the final report or in any scholarly articles or presentations.

The tape recordings, field notes, photographs, and transcriptions made during the study will be kept with the instructor in a secure file until the study is finished. After completion of the study, the tapes and other data will be kept for five years at the University of Saskatchewan and then destroyed.

Participation in the study is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without penalty. If this happens the tape recordings and interview data will be destroyed.

Although the researcher cannot guarantee the benefits of the findings, I expect the benefits in the study to be gained awareness of the valuable literacy practices which exist in your homes as well as a broader understanding of literacy. By sharing your lived experience, you will be benefiting the wider community in developing understandings regarding parent / school

collaboration and family literacy programs. There are minimal risks associated with participation in this study.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ understand the guidelines above and agree to release the revised transcripts to the researcher. A copy of the transcript release form is provided for your records.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participants Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature \_\_\_\_\_

As a participant in this study, you may contact the Ethics Office at the University of Saskatchewan (966-2084) if you have any questions about the study, me, Cari Roberts, 979-0549, or my instructor, Dr. Angela Ward, Department of Curriculum Studies, 966-7585

## **Appendix F: Release of Photographs Form**

I appreciate your participation in my research study. This waiver form releases confidential information, in the form of photographs, which are data for my Master's in Education thesis. I will follow the following guidelines which are designed for confidentiality and interests in the study.

I have chosen to add photography to the study as a tool to help the study capture the literacy activities which occurs at home. Photographs often help us "see" what we normally may have taken for granted. I would like the photographs to help you pause and reflect on the many activities you are engaged in with your children and consider them valid learning experiences.

I will use the photographs, along with the other data to identify themes or patterns which may occur in our study. The understandings gained from the photographs will be used only in a thesis document and literacy presentations. Except for the researcher(s) in the study, your participation will remain private. The photographs which identify you as participants in this study will not be used in the final report or in any articles or presentations.

The photographs taken during the study will be kept with the researcher in a secure file until the study is finished. After completion of the study, the photographs, along with all other data, will be kept for five years at the University of Saskatchewan and then destroyed.

Participation in the study is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without penalty. If withdrawal happens, the photographs and data surrounding them will be destroyed.

Although the researcher cannot guarantee the benefits of the findings, the expectation is that the benefits of the study are gaining awareness of the valuable literacy practices which exist in your homes, in addition to a broader understanding of literacy. By sharing your experience,

you will be benefiting the wider community in developing understandings regarding parent / school collaboration and family literacy programs.

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this study.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ understand the guidelines above and agree to release the revised photographs to the researcher. A copy of this photograph release form is provided for your records.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature \_\_\_\_\_

As a participant in this study, you may contact the Ethics Office at the University of Saskatchewan (966-2084) if you have any questions about the study, me Cari Roberts, at 979-0549 or my instructor, Dr. Angela Ward, Department of Curriculum Studies, 966-7585.

## **Appendix G: Interview Questions for Parent Participants**

Let's begin by getting to know each other. I am ...

- Tell me a little bit about where you are from and how you decided to come to Canada.
- What are your early memories of learning? Where do you recall this happening? Home, school, ...?
- What was a typical school day like for you when you were eight years old?
- Tell me about the way in which you learn?
- What type of knowledge is valued in your culture? (Oral traditions, storybook reading) Who passed this knowledge to you?
- Who do you view as “wise”, or the holder of knowledge? When you were young vs. now?
- What was the expectation for families in terms of involvement in your school experience?
- What was your family's involvement? In retrospect, do you think it was appropriate?

## **Appendix H- Questions for Parent Participant #2**

- Recap first interview and begin second interview here
- Tell me about the literacy abilities of your child. How did she/she gain these capabilities?
- Tell me about your child's "school literacy". What are the skills your child is learning within the school?
- What differences between school literacy experience and home literacy experiences? What similarities do you see between the two experiences? Explain.
- What differences do you see differences between the learning that occurs within the school and the home? Explain this to me.
- In what ways to you feel you aid to your child's literacy abilities? What do you feel is your responsibility to teach? What is the school's responsibility? Where do the school's role end and the parents' role begin?
- Tell me about the photos you have taken of your children engaged in learning activities.
- Explain your involvement in your child's formal schooling. How have you been invited into the process of his/her literacy learning? What is your understanding of the programs and projects which are occurring within the school?
- How does the school encourage the use of your first language? How does the school provide support services such as language and community groups where first languages can be taught?
- Do you continue to use your first language at home? Tell me about that.

- How is literacy progress monitored and shown to parents throughout the year?
- Tell me how you feel about the reporting of literacy progress. Do you think parents should have input into this process?
- Let us conclude with your vision of schooling for your child. How would you work together with the school to ensure your child's literacy needs were achieved and your role as parents were validated?

• **Appendix I– Questions for Teacher Participation**

- Tell me about your early memories of learning.
- How do you think children learn best? What is your teaching philosophy?
- Tell me about your teaching methods, in terms of literacy instruction.
- Do you feel your pre-service education adequately prepared you for teaching?
- Educational literature speaks of the gaps between policy and practice. Tell me about this gap.
- Discuss the literacy initiatives of the School Division you work in. Do you feel these initiatives meet the needs of the EAL learners?
- What professional development opportunities and/or supports are in place for teachers of EAL learners?
- Describe your school in terms of its diversity.
- Do you find that you have to adapt your program to meet different needs of your EAL students? Explain.
- What do the terms parental involvement and parental engagement mean to you?
- How do you make connections with your EAL families?
- If you had a vision of school for students and parents working together what would it be or what would it look like?